

band who went about among the villages and small towns, and who, in order to avoid suspicion, assumed the appearance of pedlars, selling knives and all sorts of things, but the chief things that they sold were copies of various portions of Scripture, and sentences from the Old Fathers in which the way of salvation was held forth; so that the "Colportage Society" is a very venerable and ancient one.

I need not remind you of John Wycliffe and the "Colportage Society" he had; and when we come to the times of the Reformation, it was not merely through the preaching of Luther and the Reformers, but it was to a great extent through colportage that the doctrines of the Gospel were spread all over the Continent. About thirty or forty years after the Reformation we find one of its great opponents saying, "These friends of Luther and Calvin have flooded all the countries of Europe with most pernicious little books and tracts, which can only be compared to the plague of locusts which flooded the land of Egypt." So you find a "Colportage Society" in the days of the Reformation.

Many people think that the preaching of the Gospel means exclusively setting forth the Gospel either in conversation or in a set discourse, and although this is one of the chief ways in which it pleases God to arouse hearts and bring souls unto Himself, it would be a very narrow view to take if we were to think that it was the only way God has; but the instances in which it has pleased him to bless what is written unto the conversion of souls and unto the building up of His saints are very numerous. There are not merely individual instances, but also instances of the revival of God's work on a large scale. In France we find more especially that when, through the opposition of infidelity and of Popery, the voice of the Gospel has been almost silenced, that it was through the circulation of evangelical books that souls were gathered in unto Christ.

There is one thing that we must remember—that there is a certain fervour and warmth in the human voice. We also believe that in answer to the prayer of the congregation there is a special blessing given to the utterance and preaching of the gospel; but although this is so, there is a great deal in books which proceed out of the Christian mind and the Christian heart that we are apt to overlook. When the people see a minister take out a manuscript and begin to read a sermon, they have a sort of prejudice against it. As I am not in the habit of doing this myself, I may speak about it thus freely. They forget how many prayers and tears and sighs are, as it were, imprisoned in that manuscript; how much waiting there has been on the guidance of the Holy Spirit in its preparation; and that it is really a living utterance of that which it has pleased the Holy Ghost to give unto His servant that they are come to listen to.

And so it is with books. We must remember that these books have a wonderful vitality in them, if they have been written by men who have sought the glory of God and to spread the love of the