

THE SPIRITUAL IMPACT OF THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY.

A Preliminary Survey of the History of the Religious Tract Society, Founded in London, 1799, and of its Spiritual Impact.

Introduction.

Good quality literature has always been an important feature in the strength and propagation of heart-felt Christianity since the invention of printing in Europe, and there have been certain special times when literature has played an outstanding role in the life of the Church.

For example, the impact of Martin Luther in Germany was greatly increased by the spread of his various writings, and especially by his translation of the New Testament in the vernacular.

Professor Lindsay says that the "Reformation movement may almost be said to have created the German book trade."¹ The number of books which were published in Germany before 1518 was very few, and they were not of any great importance. From 1518 to 1521 there was a sudden increase which was created by Luther almost alone, mainly in the form of sermons, tracts and controversial writings. After that he had many disciples, who also wrote and published, and the total figures increased steeply.

Luther's translation of the New Testament appeared in September, 1522. The translation had been completed in only eleven weeks. Other translations had previously been made by other people, all based upon Saint Jerome's Latin Vulgate. But in 1516, Erasmus had published a Greek New Testament, and Luther used this, translating it into the official German of the Saxon chancery, rather than into his own colloquial Saxon dialect. In this way "he helped create a standard German for all Germany." Five thousand copies were sold in two months, and two hundred thousand copies in twelve years.²

John Wesley provided another example. Wesley knew the value of a good education and of wide reading. Although most of his preachers were relatively uneducated, he enforced upon them the need to preach about education, and to spend good time reading as widely as they could. They were told to spend "at least five hours in twenty-four in reading the most useful books." He said they would never be deep preachers without extensive reading, nor would they be thorough Christians without it.³

Wesley scoured 1,500 years of Christian literature and published 50 volumes of *The Christian Library* for the use of his preachers in this regard. He also began editing and publishing the *Arminian Magazine* for the same purpose. Wesley considered that his ministry of writing was as important as his preaching ministry. So that these books would be read, every Methodist preacher was also meant to be a book salesman and distributor. One of his maxims was "beg money of the rich to buy books for the poor." Bready quoted from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* concerning Wesley that "No man in the

¹ T. M. Lindsay. *History of the Reformation*. Edinburgh. T & T Clark. 2nd ed. 1907. Volume One. page 300.

² H. J. Grimm. *The Reformation Era. 1500 – 1650*. New York. Macmillan. 1954. page 147.

³ J. W. Bready. *This Freedom - Whence?* New York. American Tract Society. 1942. page 135. See also Bready, *England Before and After Wesley*. The Evangelical Revival and Social Reform. London. Hodder and Stoughton. No Date. Religious Book Club edition. page 220.

eighteenth century did so much to create a taste for good reading, and to supply it with books at the lowest prices.”⁴ The Methodist preachers not only helped to carry this out, but were also the main ones to benefit from it.

Francis Asbury continued this practice for the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America, and with the same beneficial effect.

Professor Rudolph provides the following quotation from Asbury’s *Discipline* of 1798. “A taste for reading profitable books is an inestimable gift. It adds to the comfort of life far beyond what many conceive, and qualifies us, if properly directed, for very extensive usefulness in the church of God. It takes off all the miserable listlessness of a sluggish life; and gives to the mind a strength and activity it could not otherwise acquire. But to obtain and preserve this taste for, this delight in, profitable reading, we must daily resist the natural tendency of man to indolence and idleness.”⁵

The Religious Tract Society provides us with another major example of the use of Christian literature for the furtherance of the Gospel. In some ways this example is not so spectacular as the examples of Luther, Wesley and Asbury already quoted. But, in other ways the work of this Tract Society has been equally as far-reaching and valuable for the Kingdom of God as any other example we might quote.

The Religious Tract Society was one of the many societies for achieving good goals which arose out of the Second Great Awakening. This awakening began in answer to united prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, first appearing in England in 1792, and continuing on for twenty or thirty years. It appeared in the United States around 1797 or 1798, extending through New England, reaching a crescendo in Kentucky in 1800, continuing more or less for several decades, and reaching another climactic period around 1830. Indeed, it appeared also in every part of the world where Protestant missionary work was being carried on at that time.⁶

This spiritual movement also created much interest in the development of education generally, and in higher education. While reading can help people think, the good or bad qualities of this thinking will usually depend upon the quality of material which is available to read on a subject, and which forms the mind of a person.

