



I FOLLOW

THE ROAD



A Colporteur at
Prague.

By The
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D.D.



Among the motley of men who follow the road the packmen of the Bible Society are to be found on most highways of the world. George Borrow was one of their company. Along the roads and rivers of the five continents they go through towns and villages offering their cheap little Bibles and Testaments.

I Follow the Road



HERE is no better cure for parish-mindedness and religious staleness than to picture the army of colporteurs travelling in most of the countries of the world on their great business, often rejected and scorned, sometimes in peril and persecuted, but here and there beholding the miracle of men and women raised from death to life, changed by reading the Bible.

A colporteur is precisely a peddler who carries round the Scriptures to sell. His pack is filled with Bibles, printed in the languages that are current in the provinces where he travels. And his work is to tramp on from town to town and from village to village, calling at the scattered dwellings and offering his cheap little books from door to door. The Society proceeds on the principle laid down by Dr. Johnson—"People will seldom read a book which is given them. The way to spread a work is to sell it at a low price." The low price asked by the colporteurs is often only a fraction of what it has cost to print and distribute.

Let anyone whose vision has grown dim, whose fires of enthusiasm have died down, let him, I say, take up the report of the Bible Society with their tales of God's Packmen, the successors of the illustrious George Borrow, tramping the roads, attending fairs and markets plying the Book.

The title of the last report of the Society is "For Men and Nations," and it proclaims the audacity of the Bible's bid for world empire. It is for Everyman, but it is also for every nation. There can be no permanent peace until national life is founded upon the great spiritual principles set forth in the Bible. The task of the British and Foreign Bible Society is to get the Bible into the hands of the people of all nations and tongues.

ONE of these Bible peddlers travelled along three less known waterways in the southern section of the Amazon valley, among rubber gatherers, and after disposing of every copy of Scripture he had brought with him long before he had carried through the original plan of the trip, returned to his base with this report: "In the interior of the country there is a great hunger for the Bible. I descended from Calana to the mouth of the river Madeira, and was approached by scores of people seeking the Bible. One man, by the name of St. Jose Correa, travelled five hours from an inland home in order to buy a Bible."

In Ecuador, the Society circulated last year 21,000 volumes—8000 through missions and 13,000 through colportage. We learn of a colporteur who experiences the extremes of cold and heat in the course of his duties: "In March and April you would have found Colporteur Obando shivering near the snow line at Tulcan, near the frontier, and among the Itavalo Indians on the main road south, who buy a lot of Gospel portions from him when he visits them every year. After leaving this region, he goes to the other extreme of climate—tropical heat right under the Equator—but he takes it all in his stride."

In Iran, 49,500 books of Scripture were circulated. These books were in no fewer than 43 written languages, the chief of which were Persian, English, Armenian and Hebrew. Troops stationed in Iran have been supplied with the Scriptures, books being sold to British, American, Indian and Assyrian soldiers.

AT Shiraz, the city of Sa'adi and Hafiz, the famed Persian poets, a colporteur sold more than 2400 books. In the course of the year he took a journey to Fasa with another worker, and then he had a trying experience. This is how he tells his story: "We were interned by the road police. They searched our pockets, our notebooks and our boxes, and sent us under guard to their headquarters. They insisted that we should walk the distance, but we were finally allowed to go on donkeys. The journey took two days, in burning heat, which gave us severe headaches. On arrival we were put in a small, in-

sanitary and dark prison. I think two days there would have been the end of us."

However, the situation brightened in a remarkable way, for the story continues: "At night we gathered the prisoners together and gave them a two hours' magic lantern lecture on the life of Christ. The following day we were able to witness to our faith to several of the officers. Before long relief came and we were set at liberty." That is a delicious story of these irrepressible colporteurs.

During the year the work was kept up in the vast region of the Sudan and the colporteurs undertook long and arduous journeys in all directions from Khartoum. These long journeys are inevitable, and on one journey the circulation worked out at about one copy for every three miles travelled.

The British and Foreign Bible Society's main aim is to provide the Scriptures in all languages, and the full number in which it has published or distributed them is now seven hundred and sixty-one. In spite of war conditions the production of versions in new languages continues, although more slowly. Nearly thirty have been added to the list since the war began, including three in the past twelve months, while translation and revision are proceeding in many languages all over the world.

The Bible is still far and away the world's best seller. To understand the fact that the Bible is now published and distributed in 1062 languages by the various Bible Societies, we should realise that Homer has been translated into only twenty modern languages, Shakespeare into thirty-seven, Tolstoy into thirty-three and Marx into twenty-six. Bunyan comes next to the Bible and the "Pilgrim's Progress" has gone into one hundred and thirty languages.

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