

THE  
**Christian Monitor.**

VOLUME 1.]

RICHMOND, VA. JULY 29, 1815.

[NUMBER 4.

SUMMARY ACCOUNT  
OF THE ORIGIN AND PROGRESS OF  
**BIBLE SOCIETIES.**

(FOREIGN.)

IN March, 1804, a Society was formed in London with this designation, "The British and Foreign Bible Society." The following brief statement was then made of the "reasons which exist for such a society, of the specific *object* which it embraces, and of the *principles* by which its operations will be directed.

"The REASONS which call for such an institution, chiefly refer to the prevalence of ignorance, superstition, and idolatry over so large a portion of the world, and the recent attempts which have been made on the part of infidelity to discredit the evidence, vilify the character, and destroy the influence of Christianity.

"The EXCLUSIVE OBJECT of this society is, to diffuse the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, by circulating them in the different languages spoken throughout Great-Britain, and Ireland; and also, according to the extent of its funds, by promoting the printing of them in foreign languages, and the distribution of them in foreign countries.

"The PRINCIPLES upon which this undertaking will be conducted, are as comprehensive as the nature of the object suggests that they should be. In the execution of the plan, it is proposed to embrace the common support of Christians at large; and to invite the concurrence of persons of every description, who profess to regard the scriptures as the proper standard of faith."

This plan was received with general approbation, and was prosecuted with

great vigor. In a short time auxiliary societies were formed, to aid the parent institution in carrying its designs into effect;—the numbers of which have increased to the amount of several hundreds; so that there is scarcely a part of the British European dominions in which there is not a society employed to a greater or less extent in distributing the Holy Scriptures.

The funds of the British and Foreign Bible Society, have increased with unexampled rapidity, as will appear from this fact, that in the tenth year of the institution the net receipts amounted to £. 87,216 8 9. And the expenditures to £. 84,652 1 5. The total amount of receipts from the beginning, is £. 299,287 11 1; and the expenditures £. 267,571 1 6. The number of Bibles issued by this society since its commencement to the 30th June, 1814, is 443,871; of Testaments is 670,125, making a total of 1,113,996. In addition to this, there have been printed, or are printing by Bible Societies on the continent of Europe, aided by Donations from the British and Foreign Bible Society, 90,000 Bibles, and 83,600 Testaments.

Although the plan of this Society met with very general approbation, yet opposition was made to it, not indeed by numerous, yet by active and vehement partizans. The effect, however, was small, and upon the whole favorable to the institution. One circumstance is worthy of notice. In England *warm-administration-men* have accused the Society of favoring the contrary party; and oppositionists have regarded it with an evil eye, as if it were a political engine in the hands of government. High Churchmen have predicted that the Bible Society would overthrow the esta-

blishment; while the jealousy of some dissenters has been excited, least this institution should strengthen the Church-party to the injury of the dissenting interest. This may be considered as conclusive evidence that the Society has no sinister views, but honestly pursues the great and laudable object proposed;—namely “the distribution of the Holy Scriptures to the widest practicable extent.”

The example of this Society has been followed in various parts of the world.—On the continent of Europe several institutions of this kind have been established.—1. The German Bible Society. This was originally established at Nuremberg, and afterwards by the aid of a liberal application of the funds of the British and Foreign Bible Society transferred to Basle in Switzerland. It has published 16,000 German Bibles; 3,000 French Bibles; 4000 French Testaments; 4000 Romanese, and 3000 Italian. Several Bible Associations have been formed in other cantons of Switzerland, to aid in printing and distributing the Holy Scriptures. A Bible institution was also formed under the patronage of the king of Wirtemberg for the benefit of the poor in his dominions, to which the society in England made a donation of *l.* 500.

2. Bible Society at Berlin. This Society was formed under the auspices of the rich and great, with the express approbation of the king of Prussia, who assisted its funds by a donation.

The efforts of this Society have been directed to three important undertakings; the printing of editions of the Scriptures in the Bohemian, Polish, and Lithuanian dialects.

1. Of the Bohemian Bible, 5000 copies have been printed and the whole impression has been rapidly circulated in Bohemia and Silesia. A second edition of 5000 copies has been undertaken, and probably by this time circulated among the destitute and poor. The British Society made to this institution a donation of *l.* 550, and a loan of 1500 dollars.