The Spiritual Impact of the Religious Tract Society.

Traditionally, a “tract” is a treatise, small or large, on a particular subject.

In this paper, the word “spiritual” carries its evangelical meaning, in that it refers to the individual’s personal relationship with God our Heavenly Father, and with Jesus Christ, and the living of the Christian life within this personal relationship. It does NOT carry the meaning often given to it, of referring to a wide range of the higher, more civilized aspects of human personality and culture, regardless of its relationship with the Christian God.

There are, perhaps, two ways for an historian to try to assess the spiritual and evangelical impact of the Religious Tract Society.

The simpler way is to look at the history of the Society, the contents of its publications, circulation figures, and the news that the Society received about the spiritual

⁴ Bready. *This Freedom – Whence?* page 136.

⁵ L. C. Rudolph. *Francis Asbury*. Nashville. Abingdon Press. 1966.

⁶ J. Edwin Orr. *The Eager Feet*. Evangelical Awakenings. 1790 – 1830. Chicago..Moody Press. 1975. chapter 2. This book provides a good survey of the whole spiritual movement.

effects upon individual lives of people who read its publications. This last point can be described as making an examination of the Society's "spiritual returns," although one should also look at all other forms of impact upon people that the Society achieved through its publications, which might not be spiritual in any deep sense. It is this method which will be pursued in this paper.

The more difficult way would be for the historian to look into a wide range of individual lives in detail, to examine what spiritual results flowed from the Society's work, amongst the spiritual impacts that affected these people through other means. This would probably achieve a better assessment, but would be much more difficult, and may be impossible. The generations most vitally affected by the Society's publications are now gone, and so they cannot be questioned directly. Probably an insufficient number of these people may have left written records about their spiritual experiences. The right kind of documentary evidences may not exist, or it may not be possible to find them if they do exist.

Sources of Information.

It was thought for some years that the Archives of the Religious Tract Society had been destroyed during the London Blitz, and that this would weaken the possibilities of historical research about the Society. To a good extent this was true, but not entirely so. Some of the large leather-bound minute books were not totally destroyed, though singed and degraded with age, and now are held in the Lutterworth Press head offices. Other related holdings exist in the British Library, and in several university libraries, although these would probably not have been "primary" documents in the same way as the materials in the R.T.S. Archives. A good many of the R.T.S. books are still in circulation, and thus provide at least some kind of a wider basis for research.

Apart from these minute books and receipt books, and large volumes of correspondence, many of which no longer exist, the most important source of information about the early work of the Religious Tract Society is the *Jubilee Memorial*, written to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Society in 1849, by the Secretary of the Society at that time, Mr. William Jones.⁷ This book of 700 pages is a thorough, careful, and exhaustive survey of the Society, in Great Britain and overseas, and of the main people who were involved in it during its first fifty years. It is a mine of information. Today, 158 years later, this book is scarce and expensive. My copy (obviously second-hand) cost nearly one hundred pounds sterling (including postage) although its cover was no longer attached. As a result, I had to rebind the book before I could use it. Despite the unattached cover, with very poor hinges, the bound pages were in reasonable condition. The book had scarcely ever been read because almost all of the top edges of the pages had never been cut. This copy had originally belonged to Mansfield College, Oxford, and then to the Spring Hill College Library.

Annual Reports of the Society are also a very important source, although Jones's book is so good that they hardly need to be consulted before 1850. After 1850, the *Annual Reports* were usually about 200 pages long, but a much briefer version of the

⁷ William Jones. *The Jubilee Memorial of the Religious Tract Society: containing a Record of its Origin, Proceedings and Results. A.D. 1799 to A.D. 1849.* London. Religious Tract Society. 1850.

Annual Report could appear in one or other of the Society's other publications.⁸ A few even appeared in *The Christian*.⁹

Another much more modest, but very valuable volume, was prepared for the Centenary of the Society by the Rev. Dr. Samuel C. Green, who was secretary of the Society at that time.¹⁰ Information is also found in examining the Society's many publications. Yet another source of information appeared in recent decades because several anthologies and reminiscences have been published about the *Boy's Own Paper*, and the *Girl's Own Paper*, reproducing excerpts from the older books.¹¹

Historiography.

