THE

THIRTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

Central China Religious Tract Society

For the year ending December 31st,

1888.

HEAD QUARTERS,—HANKOW AND WUCHANG.
DEPOSITORY,—HANKOW.

HANKOW:

Printed at the "Hankow Mission Press."

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OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE
FOR
1889

PRESIDENT

* Rev. Griffith John,—Hankow,

GENERAL SECRETARY AND TREASURER


DEPOT SECRETARY

M. J. Walker Esq.—Hankow.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Rev. David Hill,—Hankow.

J. Archibald Esq.—Hankow

Rev. T. E. North,—Hankow.

Rev. C. G. Sparham,—Hankow,

Rev. Wm. Owen,—Wuchang.

Rev. W. T. A. Barber, M.A.—Wuchang.

C. W. Mitchil, Esq.—Hanyang.

* Ex officio members of the Executive Committee,
REGULATIONS

OF THE

SOCIETY.

I.—NAME.

That this Society shall be denominated the Central China Religious Tract Society, and that its head-quarters shall be Hankow and Wuchang.

II.—OBJECT.

That the object of this Society shall be the circulation of Books and Tracts, prepared on the same principles as those of the Religious Tract Societies of London and America.

III.—MEMBERSHIP.

That all Protestant missionaries and Bible Society agents labouring in Central and Western China, and all persons willing to co-operate in furthering the objects of the Society may, on application through the Secretary, be elected members thereof.
IV.—Executive.

That the business of the Society shall be conducted by an Executive Committee of nine, officers included. This committee shall be elected by ballot at the annual meeting from members resident at head-quarters, and empowered to fill up vacancies. It shall meet when necessary, four to form a quorum, for the examination of tracts, and the transactio of general business.

V.—Annual Meeting.

That the annual meeting of the Society shall be held at Hankow during the first week in January, to adopt the Report for the year past, and to elect the officers and committee for the year entered on. General Meetings may be held at other times when important business requires it.

VI.—Branch Societies.

That the Committee shall be authorized to aid members of the Society in distant parts, in the formation of Branch Societies.

VII.—Society's Publications.

That all Books or Tracts published by the Society must first be submitted to the committee for examination, and no Tract or Book shall be adopted which is not approved of by a majority of the Committee.

VIII.—Other Publications.

That applications made by members of the Society for assistance towards the publication of books accepted by, and specially required in their own missions shall be granted, if supported by a majority of the Committee.

IX.—Prices.

That the prices at which tracts should be sold are to be fixed by the Committee.

X.—Subscriptions.

That the Treasurer shall be authorized to solicit subscriptions on behalf of the funds of the Society.

XI.—Report and Catalogue.

That an annual Report and Catalogue shall be printed, and circulated throughout China.
REPORT

According to custom, the Central China Religious Tract Society wishes to place before its friends a brief record of the work accomplished during the past twelve months.

The year 1888 is regarded by the Chinese as having been a year of great calamities. In several provinces either drought or flood brought ruin and disaster to many homes; many places were visited by pestilence, and from almost every part of the Empire there came general complaints of the badness of the times. Under conditions so unfavourable to the particular work of this Society it would not have been surprising had there been a considerable falling off from the usual circulation, but it is gratifying to be able to state that, notwithstanding all adverse influences, the year may be regarded as a thoroughly prosperous one. For many years past the Committee have been able annually to announce an increasing demand for their publications, and it is a matter for rejoicing that the past year of 1888 is no exception to the hitherto unbroken history of progress.

The aim and object of a Tract Society is to produce and send forth as many Christian publications as the means at its command will allow, and where the principle of part-payment is insisted on in all cases, as it is in this society, the circulation may be regarded as a very fair test of its usefulness. Judged by this test our Society has far exceeded what might reasonably have been expected of it, and indeed long ago it more than realized the hopes of its earliest promoters. With a comparatively small expenditure of money, and the ungrudging labour of friends, who have willingly devoted what leisure they could spare from their own special work, the Society has, during 1888, sent forth to almost all of the Eighteen provinces, and to many distant colonies of Chinese, nearly four hundred and fifty thousand tracts.