2. Of the Polish Bible, an edition has been printed consisting of 8000 copies, with 400 extra Testaments at an expense of *l.* 1600, of which *l.* 960 were contributed by the British and Foreign Bible Society.

The Polish Scriptures are understood to be in great demand.

3. An edition of the Lithuanian Bible consisting of 3000 copies has been undertaken, and is probably completed and distributed. To this work the British Society contributed *l.* 500.

Connected with the Society of Berlin, there are Bible Committees in Koningsberg, Frankfort, Leipsic, Halle, Lubeck, Osnaburgh, &c. actively engaged in promoting the cheap sale, or gratuitous distribution of the Holy Scriptures in different parts of Germany.

3. Hungarian Bible Society. Some German Bibles and Testaments were distributed in Hungary and Austria, by a German Minister, at the expense of the British and Foreign Bible Society.—This was the occasion of establishing at Presburg “the Hungarian Bible Institution.” Two professors in that city were very active in bringing about that event. According to their representation, there are upwards of a million of protestants in Hungary; very few Bibles among those who speak the Slavonic and Hungarian dialects, and many of them very poor. *l.* 500 were appropriated by the British and Foreign Bible Society to this institution.

4. Bible Societies in Sweden. There is a Society at Stockholm incorporated under the sanction of the king and privy council, denominated the *Evangelical Society*. Its objects are the circulation of the Scriptures, and the distribution of Religious Tracts; but by a fundamental rule of its institution, *each object has a separate fund*, and a distinct account is kept, and published of its income and expenditure. To that department of this society which respects the distribution of the Scriptures, the British and Foreign Bible Society has at different times granted *l.* 2,150. The attention of the Stockholm Society has hitherto been directed to printing editions of the Scriptures in the Swedish and Laponesic dialects.

Of the Swedish Scriptures, 11,000 Bibles and 38,000 Testaments have been printed on standing types. Of the first edition of this Bible every copy was purchased, before the impression was completed.

The New Testament in the dialect of Lapland has also been printed. Of these, two thousand five hundred copies have been distributed in Swedish Lapland, with the express approbation of the king of Sweden. Measures have also been taken to facilitate the distribution of the Bible, both in Russian and Danish Lapland. Three other Societies have been established in Sweden, under the designations of the Gothenburg, the Westeras, and the Gothland Bible Societies. To each of these institutions that Society which is the parent of all others, has granted a donation.

5. *Bible Society of Finland.* The number of persons who speak the Finnish language is not less than 1,500,000. No edition of either the Old or New Testament has been printed in this dialect for the last thirty years; and scarcely a single copy of the last edition could be purchased. Upon hearing this, the British and Foreign Bible Society made a tender of £. 500 as an inducement to the printing of the Finnish Scripture. The Emperor of Russia approved the acceptance of the grant, and added to it the sum of 5000 rubles from his privy purse. Under this sanction and encouragement, the Bible Society of Abo has been formed. The British Society has added £. 250 to their former grant, and measures have been adopted for printing the Finnish Scriptures. The work is superintended by the Academy of Sciences at St. Petersburg.

The British Society has also granted £. 200 to supply the poor Swedes in Finland with the Scriptures in their own language.

6. *Esthonian, Livonian, and Courland Bible Societies.* It was understood that, in these provinces, where almost every individual had within the last forty years been taught to read, there were 400,000 families without a Bible. To supply this very great and alarming deficiency, Bible Societies have been formed in Dorpat, Revel, Mittau, and Riga, from whose exertions much lasting benefit may be expected. These Societies have been assisted by donations to the amount of £. 1500 from the British Institution.

(To be continued.)

#### DOMESTIC.

In the year 1808, the example which had been set by the people of England, was followed by those of the United States. A Bible Society was organized under the title of the Bible Society of Philadelphia; and met with that encouragement from all denominations of Christians, which might be expected in favor of an institution so laudable.