In a sense, the books by Dr. Patrick Dunae, Jack Cox and by Wendy Forrester, referred to above, should also be classed in this section, as early historical developments upon the primary sources, because they contain some historical reflections upon, and valuable information about, the particular R.T.S. publications in which they are mainly concerned, as well as directly reproducing materials from these publications.

In 1949, Gordon Hewitt wrote a modest book on the history of the United Society for Christian Literature (USCL). The book gives a bird's eye view of the Religious Tract Society, divided into five periods. It also contains some information about the other two societies which combined with the R.T.S. in 1935. It has a number of useful insights, about the overseas missionary work.¹²

Several other excellent books have appeared recently which present us with serious historical research, especially related to those publications of the Society which are classified as "Children's Literature." Another such book concerns popular evangelical writing about science in the Nineteenth Century.¹³

So far as I am aware, no other serious and extended historical research of any kind has been done on the more spiritual and religious publications and writings of the R.T.S. The one more modest exception, perhaps, is found in the early chapters of the book edited by Butts and Garrett. The result is that historical research about R.T.S. publications, about their impact upon people, and upon the world, is very lop-sided. It only exists about juvenile literature and writings on science. Because almost no modern research exists upon the more directly spiritual books, research upon "spiritual returns" will be dependent almost entirely upon primary Religious Tract Society sources, and perhaps upon any research upon the overseas sources which benefited from R.T.S. help.

⁸ For example, *The Sunday at Home*, July 31, 1886. page 494.

⁹ For example; *The Christian*. May 11, 1905. page 19.

¹⁰ Samuel C. Green. *The Story of the Religious Tract Society*. London. R.T.S. 1899.

¹¹ Jack Cox. "Take a Cold Tub, Sir.!" *The Story of the Boy's Own Paper*. Guildford, Lutterworth Press. 1982. Philip Warner, *The Best of British Pluck*. The Boy's Own Paper revisited by Philip Warner. London. Macdonald and Jane's. 1976. Patrick Dunae, 'Boy's Own Paper: Origin and Editorial Policies.' *The Private Library*. Second series 9:4. Winter 1976. The Private Libraries Association. 1977. Wendy Forrester, *Great-Grandmama's Weekly. A Celebration of the Girl's Own Paper. 1880 – 1900*. Guildford. Lutterworth Press. 1980.

¹² Gordon Hewitt. *Let the People Read. A Short History of the United Societies for Christian Literature*. London. United Societies for Christian Literature and Lutterworth Press. 1949.

¹³ D. Butts and P. Garrett, (eds.) *From the Dairyman's Daughter to Worrals of the WAAF*. The Religious Tract Society, Lutterworth Press and Children's Literature. Cambridge. Lutterworth Press. 2006. Aileen Fyfe. *Science and Salvation*. Evangelical Popular Science Publishing in Victorian Britain. Chicago. University of Chicago Press. 2004.

THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS

The Society Begins.

The founders of the Religious Tract Society, at their first meeting in 1799, wanted to supply literature which tended to the formation of opinions in harmony with the revelation of God to man found in the Bible.¹⁴ The proposed publications should be clear, able to hold attention, and should make clear the way of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Perhaps, naturally, the Society wanted to achieve these ends for normal, average people. Although some of their publications would have been very useful for people with higher education, or seeking higher education, their efforts were not directed mainly to that end.

This was not the first Society of this kind to be formed. The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.) had been formed a hundred years before. It had been strictly Anglican. It had promoted the circulation of Christian books and tracts, and had supported parochial libraries in England and America, and missionary efforts in India and in British colonies.

In 1750 a more united Society for Diffusing Religious Knowledge among the Poor had been organized, and John Wesley's literary efforts had also appeared.

In 1787, Wilberforce had formed a non-denominational Society for the Reformation of Manners, similar to one which had existed in 1692.