Even though no results had appeared from the sending forth of these books and sheets, it could not with justice be asserted that the Society had in any sense failed, for, as has been shewn, it would already have realized the object of its existence. It is, however, a fact that from all
quarters comes the assurance that efforts put forth in past years have not been wasted, and there is abundant evidence to show that tracts distributed in former days have been read, and are, in some cases, still bringing forth good results. Until within recent years it was a rare, if not an unheard-of thing to meet in one's travels with men who had gained any knowledge whatever of Christianity, while now it is comparatively rare to journey far without meeting with some who have gained a few ideas, however crude they may be, of the teachings of the Gospel. The truths which are taught in our tracts are certainly spreading, and by degrees the popular mind is becoming better instructed. It would not be just to claim for Tract work the sole glory of having effected this change, but it must be admitted that, by the persistent and wide distribution of Christian literature, much prejudice has been broken down, much superstition destroyed, and much other preparatory work done. One of the oldest missionaries in China was lately calling attention to this fact, and he stated that it has only been during the past few years that he has observed this hopeful sign of the times.

It is probable that many books have to be scattered before any appreciable result can be obtained, and when the results begin to appear one is, perhaps, more ready to ascribe the success to some new departure in method, or to some favourable external circumstance, rather than to the work of the past, which while it apparently failed to accomplish any direct good has, in reality, been secretly and quietly effecting a mighty change.

The longer one lives in China the more intensely does he realise the immense importance of widely circulating large quantities of carefully prepared Christian books, and it is interesting to note that those who have been hitherto most active in carrying on this kind of work are the most earnest believers in its value.

**Membership.**

During the past year the Society received several accessions to its roll of members. The secretary will be glad to receive the names of any who desire, by their sympathy and co-operation, to help on this good work.

**Changes in Officers.**

During the year the Society has lost the valued assistance of the
Rev. J. W. Wilson, and Mr. J. Murray, both of whom have removed to Chungking. It is probable, however, that these brethren will continue to assist the Society, though in a somewhat different way. On the other hand the Committee are rejoiced to welcome again their friend Mr. J. Archibald, who has always shewn himself ready to help on the work of the Society to the best of his power.

New Publications.

It was announced in our last Report that two small books by the Rev. Griffith John, which have been very popular in the simple Wán-li style generally used by the Society in its ordinary publications, were shortly to be issued in Mandarin. Early in the year this promise was fulfilled and the success of the effort has been so encouraging that it has been decided to issue more Mandarin tracts at the earliest opportunity. During the past year more than 60,000 of the small books referred to, viz “Important Truths” and “Great Themes of the Gospel” were required in Mandarin, in addition to the usual issue of 20,000 in Wán-li form. A new book by Mrs. Arnold Foster entitled “The Old Testament Narrative in Verse,” being a companion to her “Gospel Narrative in Verse,” has been added to the catalogue. It was prepared with a view to school work, and will be found to be specially useful for that purpose.

The Calendar has now taken its place as a permanent institution of the Society and is in increasing demand. That for 1889 is a distinct advance on the issues of previous years; the pictures being, as usual, the work of our friend, the Rev. W.A. Cornaby, while the letterpress was supplied from various sources. Year by year the editors see their way to improve this important publication and it is hoped that the next issue will again be an advance on those that have gone before.

Circulation.

The total circulation has amounted to 447,196, viz.—

Book Tracts.............................................183,834
Sheet ditto............................................129,847
Calendars.............................................120,015
Distributed at the Examination in Wuchang..................10,000
Pictures, &c..................................................4,000

It will be noticed that the National Bible Society of Scotland has again not required to make use of our "Introduction to the Scriptures," otherwise our circulation would have been very much larger than it is.

Reference was made in our last Report to the fact that some of our books are being printed and published by private individuals at a distance, in order to save the expense, delay, and risk of carriage. The Committee sympathise with those brethren who have thus endeavoured to overcome as far as possible one of the greatest hindrances to the successful development, in their various districts, of this branch of missionary labour, but it has long been felt that an effort should be made to relieve them of part of their burden, and enable them more adequately to meet the demand which is made upon them. In the constitution of this Society provision was made for the establishment of branch Societies (vide Reg 6.) which would carry on its work in distant provinces, would have power to issue any or all of its publications at catalogue prices, would be affiliated to it, and aided from its funds as far as practicable. It is now proposed by the Committee, should the necessary funds be forthcoming, to make an offer of help on the foregoing conditions to the brethren of two or three large centres at a distance from Hankow, whence the publications at present included in the Catalogue of this Society might be easily and inexpensively distributed to purchasers in those neighbourhoods, thus both saving money and avoiding delay. It is only in some such way as this that the labour of providing tracts suited to the varying needs of the readers can ever be efficiently and adequately carried on and the work consolidated.