The Society was enabled in a short period after its establishment, to import a Stereotype press; and thus to multiply copies of the Holy Scriptures much more rapidly, and at much less cost than could otherwise be done. The importance of this measure, say the Managers in their last report, "will be duly estimated by the members of the Society, when they are informed that in the course of the year, the pressing calls on the Stereotype Press have occasioned the issue of sixteen thousand, three hundred and seventy-five Bibles, and 6,500 New Testaments."

Not long after the establishment of the Philadelphia Society, similar associations were organized in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New-York. A flame was then kindled which spread rapidly thro' the country: and before the close of the year 1814, there was not a state in the union in which there was not at least one Society established for the gratuitous distribution of the Scriptures. The whole number of Societies now in our country amounts to seventy-six. Of these, there are at least 7 in Massachusetts; 12 in New-York; 4 in New-Jersey; 8 in Pennsylvania; 11 in Virginia; 3 in Ohio; in Vermont, Maryland, and South Carolina, 2 each: and in the other states, as also in the District of Columbia, and in the Mississippi Territory, at least one. Concerning the number of Bibles distributed by these various Societies, the Editor has not received information.— From such Reports as have been received, some extracts of an interesting nature will be published:—

#### *Extract from the first Report of the Bible Society of Louisiana.*

The Bibles (in English) and the New Testaments (in French) which we have hitherto circulated, are the donations of other sister societies.

From the New-York Bible Society was received in the summer of 1813, a donation of 150 English Bibles, through the hands of the reverend Messrs. Schermerhorn and Mills. From the Massachusetts Bible Society was received in the month of February, 1815, a donation of 140 English Bibles sent on by the reverend Messrs. Mills and Smith, visiting this country as *missionaries*. By the same gentlemen, the Philadelphia Bible Society has forwarded 3,000 French New Testaments, a part of the edition of 5,000 which that society, aided by sister societies, and different individuals, has printed for gratuitous distribution among the French of the State of Louisiana, and the territories of Missouri and Illinois.

From the British and Foreign Bible Society, the parent of 1000 like institutions, existing in Europe and America, we have to acknowledge a generous donation of *l.* 100 sterling; one among many other instances of the very extended and benevolent views of that most noble institution of modern times.

*Of the English Bibles, there have been distributed—*

- 64 Among 300 British prisoners in the public prison of New-Orleans.
- 30 Among 300 patients of the U. S. Hospital (of whom 180 were British prisoners.)
- 31 Among 240 sick in Hospitals of the Kentucky Militia.
- 31 Among 265 sick in Hospitals of the Tennessee militia.
- 34 Among 360 sick in Hospitals of the Louisiana militia.
- 8 Among 50 sick in the U. States' navy Hospital.

198 Total.

*Of 2,000 Copies of the French New Testament, received in this city, there have been distributed,*

- 2000 Among the inhabitants of New-Orleans and its environs.
- 112 Have been sent for distribution to the county of Natchitoches.
- 42 For the county of Rapides.
- 200 To the county of Attakapas.
- 300 Copies of the French New Testament have been forwarded by the

Philadelphia Bible Society and committed to the care of different gentlemen residing on the river between this city and Natchez, for gratuitous distribution among the inhabitants of their vicinity.

The want of Bibles in Louisiana has been extreme: and it will yet require a very considerable number to supply, in an adequate manner, the families which are destitute of the word of God. Had 3000 English Bibles and as many New Testaments been in the hands of the managers at the beginning of the past winter, they could have been distributed in this city with the greatest facility, and it is believed with much advantage: so good an opportunity will not probably occur for some time to come: Our regular troops and militia then here, were remarkably destitute of the scriptures.

It was very unusual to find any portion of the sacred volume among our soldiers: and in many instances there were found an hundred sick assembled in a hospital, without having among them one Bible or New Testament.

Some of the Tennessee militia, when passing through Nashville on their way to New-Orleans, had enquired in vain for a Bible: not one was to be found for sale; and in the month of December last a similar enquiry was fruitlessly made in this city by a gentleman from the Amite; nor is there at this moment a Bible to be purchased in any Book Store in the city of New-Orleans.

The inhabitants of Florida, who are principally Americans, are generally without the Scriptures; so are the other Americans for the most part, throughout the state. It has been supposed, and, it is believed, with the strictest correctness, that before the transmission of a few French Bibles to New-Orleans by the British and Foreign Bible Society in the year 1813, there were not *ten* among the French inhabitants of Louisiana.