William Jones provides brief mention of several other tract societies which existed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Several Christian periodicals had also begun to appear before 1799. After 1789, with the appearance of the French Revolution, Hannah More wrote a series of popular tracts which she called *Tracts for the Times*. Her first tract was called *William Chip*. With the success of this particular tract, and with the help of her sisters, she produced a series of *Cheap Repository Tracts*, which achieved many good results. Over a period of three years, two million copies of these tracts were circulated, with the aid of tract distribution societies which were specially formed to help circulate them.¹⁵

The key founder of the Religious Tract Society was really the Rev. George Burder of Coventry, who was a Congregational minister. With a few friends, he had already published several tracts, like those of Mrs. More, which were practical and spiritual, rather than doctrinal. In 1799 he visited London in order to attend the annual meeting of the London Missionary Society. In London he met with the Rev. Rowland Hill, and several other friends, where his plan for a new Society was unfolded.

Within a few days, a Committee was organized, and work began. Its principles were that everything published should flow from the fountain of the New Testament; should contain at least some account of the way of salvation through faith in Christ; it should be plain, striking, entertaining, full of ideas, and should be adapted to various

¹⁴ G. Campbell Morgan. 'Bible Truth in Many Forms'. in *The Sunday at Home*. London. Religious Tract Society. 1911-12 page 649.

¹⁵ Jones. *Jubilee Memorial*. page 9.

situations and conditions.¹⁶ The foundational members were people involved already with the London Missionary Society, though this widened very quickly.

Members of the Society were required to subscribe half a guinea or more annually, and this is how the first funds were acquired. A subscription of ten guineas brought life membership with it. In the first years, loans had to be requested from members in order to keep going, and these were duly repaid. The first subscribers included John Newton (author of *Amazing Grace*), William Wilberforce, Zachary Macaulay, Vice-Admiral Gambier and Sir Richard Hill. They were soon followed by others, such as Charles Simeon, Andrew Fuller, John Ryland and Dr. Haweis. Very soon, all of the Protestant denominations were represented amongst the subscribers. Auxiliaries and special church-based efforts improved the financial basis of the work.¹⁷

Naturally, money was re-cycled, as published materials were sold, but there were also outgoings in the form of subsidized contributions to mission work both at home and overseas, a good deal of which was donated by the Society.

In the first year, thirty-four tracts were published, of which twenty-three were original, and the others were extracted from another source. These generally were instructional publications on important issues (such as purity, or behaviour at worship), usually evangelical in nature, and perhaps addressed to certain kinds of people, such as prisoners, servants, someone seriously ill, or a youth at school. Several were about preparing for eternity.

From the very first year, also, an interest appeared in missionary work. In the first instance, leaflets were written by Zachary Macaulay and William Alers for French prisoners of war who were then in England, leading to numbers of conversions amongst them. It was found that many of the prisoners could not read, so a large *Spelling Book of the French Language* was quickly published, with Scriptural lessons included.¹⁸ Tracts were also written for Dutch and German soldiers who fought on the British side.

Formation of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

The most outstanding event of these early years, however, occurred almost as a by-product of the main business, which was publishing tracts. This outstanding event was the founding of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804.

Founding new societies was not new to members of the R. T. S., because in 1801, members had started the Society for promoting the Religious Instruction of Youth, with Robert Cowie as Treasurer, and the Rev. Rowland Hill as Secretary.¹⁹

There are a number of myths associated with the story of the founding of this Bible Society. Thomas Charles was a Calvinistic Methodist minister from Bala in Wales. He was a “country” member of the R. T. S. Committee, and so was not expected to be present at Committee meetings in London very often. When he was present, his name did not appear in the list of “Rev. Mr.’s” of those present. He was listed simply as a “Mr.”, because his ordination was not in the established church. The famous visit to Thomas Charles’s parsonage in Bala by Mary Jones, occurred in 1800. She returned

¹⁶ S. G. Green. *The Story of the Religious Tract Society*. London. R.T.S. 1899. page 7.

¹⁷ Jones. *Jubilee Memorial*. Page 152 – 153.

¹⁸ Green. page 14.