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE.

As will be seen from the Cash statement appended to this Report the income of the Society during the year has amounted to Taels 2550. 64. The Religious Tract Society, of London, very kindly made an increased grant of £300 = Taels 1370. 15, for which the heartiest thanks of the Committee are returned. It is mainly to the constant and generous help afforded by the parent Society that the work of this Society owes its continued development and success. The part payment for tracts brought
A welcome subscription of £10, per Mr. W. J. Slowan, from a Glasgow gentleman gave great pleasure. More of such help would enable the Committee to meet pressing claims, which are now put aside for lack of funds. The thanks of the Society are cordially offered to the kind friend abovementioned for his gift.

Distribution of Books at Wuchang.

The Rev. W. T. Barber, M.A. writes,—It has been estimated that in the Eighteen provinces there are some two million men constantly presenting themselves at the various government examinations. These students assemble in the prefectural cities and gain their first degree, which for the sake of brevity may be described as their B. A. The successful candidates return to their villages and towns and are henceforth the acknowledged leaders in all matters of local government and influence. When travelling in the country one is constantly struck by the way their learning is considered to cast lustre on the whole clan. "Yonder is a most important village, there are two B.A's in it." "Let us go and preach, they have a B.A. among them." Such remarks from the lips of a respectable countryman tell better than anything else how powerful these men are for good or for evil. Last year there gathered at Wuchang upwards of ten thousand D. A's from the whole province of Hankow for examination for the coveted honours of the Provincial, or M. A. degree. It was felt that a great opportunity was thus given of reaching large numbers of the leaders of thought of the nation, many of them influencing regions where the Christian missionary has rarely, if ever, penetrated. It was resolved to seize this opportunity, and, following the precedent of former years, distribute to each candidate a copy of some suitable Christian book, together with a Gospel. The book chosen was a selection of chapters from the great work of the Rev. Ernst Faber on "Chinese and Christian civilization." The selection of chapters was kindly undertaken by the author, and a preface was supplied by the Rev. David Hill. The National Bible Society of Scotland kindly made a grant of ten thousand Gospels.

The examination continued over nine days; the ten thousand Bachelors of Arts, who competed for the sixty Master's degrees were shut in their
cells in the vast Examination Hall for three successive sittings of two nights and a day each. The whole city was astir to see the state procession of the Imperial Commissioners accompanied by all the provincial authorities to open the Hall. Then for a whole day the myriad of candidates kept streaming in at the great doors to find their places; at midnight the subjects of the essays were given out and the great ordeal commenced. This year, as usual, several eager aspirants died in the Hall. Their bodies were carried out through the walls, by specially made breaches, for death may never spoil by his ill-omened presence the good fortune of the regular entrances. At the close of each sitting a multitude of relatives and friends gathered at the doors to escort the jaded essayists to their homes for a day's rest, but it was deemed that the most suitable time for the presentation of the books would be at the close of the final sitting, when in the absence of further trials they would be more likely to receive respectful attention. Accordingly on the afternoon of the 20th Sept., the great autumn holiday, a dozen volunteer native helpers met with five foreign pastors at the London Mission chapel, near the Examination Hall. After prayer for God's blessing had been offered, and all due arrangements made they waited for the firing of guns which was to mark the exit of the first batch of students. At each of the three gates were stationed men well supplied with small packets containing a gospel and a copy of the book already mentioned. Towards six o'clock in the evening the doors were thrown open and out came the great rush of men who had finished their essays early. In the course of an hour some three thousand packets were distributed. Amidst the clamours of the excited mob of servants and loafers no doubt a certain proportion of the pretty-coloured books found their way into hands more accustomed to handle tools or chairpoles than pens, but in the great majority of cases the weary dazed scholars themselves received with thanks what was respectfully presented by the distributors. After the first rush the stream flowed on gently until towards midnight, when the great doors were shut till dawn. At dawn, these friends were again in their places for the new rush which took place between five and six in the morning, and continued distribution until the books were exhausted about ten o'clock. It is encouraging to learn that the difficult task was carried out both
pleasantly and effectively. The soldiers on guard gave every facility, affording shelter for the books and even assisting in the distribution; the scholars themselves almost universally received the present courteously, only some dozen out of the whole number scornfully refusing the "foreign trash." The volunteer helpers took the utmost interest in their task, and cheerfully bore the discomforts of crowding, snatching and watching. And now the books must be left under God's good hand to do their own work. The "bread" has been "cast upon the waters" and will be found again, whether the days be many or few.