The manner in which the Scriptures have been received by those to whom they have been distributed is highly gratifying; and encourages the belief that the labours of those who have united in this work, will not be lost.

The Tennessee and Kentucky troops received the Bibles with no ordinary wil-

ingness: it seemed to be received by many of them as "*a pearl of great price.*"

As there were not Bibles sufficient to supply even the sick in hospitals, who were anxious to receive them, it was not uncommon to see one reading aloud to several around; and at other times two or three lying on the floor together would be attempting to read in the same book, at the same time. Some of those who had received Bibles, declared a determination to carry them home with them on foot 800 or 1000 miles; and rather than not carry them, they said they would throw away part of their baggage.

The French have received the New Testament with much satisfaction: it is possible that some have asked for it from curiosity; but very many have done so from a wish to *search the Scriptures*, which numbers declared they had never seen before. It must give pleasure to every philanthropic mind to learn that the rising generation in this city, heretofore almost destitute of any book of instruction, has now a class book used throughout our schools; that those children, whose parents were unable from the exorbitant price of school books, and the pressure of the war, to furnish them, have now a book,\* "*which has GOD for its author, salvation for its end; and truth without any mixture of error for its matter.*"

Although the 3000 copies of the New Testament in French had been received by the president of the society about the middle of *December* last; owing to the disturbed situation of the country, at that time invaded, none of them were distributed until about the 10th of February: after a few persons had received the New Testament, and it had become generally known that there were more in the hands of one of the managers who had been appointed to make the gratuitous distribution of the whole number designed for the city, the applications were more frequent than could be supplied; a large crowd of some hundreds of people of all colors and ranks was formed before the house, and became literally clamorous to have "*a book*;" a word which was often vociferated in French by fifty voices at once.

\* Locke.

Such an assembly, for such a purpose, never before witnessed in Louisiana, presented to the beholder many affecting scenes: the young and the old, the rich and the poor, as if alike conscious of their wants, pressed forward with out-stretched hands to receive the valuable gift. A child not more than five or six years of age, was borne in the arms of its mother, a woman of colour, pressing through the crowd as one of the candidates for a treasure, which she seemed justly to estimate: the silence and attention exhibited by the bye-standers was immediately rewarded by hearing this infant read in an intelligent manner the story related in Mark 10, 13—16, rendered doubly interesting by the incidents.

As all who presented themselves for a French New Testament were asked if they could read, and if any doubts existed, were put to the trial—an aged black woman being asked the usual question, and requested to prove the fact, answered that she could not without her spectacles, which she had not with her; but unwilling to depart until the object of her wishes had been obtained, she renewed her application, and observed to the distributor, "*If I get a book by falsehood it will not be deceiving you, but God.*"—Many persons who could not read themselves wished the New Testament for their children, who they said would read it for them.

The managers have received the hearty co-operation of various individuals in distributing the French New Testaments. The reverend father Antonio de Sedilla, the curate of the parish, has taken an active part in aiding the circulation of the New Testament among the Catholics: the countenance given by him to the views of the society is of the highest importance from the great influence which he has among his parishoners. We acknowledge likewise with pleasure, the aid of several gentlemen in the country; nor in any instance has assistance been refused.

The British prisoners, to whom a portion of the English Bibles were distributed, manifested the sincerest joy and gratitude: most of them had been supplied with Bibles or Testaments previous to their embarkation for this country;

and some (as appeared by a printed notification in the Testaments) by the Naval Bible Association established as long ago as 1780: but having left their heavy baggage at their camp on the 8th of January, the day on which a general assault was made on the lines near this city, they became destitute when made prisoners.

(To be continued.)