¹⁹ D. E. Jenkins. *Life of the Rev. Thomas Charles of Bala*. Denbigh. Llewelyn Jenkins. 1908. Second volume. pages 503 – 504.

home the thirty miles to Merionethshire with three Bibles which had been produced by the S.P.C.K. Mary Jones was not the only person pleading for Welsh Bibles like this. It was not until late in 1802 that Mr. Charles was well enough to attend a London meeting of the R.T.S. With the aid of his friend Mr. Tarn, the subject of Mr. Charles's concern for Welsh Bibles was introduced, and at the following meeting a plan was outlined to set up a new Society to publish Bibles wherever there was need. That part of the minutes of the R.T.S. meeting which refer to the outline of this plan for a new Bible Society was in brackets, to indicate that the plan was actually outside the ambit of normal R.T.S. business. It did not involve publishing tracts. However, there was good support for starting such a new Society, both amongst R.T.S. supporters, and on a wider basis.

This project was discussed at several other meetings of the R.T.S. early in 1803, and one of the R.T.S. members wrote a tract on *The Excellency of the Holy Scriptures*. 500 copies were printed, and circulated. At an April meeting, Wilberforce was present, and three of the R.T.S. leaders breakfasted with him specifically to discuss this subject. Wilberforce apparently had very little idea about the scarcity of Bibles in other parts of the land. For some months nothing happened, until December, 1803, when Charles was in London again, staying with his friend Tarn. Again the Bible Society matter was raised at the two R.T.S. meetings in December, and three special meetings were arranged on this subject for January 10, 17 and 26, 1804, with letters from Wilberforce expressing his support. Further meetings occurred in February and early March. Finally, a meeting occurred in the London Tavern, Bishopsgate Street, on Wednesday, March 7, 1804, at which the British and Foreign Bible Society was actually formed.

The delay through 1803 was not entirely due to ignorance or lack of enthusiasm by Wilberforce, but was also affected by events in the war with France.²⁰

Legh Richmond and *The Dairyman's Daughter*.

One early famous title which was published by the R.T.S in 1814 was Legh Richmond's *The Dairyman's Daughter*. This book had already been published several years earlier, but it was not widely known. The R.T.S. leaders recognized it as the kind of book they really wanted to promote. So, they published it along with several other stories by Richmond in a volume entitled *Annals of the Poor*. *The Dairyman's Daughter* was a true story about a lady named Elizabeth Wallbridge who died of consumption at the age of 31 years. Richmond was a few years younger than Elizabeth. He arrived in the Isle of Wight after graduating from Trinity College, Cambridge, to become the resident curate. Soon after, Richmond was very impressed through reading William Wilberforce's Book, *Practical Christianity*, in which Wilberforce attacked English formal Christianity. Alexandra Leach describes this book in the following way:

In this work Wilberforce accuses the great majority of English Christians of thinking that since they live in a Christian country and attend church services, this is sufficient to call themselves Christians and to expect to go to heaven. These so-called Christians consign a very small compartment of their lives to religion, leaving the vast remainder to do with as they please. By seeking amusements to fill up the void in their listless and languid lives, gratifying their appetites, chasing after wealth and power, and by wrapping themselves up in

²⁰ The formation of the Bible Society is discussed fully in chapter 43 of Jenkins, *Life of the Rev. Thomas Charles of Bala*, (volume 2. page 492.) including variations upon the whole course of events.

business and daily pursuits, they supplant God in their lives. Wilberforce calls this attitude a “decent selfishness” since he is not describing notorious evildoers, but ordinary people. To his mind there are no small sins, and no small sinners. All men are sinners by their very natures, in need of hearty repentance and the firm resolution to live new lives.²¹

Elizabeth had experienced an evangelical conversion a few years before she met Richmond. His first contact with her was when he was asked to bury a younger sister who had also just died of consumption. Richmond was impressed by the quality of Elizabeth’s Christian character, and by her steadfast faith in God, although he could already see the signs of the sickness in Elizabeth’s pale face. So, *The Dairyman’s Daughter* describes the life, conversion and faith of Elizabeth, especially in the light of her approaching death, and concludes with an account of her funeral service, which Richmond conducted in 1801 on the Isle of Wight. Similarly, she had not been a notorious sinner, but had been convicted of what might be called much smaller sins, and of the spiritual sins of failing to love God and our neighbours. Her conversion had changed her noticeably, creating devotion to others in need, and love for God. She became Christ-like and humble.

