

HOW TO CIRCULATE THE SCRIPTURES.

This is a problem which is always confronting those who are charged with the management of Bible societies. The aim of them all is simple enough—"To encourage a wider circulation of the Holy Scriptures." How shall it best be accomplished?

There are various ways. No cast-iron rule can be formulated. One way is to give the Scriptures freely, a Bible to every one who will accept it. Another is to establish and maintain depositories where all who choose may buy for themselves or for others. A third way is to send men from house to house to offer the Scriptures for sale, and so to furnish the opportunity and the occasion, which otherwise might never offer. Either method is costly. Indiscriminate giving would soon drain the treasury of any society. The maintenance of a depository calls for certain, perhaps a large expenditure for rent and attendance. The employment of a staff of itinerant colporteurs necessitates a large outlay for their wages, their travelling expenses, and the transportation of their books from place to place. No doubt it often costs more to look up a family destitute of the Bible and take the book to their door, than was paid for printing and binding the volume.

It is instinctive with Christian people to advise the free donation of books. Texts of Scripture favour it: "Freely ye have received, freely also give." "Give to him that asketh thee." It is a very cheap way of doing good. Any one can get more for his money in Bibles than in any other commodity. To judicious giving no exception can be taken. But in the matter of indiscriminate giving, or of giving to every person who does not own a Bible, there are few who would not hesitate after making trial of it, and seeing the evils it involves. It does not answer to make the sacred volume too cheap. As a rule, slight value attaches to that which costs one nothing. To give indiscriminately may be casting pearls before swine. An octavo Bible did good service to a Mexican grocer as a ream of wrapping-paper. The hope of securing a second copy reconciled a Brazilian family to the surrender to the priest of a Bible which they had received as a gift.

Experience has taught missionaries and Bible societies, the world over, to be cautious about too lavish a distribution of the Scriptures even among the very poor. Sales at reduced prices are better than gifts. The purchaser will ordinarily prize the book he has bought with his own money. The Bibles are well circulated in London which are paid for in weekly instalments of a penny.

It is interesting to notice how often this subject is adverted to in the last report of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and we cannot do better than to supplement this article by quotations from different parts of that volume. In the section on Germany the general remark is made:

"Colportage is a costly channel of circulation—more costly even than free grants. It is not from financial reasons that your committee press for sales by colportage in preference to gratuitous distribution in all cases where the choice really lies between the two. It is because any amount of gifts of the Scriptures does not, as a missionary agency, supply the place of a colporteur's visits from house to house in search of those who would never of themselves go to look for a Bible. Colportage is difficult work; its expense is great; it exposes a colporteur to abuse, persecution, and inhospitality. But it is a form of real missionary work, and indispensable in Germany, if the Roman Catholics there are to be provided with the Bible."

In respect to France some observations occur which are applicable to other parts of the continent as well:

"To require a small price for the Scriptures looks less enthusiastic in seeking the salvation of man than to give them for nothing, but it is one safeguard against waste.

"The spread of gratuitous distribution of the Scriptures in France by for-