#### MISCELLANEOUS.

*Extract from a Manuscript Essay on the evidences of Christianity.*

Belief of the Scriptures is frequently represented as proof of intellectual weakness. But it may very well be questioned whether the reverse of this is not the truth. At any rate, if belief is not universally proof of strength of mind; scepticism affords strong ground to suspect imbecility, as well as moral depravity. The sceptic, often ignorant of the nature of evidence, requires on moral and religious subjects, that sort of proof, of which the nature of the case does not admit; and rejects the truth, because such evidence as he arbitrarily requires cannot be afforded to him. This is about as reasonable as to demand that mathematical evidence should be applied to the questions agitated in a court of justice, and to refuse to make any decision, because no man can comply with a demand so unreasonable. But it frequently happens that the mind wavers on the subject of religion, because in relation to the doctrines taught, and the facts recorded in the Bible, there are difficulties which no power of human intellect is sufficient to solve. Often through pure weakness of understanding, these difficulties are permitted to have such weight as to unsettle the faith, and at least keep the mind continually undecided as to the truth of the scriptures. Persons of this intellectual cast sometimes see strong reasons to believe that the scriptures are true, and show a considerable leaning to christianity; but the first difficulty that is started by a plausible sophist, will erase every impression favorable to religion; and they who so lately were almost persuaded to be christians, are now pert and clamorous disciples of some modern philosopher. Minds of this description have no tenacity; no

power of adhering to conclusions however fairly drawn; no fortitude of understanding: "they are children tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine," and lead into any devious way "by the cunning craftiness of men, who lie in wait to deceive." "All things by fits—and nothing long," they are alternately christians, or Jews, infidels, or Socinians; taking a cast from the last book that was read, or the last man that was conversed with. And yet with all this versatility of character, persons of this sort are exceedingly apt to be dogmatical in their decisions. A fact is stated in scriptures, that for instance, of the incarnation of the son of God, or of his resurrection.—This is boldly declared to be impossible. But on what ground is this hasty conclusion pronounced? Simply on this, that the thing is contrary to all the observation and experience of the objector, or because it is not in conformity to the ordinary operations of nature. Or, it may be, because the reason of the thing, or the manner of it, is unknown, all that is recorded concerning it, is decided to be untrue. What is this but to make our ignorance in some sort the standard of truth?

The observation of Paley on this subject is worthy of perpetual remembrance. "*True fortitude of understanding*" says he "*consists in not permitting what we know, to be unsettled by what we do not know.*" If the best evidence that the nature of a case admits of, be produced, it is folly to refuse belief, because the subject is incumbered with difficulties. The truth is, that difficulties incumber every opinion, and we only believe what is least difficult of belief, when we heartily embrace the gospel of Christ.

But here it may be asked "of what use can it be, to believe religious doctrines which we cannot comprehend—and in fact what are we to think of a revelation which leaves us at a loss to understand its most material doctrines?" This objection, it is believed, has considerable influence on the minds of some; and is, therefore, not unworthy of attention. It may then be answered, that what are termed the incomprehensible doctrines of religion are, supposing them true, all facts;

such, for instance, are the incarnation, already mentioned, the doctrine of the Atonement, and even the sacred mystery of the Trinity; which last is a fact concerning the manner of the divine existence. Now it may be of unspeakable importance to know a fact, which we can by no means comprehend. For instance, to know that Peruvian Bark will, in certain cases, prevent the return of fever, or that opium will procure sleep, may be in the highest degree beneficial, and yet I may be utterly unable to explain the mode of operation in either case. In like manner, if I am conscious of the sinfulness of my heart and life, and anxious to be informed "what I must do to be saved," it may be unspeakably important for me to know that Jesus Christ has made an all-sufficient atonement for sin, and that "whosoever believeth in him shall not come into condemnation."—And yet I may be unable to give any better explanation of this fact, than I can of the manner in which medicine operates on the human body. Thus religious doctrines may be incomprehensible, and at the same time in the highest degree important: and thus also, *that* may properly enough be termed a revelation, which makes known to us truths, which in the present mode of existence we can never explain.

From the doctrine here advanced, an inference may be drawn, which a little consideration will convince us is perfectly just, although perhaps, at first view, the reader may be a little startled. It is this, that it may be entirely rational to believe *facts* which *appear* contradictory. In other words, facts may be established by the best evidence which the nature of the case admits, and yet from our incapacity to enter into them and understand their hidden nature, they may appear to contradict each other.—Were our capacities sufficiently enlarged, the apparent contradiction would vanish. But until this enlargement take place, we must believe according to evidence, and for the rest, acknowledge our ignorance. They who still doubt of the justness of these remarks, may be referred to the common demonstration of the infinite divisibility of matter, as some illustration of the subject. An inch is limited of course, yet has it often been

proved to contain an infinite number of parts: Or to make another reference to mathematics, it has been demonstrated that two lines may continually approach, and never meet. These truths are susceptible of the most rigorous demonstration. Mathematicians do not entertain the least doubt of them; they nevertheless are direct contradictions.

