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A MISSION TO THE 500,000 BLIND OF CHINA.

Of this remarkable man, now carrying on such a great and successful work in North China, Miss C. F. Gordon-Cumming writes:—Mr. W. H. Murray's calling to mission work must be traced to an accident in a sawmill whereby he lost an arm, and so was disabled from following his original profession. He therefore sought and obtained employment as a rural letter-carrier in the neighborhood of Glasgow. He was subsequently employed by the National Bible Society of Scotland as a colporteur, and at this time his remarkable facility for languages attracted the notice of some of the Directors. It was accordingly arranged that he should attend some classes at the College, though his studies were not allowed to interfere with his regular work. All day long, therefore, he travelled with his Bible-waggon, went to bed at 9 p.m., rose at 3 a.m. (only think of the physical misery involved in daily rising at such an hour on chill wintry mornings!), then he studied till it was time for his classes at 8 and 9 a.m., and then began again at a new day's work at bookselling.

Thus he worked steadily through the long dreary winters in Glasgow—a good preparation for the bitter cold of winter in North China—a land where the overpowering heat of summer exceeds anything I have experienced in the tropics, while during the long winter, the frost is so intense that for many months the Peiho River is frozen, and the only access to Peking is by a difficult land journey.

Thither Mr. Murray was sent in 1871, and there his first work was that of mastering a language which is probably the most difficult of all the products of Babel. His definite employment now, as in earlier days, is that of a colporteur of the National Bible Society of Scotland, whose daily endeavor it is to circulate the Scriptures among the millions who for centuries have held in deepest reverence the learned writings of Confucius and the voluminous sacred books of Buddha. The attempt to sell the foreign sacred books was at first attended with manifold discouragements; but perseverance has carried the day, and thanks to a happy combination of patient gentleness with most resolute determination, Mr. Murray and his pony-cart now rank among the recognized "institutions" of the great capital; wherever there is a chance of effecting a sale, there he takes up his post, no matter at what inconvenience. In 1883 he disposed of 13,226 copies of parts of the Scriptures, while the other colporteurs of the same Society sold about 50,000 more, and the demand is steadily increasing. This is also the experience of the other Societies at work in China.

But while this scattering of good seed is what I may call Mr. Murray's official work, that to which specially to call attention is a branch which is wholly his own, and which is a most striking proof of the ad-

vantage of acquiring all manner of useful knowledge, even when there seems no present reason for doing so. While working for the Society in Glasgow his interest was aroused by the blind who came to purchase books printed on Moon's system; thereupon he took lessons in Professor Bell's system of visible speech, and also in Braille's system of reading and writing for the blind, by means of embossed dots. On arriving in China he found that the former actually facilitated his own study of the execruciating language, so he noted down the value of every sound he mastered, and thus ascertained that these are really limited to about 420 (a very fair number, we must allow, as compared with our twenty-four). These he succeeded in the most ingenious manner in reducing

beggars who throng the streets of every Chinese town, frequently going about in companies of a dozen or more. A vast number of these are the victims of small-pox, and perhaps as many more have lost their sight through neglected ophthalmia. Nothing could be more miserable than their condition, but if once they could acquire the art of reading, apart from the gain to themselves, they would command an amazing amount of respect from their fellow-citizens.

Of course no amount of embossing could make the frightfully complicated Chinese character comprehensible to the most sensitive fingers, but the newly-devised system appeared hopeful, and now came the anxiety of testing it. Selecting a poor little orphan blind beggar who was lying almost

It was at this stage that I made their acquaintance, and it struck me as intensely pathetic—as we stood at the door of a dark room, for it was night—to hear what I knew to be Holy Scripture read by men who, less than four months previously, sat begging in the streets in misery and rags, on the verge of starvation.

No wonder that to their countrymen it should appear little short of miraculous that blind beggars should be thus cared for by foreigners, and endowed with apparently supernatural powers; and when one was sent out to read in the street in company with a native colporteur, crowds gathered round to hear and to buy the Book. Hence it is evident that the Mission might be greatly aided in spreading the knowledge of Christian truth by the agency of a whole legion of blind readers.

A serious difficulty, however, lies in the necessity of providing board and lodging for those who at present maintain themselves by begging. Mr. Murray's private resources have from the first been seriously overtaxed, and as this blind-teaching is altogether out of his official work, he can only accomplish it in extra hours stolen from sleep. He would, however, very gladly increase his class, which, when I last heard from Peking, numbered six boys, the first lot having been fairly started in life. Only the lack of funds prevents his doubling their number; £10 enables him to give one Chinese beggar a year's training.

Miss Gordon-Cumming, in addition to this, writes to the *Illustrated Missionary News*:—"Not only do these blind boys rapidly acquire the art of writing with the greatest accuracy, but the same system has been applied to musical symbols, and several boys who were found to have a remarkable talent for music have now been instructed in its science, and have learned to write music from dictation with extraordinary facility. Within forty minutes the class writes down any two of Moody and Sankey's hymn tunes, in four parts; and when the sheet is taken out of the frame, each student reads off his part, rarely making a mistake. These boys now form an efficient choir at the London Mission Chapel, one taking his place at the harmonium. Several more have been bespoken as organists for other chapels. On week days these boys and young men read the Scriptures and sing hymns in the chapel, and numerous passers-by are thus attracted to come and hear the message of the Gospel.

"But in order to reach the unlearned, special books must be prepared for the different provinces, and it is of the utmost importance that Mr. Murray should now be placed in such a position as may enable him to devote his remaining days to preparing books for the blind legion, and also to transmit to others the knowledge which has been so specially revealed to him, and which he alone is at present competent to impart. It is greatly to be desired that he should



W. H. MURRAY.

Inventor of the System for Teaching the Chinese Blind to Read.

to a system of dots, which (though to me quite incomprehensible) is said to be extraordinarily simple. With patient ingenuity, he then contrived so to combine the two systems that there seemed every reason to hope that henceforth this might be made accurately to represent the perplexing sounds of the Chinese language, and also to replace the bewildering multitude of Chinese characters.

The difficulties to be overcome are almost beyond comprehension by those who have never struggled to acquire an Oriental language, represented in crabbed characters; but Mr. Murray's patient resolution was kept constantly up to the mark by the continual sight of the innumerable blind

naked in the streets, and who, notwithstanding his loneliness and poverty, always seemed cheerful and content. Mr. Murray took him in hand, washed and clothed him, and undertook to feed and lodge him, provided he would apply himself to mastering this new learning. Naturally the boy was delighted, and we may imagine his ecstasy and the thankful gladness of his teacher when, within six weeks, he was able not only to read fluently, but to write with remarkable accuracy!

To complete the experiment two blind beggar-men were next induced to learn, the boy acting as teacher. One was able to read well within two months, the other more slowly, but also with great pleasure.

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