

Of the work of Colportage, in which Mr. Muirhead takes a special interest, often meeting the Colporteurs for prayer and Christian counsel, he gives the following sketch:—

In our last communication it was stated that several native Colporteurs were employed in connexion with the Corresponding Committee. We have still to state that they are actively engaged in the same way. The greater part of the last six months has been spent by them in the immediate neighbourhood, visiting the multitudinous population all around. The manner of their reception is varied. By some they are listened to with respect, and they have had many opportunities of making known the Word of Life to those who might otherwise have never heard it. This alone is a satisfaction, though the apathy and materialism of the Chinese in general have been found a great impediment in their way. It were useless to enumerate the different kinds and forms of objections they meet with from day to day, and beyond a few cases of hopeful appearance they have little to report in the light of encouragement. Their own religious character and conduct, their manifest interest in the work, are as much as we can possibly expect: and are a sufficient warrant for their being engaged by us, while their experience is similar to that of the most zealous missionaries to this peculiar people. It has been the habit of the writer to meet with them every Monday morning, for prayer and consultation, and occasionally to accompany them in their out-door labours. On every ground he is satisfied that they are doing their work in a becoming manner and spirit. In the meantime these labours must be carried on for the enlightenment of the multitudes around; and though we cannot speak of much positive good hitherto, they are too important to be discontinued.

It has been of late considered a desirable thing to extend the Colportage work to the country. The various towns and cities now at rest from war are gradually recovering their population, and three of our native assistants have been visiting different parts, the design being for them to remain a sufficient length of time at any one place to sow the seed and ascertain the disposition of the people in regard to Divine things. It is intended to carry on this system to an indefinite extent, and as in missionary labour some fields promise better than others, these visits of the Colporteurs may lead to the discovery of some hopeful places. As a whole, the country districts are spoken of much more pleasingly than the city. The natives show greater signs of interest, and are less absorbed in worldly occupations. Though more ignorant, they are more distinguished by honesty and truthfulness than their city brethren. At the same time, there are those, alas! amongst them who are intolerably opposed to everything seemingly new and foreign, attached to their old superstitions, and not backward in threatening vengeance on the propagators of Christian doctrine. Though a foreigner would meet with all apparent respect at their hands, the character and feelings of their countrymen in a well-known manner. Our assistants have been duly forewarned on this point, and their connexions with the heathen, though frequently of this painful kind, have, we are glad to say, not led them to quail in their presence. It requires courage on the part specially of a native representing Christianity to stand up in its defence away from the patronizing influence of a foreign missionary; and without averting too much in favour of our Colporteurs in this respect, there is gratifying proof of their stability and steadfastness in the prosecution of their work. We shall continue their operations in this line by sending them from town to town and city to city in the surrounding country, and when the heat of the weather abates, they will be visited and aided by one or other of our missionary brethren. At present these assistants come to Shanghai once a month, and on reporting the state of their respective fields, are advised either to continue there or to go to some other place.

The extension of this system to Tientsin, Peking, Hankow, and other missionary stations, would no doubt be an excellent means of diffusing Bible truth.