The object of these remarks is to show that the clamor which has been raised in respect to the difficulties in Scripture, is unreasonable. Nay, it appears to the writer of this, that the wisdom of the Deity is manifested in the very difficulties and obscurities which some think fatal to the credibility of the Gospel. Let it be remembered that the Bible claims the prerogative of deciding infallibly, and without appeal, a number of questions of the utmost importance to the human race; and that all who receive it, readily acknowledge its claims, and without hesitation, submit to its decisions. Now, in other cases of the kind, the submission of the understanding to authority has been productive of the most deplorable effects. Mahometans, Lamists, and Bramins are in a state of miserable intellectual degradation. Tame, and passive, without enterprize or mental vigor, they furnish a melancholy spectacle of what human nature may be reduced to, when the understanding and the will are subjected to arbitrary power. Among those, who, in former times were called Christians, we find instances of a similar nature, at once curious and mortifying. When through the arts and policy of designing men, the Bulls of Popes, and the decrees of Councils were substituted for the authority of Scripture, the effect on the human understanding soon became apparent, and a despotism was established over the human mind, as overwhelming and degrading as any that can be imagined. The history of what is emphatically, and with the utmost propriety, called the dark ages, is proof of this.—But wherever men have free access to the Bible, the case is just the reverse.—The system of Christianity is so constructed, that while fundamental truths are revealed with sufficient clearness to regulate practice, there is opened an inexhaustible mine, in which the most vigorous minds may labor for the discovery

of truth; while, at the same time, such an interest is excited, by the very nature of the subject, as prompts to the most vigorous exertions of intellect, and the most unwearied researches after truth.—The effect of this intellectual exercise, is the invigoration of the human mind, the expansion of its views, and of course the melioration of the state of man, and the exaltation of his character. But what would be the consequences, were such a revelation afforded as Philosophists require? A reference to the facts already stated, may afford an answer. The mind of man would stagnate, exertion would be at an end, and Christians would in all probability be a feeble, nerveless, stupid race, such as the votaries of eastern superstition. He who contrived the Gospel, knows more of human nature than modern philosophers.

Again: one great and very important object of the Gospel is to form the moral character of man, and bring it to perfection. This cannot possibly be effected unless the love of truth be called into frequent and lively exercise. And we see the state of man to be such, that he greatly needs this kind of discipline.—But how could religion afford this discipline—were every truth relating to it, as clear as that two and two make four? The analogy between the body and mind in this case is remarkable. As the body, to be brought to its highest perfection, must be vigorously exercised, and accustomed to labor, must bear hardships, and endure the heat of summer and the cold of winter: so, that our intellectual and moral powers may be brought to full maturity, it is necessary that they encounter difficulties, learn to weigh evidence, and in a word, be constantly and vigorously exercised.

#### ANECDOTES.

Sir Isaac Newton set out in life a clamorous infidel, but on a nice examination of the evidences for christianity, he found reason to change his opinion.—When the celebrated Dr. Edmund Halley was talking infidelity before him, Sir Isaac addressed him in these or the like words:—"Dr. Halley, I am always glad to hear you, when you speak about Astronomy, or other parts of the Mathematics, because that is a subject you have

studied, and well understand; but you should not talk of christianity, for you have not studied it. *I have*, and am certain you know nothing of the matter."

Dr. Johnson used to say that no honest man could be a Deist; for no man could be so, after a *fair* examination of the proofs of christianity.

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Is published every Saturday; each number containing eight octavo pages. An Index will be published at the end of each volume.

The price to Subscribers will be two DOLLARS per annum, if paid within two months after issuing the first number in every year; or THREE DOLLARS should payment be delayed until after that time.

Printed by *A. G. Booker & Co.*