

Militia, as supposing, upon enquiry, some reasonable men might be found that would receive such a gift thankfully, and perhaps use it profitably.

"Each book might be accompanied with a small printed paper, showing the good-will and intention of the giver. I would by all means prefer the Bible to any other book for many reasons; but for brevity sake omit them, giving this only as a sketch of my thoughts for your consideration. To which would add, should such a thing be made known to that most benevolent gentleman, Mr. Thornton, and meet his approbation, extraordinary as it may appear, doubt not but through his interest it would be easily effected. If it should be by subscription in any part, am willing to contribute my mite according to ability.

"Cannot help observing, though with grief, how many decent servants I have seen without a Bible; no longer since than yesterday a Protestant servant girl, in a Papist's family. As such, see the distributing of books to be compassion, indeed.

"Am with all respect and good wishes, yours affectionately,

"J. DAVIS."

Who John Davis was we do not know; but he certainly planted the seed which has grown to such a mighty tree as the British and Foreign Bible Society. Friend Cussons seems to have communicated the letter to the celebrated philanthropist—John Thornton, from whom came the following characteristic letter:

"FRIEND GEORGE,—Friend Davis I know not; but I suppose you do, and his abode, which he does not mention; and I should join with him in contributing if he can get a subscription.

"The times are not such as to allow looking back; I therefore enclose twenty pounds to go forward.

"The Alleines are out of print; but perhaps a few Baxters and Bibles may be got. May the Lord strengthen you in your work and for your work; and remember me to Hannah, and believe me,

"Yours affectionately,

"J. THORNTON."

On the 8th of November, 1779, the proposal took definite shape, for we find that date on the front page of the first Minute Book of the Society, with a declaration of the object of the Society, "For purchasing Bibles to be distributed among the British Soldiers and Seamen of the Navy, in order (by the blessing of God, to spread abroad Christian knowledge and reformation of manners."

On another page headed "Bible Society, instituted November 1779," we find the following "Rules to be observed by persons who become members thereof."

"1. At present it is an open Committee, and any gentleman who is an annual subscriber may be admitted a member.

"2. It is now confined to the distribution of Bibles, and they only to the Navy and Army of Great Britain and Ireland.

"Love and unanimity being essentially necessary to carry on so good a work, it is unanimously agreed that any member of the said Committee who shall be litigious (*sic*), and thereby retard or hinder the business, shall be voted out of the said Committee at the weekly meeting."

It was not till the summer of 1781, however, that the meetings of the committee were regularly held, and minutes recorded.† The first entry in this

† The work has been going on in the interval, as appears from a note of Mr. Thornton, dated July 28, 1780, to Mr. Cussons: "Dear George—I have some Bibles for soldiers, and if you have any person to intrust a few with, I will send them where you direct when ready. I mean for St. James' or Hyde Park, or the neighbourhood. I have sent a large parcel to the Museum." Mr. Thornton continued to be a most liberal supporter of the Society, the Collecting Book showing that he gave £100 in 1781, £100 in 1782, through Mr. Romaine, and again £100 in 1790.