Some Facts of Special Interest.

For the encouragement of those friends who have in any way cooperated in the Society's work a few facts of special interest are added. The labours of this and kindred societies are, like those of the ploughman and the sower, labours of faith,

We plough the fertile meadows,
We sow the furrowed land;
But all the growth and increase
Are in God's mighty hand.

To us it is not given to see very much in the way of actual results from the work done. Often there is nought to show but the bare record of publications distributed and expenses incurred and met, yet now and again the heart is rejoiced to learn that God has used some one or more of the books scattered, in the conversion of souls to Himself. Not many years ago Christian books and tracts were, for the most part, contemp­tuously cast aside, after but a hurried and cursory perusal. We are glad to learn from many of our correspondents that it is now not an uncommon thing to find those who have purchased and read all our books and eagerly enquire for new ones, and, as a friend writes, "this shews first that our books are in many instances carefully read and a desire for further instruction created, and, second, a pressing need for new and attractive books." It is also reported that our Calendar is becoming one of the most familiar adornments of shop and farmhouse and wayside inn, and is occasionally to be seen pasted up even within the precincts of the yamen.

Mr George Miles, of the Wesleyan Mission, who is a most active tract
distributor communicates several interesting incidents. He writes,—I was preaching one morning in a large town, and was invited into a shop by a man who proved to be a Mohammedan. After a long conversation he said, "I have read your Catechism of Christian Doctrine, and sheet tract, Truth concerning God and shall be glad if you will, on your next visit, bring me fifty copies of the former and two hundred of the latter." I learn that he is a prominent man among the Mohammedans of that place, and his purpose in getting these books was that he might distribute them among his friends. He showed me a well-thumbed copy of the "Catechism," and the sheet tract was pasted up in a prominent position in his shop. On a previous trip I met with a man who had obtained and read the Gospels, and other portions of the New Testament, but did not understand them. He afterwards purchased a copy of the "Catechism," by the help of which book he was able to understand the others.

Of another occasion Mr Miles writes; The first place of any importance at which we called was the town of Hwang-Sz-Kang, on the Yangtse about sixty miles above Wusueh. When visiting this town a year ago we had a very interesting conversation with a Mr Chia, a druggist, who lives some five miles away from the town. He had read Christian books, and through reading had become a worshipper of the true God. After presenting him with books suitable for his further instruction we bade him "Goodbye" and prayed that the blessing of God might be his portion. On the present visit we made an effort to see him at his own home, so in company with the teacher, Mr Lo, who is a Christian and an earnest worker, and Lo Yin San, the colporteur, we started for his village. Thinking it possible that he might object to a visit from a foreigner without notice I stayed behind and sent the native brethren on ahead. They entered his village with gospels and tracts and began preaching to a few who gathered round them. It was not long before Mr Chia himself came and invited them to his house. He expressed his thankfulness at their coming and invited them to dine with him but on hearing that I was two or three li away he hastened to the place and hurriedly prepared a meal for us at the inn in which I was staying. Whilst waiting here he expressed his gratitude for the books given him last year saying that a
Catechism, by the Rev. G. John, of Hankow, had been very helpful to him. He touched on the subject of Sabbath observance, and said that under his present circumstances it presented considerable difficulty to him, but he felt, what so many Chinamen do not feel, that he was a sinner in the sight of God and that he stood in need of a Saviour. The new birth, too, he touched upon, told how its necessity had been made clear to him, and expressed his regret that he had not heard the Gospel many years before.

The day on which we met him was one of the great feast days, and a day on which the worship of ancestors is much practised, but our friend, much against the wishes of his relatives, had refused to join in the worship of the dead and said "I felt that I could not worship them without sinning against God." We invited him to Hankow for a few days for further instruction, and as a preparatory step to his making public confession of his faith by baptism. We then adjourned to a neighbouring hill where we commended our friend to the keeping of God.

On our way to this village we were invited into the house of Shiao Wen San, who seemed anxious to enter into conversation about the Gospel and shewed himself very friendly. After conversing for an hour, or more, we took leave of him but not before he had purchased some books which we carefully explained. In one of these he found a form of prayer, and in this he took especial interest, marking with his pen the parts which, as one of our native brethren explained to him, should be specially remembered. We afterwards learnt that he was a friend of Mr. Chia, who had spoken to him of the Gospel and exhorted him to believe and embrace it.

Another case was that of a man, who twenty years ago read some of our books which resulted in his giving up the worship of idols, and although he did not openly become a worshipper of God he was convinced of the truth of the Gospel. Three months ago this man died leaving three sons. When on his deathbed he called his sons to him and very earnestly exhorted them to give up and keep from the worship of idols and to enter the Christian church, for, said he, they have the true doctrine. In accordance with the wishes of their deceased father they came to us, related the above and sought for further instruction which we gladly gave.

The following cheering incident is recorded by another friend. One
day, not long since, a schoolmaster from Wuchang Shien waited for an hour and a half for an interview, and expressed an earnest desire to obtain salvation. He said that three years ago he had received Christian tracts, had read them, and being convinced of their truth had embraced the faith, and though his mother and his brother opposed him bitterly he prayed in secret day by day. This ray of light from a city from which our native brethren have been twice driven out should encourage us to believe that in due season we shall reap if we faint not.

The Rev. T.E. North communicates the following.—On Sunday, May 20th, Mr and Mrs Hu, their two sons, daughter-in-law and two grand-children, together with their cousin, Mr Tsen, and a scholar named Lu received baptism. This incident is not only worthy of note because it has more than doubled the members of our little Han Chwen church, but it greatly adds to our gratification in recording it that the adherence of this family is altogether due to the faithful testimony and teaching of our native brethren. The facts are briefly; Mr Tsen, a poor, half-educated man was converted to Christianity last year, and spent considerable time night after night in spelling over the pages of the Gospels and other Christian writings. Mrs Hu, who lived next door, had her curiosity aroused, and made enquiry as to the nature of the books which had so suddenly developed literary taste in a quarter where it might have been least expected. Mr Tsen replied that the writings contained the doctrine of one Jesus, who he had learnt to know was the Saviour of the world. Now, as it happened, Mrs Hu had herself not been altogether neglectful as to the future of her soul; she had for a long time been connected with the sect of vegetarians whom Buddhism has taught to seek by continued abstinence from animal food to atone for the sins of a lifetime. Her interest was naturally aroused by the disinterested testimony of Mr Tsen, and at his recommendation she paid several visits to our chapel but, wishing to make perfectly sure of the reasonableness of the truth taught, she requested her son, who is fairly educated, to investigate the matter more fully than she felt herself capable of doing. Honest, straightforward fellow, as he appears always to have been, he had little difficulty in satisfying first himself and then his mother of the truth of the doctrine
of the Cross. The matter was then talked over with the father who, however, does not possess the same force of character as the wife and son. Just about this time Mr. Tseng, their cousin, turned up from a lengthened absence from home and his advice was sought. He replied that he had heard more or less about the Christian religion during his sojourn in various parts of the country; his own convictions had more than once tended towards a personal confession of Christ; but now that his relatives were on the verge of taking decisive action he would finally make up his mind by throwing in his lot with them. To this resolution, spite of opposition in his own home, he has remained faithful.

In conclusion, the Committee desire to record their thankfulness to God for the great blessing vouchsafed during the past year, and especially in having brought to their knowledge so many proofs that the work is not in vain. To God be all the glory!
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* Illustrated.
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Selection of Important Truths. | do. | 22 | 3 | 240 |
| 18. | 營兵信主
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The God of Thunder. | Rev. T. Bramfitt | 12 | 3 | 240 |
| 20. | 福音真愛之訓言
| 21. | 真理課選
Ten Prize Essays.
(Nos. 21-30) | | 80 | 12 | 960 |
| 22. | 上帝惟一造化之主
Unity and Sovereignty of God | 王炳堃 | 10 | 2 | 160 |
| 23. | 上帝律法十誠註釋
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Worship due to God. | 潘恂如 | 10 | 2 | 160 |
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On Rewards and Punishments. | do. | 10 | 2 | 160 |
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Mysteries of Divine Providence. | 王炳堃 | 10 | 2 | 160 |
| 27. | 今世虛空當求實福
Vanity of the World. | do. | 10 | 2 | 160 |
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Prophecy fulfilled in Christ. | 何泉玉 | 10 | 2 | 160 |
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| 31. | 耶穌聖教來歷條規
The Christian Church. | | 10 | 2 | 160 |

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