The story and the book had certain qualities, which could be set out in an attempt to explain why the book produced such a powerful impact upon so many people, although slightly expurgated editions were also printed in America. Overall, reproduced in various formats, and by various publishers, over four million copies were sold in the first dozen years after 1814.²² The R.T.S. alone produced half a million copies by 1849, and almost as many copies of two other tracts by Richmond.²³

Blackwood’s Magazine in 1822 professed not to like the story for various reasons, and called its authenticity into question.

Some years later, it was revealed that her conversion had been linked to the work of a Methodist minister named James Crabb. Elizabeth’s surviving brother became a Methodist preacher, and allowed Elizabeth’s original letters to be studied by Richmond’s biographer, thus providing strong support for Richmond’s account.²⁴

The Range of Publications Increases, and the Work Develops.

From the earliest years, the range of publications slowly developed. Not only were tracts published, but other kinds of books began to be published, as well.

Several biographies began to appear, as well as copies of *Pilgrim’s Progress*. One innovation in the seventh year was to publish “Hawkers” Tracts, intentionally “both entertaining and instructive,” which would be sold to hawkers at less than cost, so that the hawkers could make a profit margin in selling them.

Auxiliary Societies began to be formed in other British towns and cities as early as 1803. The first was in Darlington, soon followed by Liverpool and Manchester. The report for 1815 stated that these auxiliary Societies had grown rapidly, and by that time numbered one hundred and thirty-four. In 1815 it was also announced that independent

²¹ Alexandra Leach. “*The Dairyman’s Daughter: From Yesterday to Today*”. in Butts and Garrett. *From the Dairyman’s Daughter to Worrals of the WAAF*. Cambridge. Lutterworth Press. 2006. page 66.

²² Ibid. page 68.

²³ Jones. Appendix 5.

²⁴ Leach, in Butts and Garrett, page 68. see also Stevens. *History of Methodism*. Vol. 2, page 347.

societies with similar goals had begun in Dublin, Cork and Sligo, which sold R.T.S. publications as well as others.²⁵

During the year 1804 the Society put 314,613 tracts into circulation. The annual output expanded almost exponentially. By the twentieth year (1819), it was announced that the number of tracts which had been put into circulation that year was 4,043,321.²⁶

By 1824, the output of tracts was 10,021,760. By 1829, the number of tracts issued was about the same as 1824, but the income from sales had risen from 7,802 pounds to 17,244 pounds.²⁷

After 1820, the number of publications specifically for children showed a marked increase. Two authors contributed many of these. They were G. Stokes and W. Freeman Lloyd. Stokes especially wrote a series of small books costing a farthing, for children under the age of ten years, about characters such as Sally Meanwell, Fanny Thoughtless, Dick Wildgoose, Tom Steady, Lydia Loverule, Tommy Trip, and many others. The series eventually included fifty-one titles, and reached a total circulation of five million copies within the lifetime of the author. Another very popular children's book was *Stories from Switzerland*, by the Genevan clergyman, Dr. Cesar Malan.²⁸

From 1824, another new strand of the work was commenced in publishing a monthly sermon, chosen from the wide range of quality sermons then available in English. The first was Maclaurin's sermon on *Glorying in the Cross of Christ*. This series continued for forty-eight issues, and these sermons were eventually published together in four volumes, entitled *Select Sermons*. Starting January, 1826, another series of simpler sermons was begun, written by the Rev. George Burder. These were entitled *Cottage Sermons*, and gained a very wide circulation. Several of Joseph Milner's sermons were later added to the *Cottage Sermons* series. Burder also provided a volume of sermons called *Sea Sermons*, and another called *Sermons for the Aged* for the R.T.S. He had also previously published his own local sermons, and, after his death, the R.T.S. published all of these in an eight-volume set entitled *Village Sermons*. Subsequently, amongst other efforts, the R.T.S. published twelve of John Cennick's sermons, and 36 pastoral sermons by John Angell James.²⁹

From 1825, a new series of publications was also introduced under the editorship of Mr. Stokes, to promote Protestant theology, and to oppose Roman Catholicism, which was considered to be raising its ugly head in England again. This series led to an open meeting of the R.T.S. in the London Tavern, held at 6 a.m., at which over twelve hundred people were present. A strongly pro-Protestant stand was adopted expressing the policy of the Society, after which a local Alderman took over as chairman, and two Roman Catholics were allowed to address the meeting. Two Protestant speakers replied to them. The two reports which flowed from this meeting (one Catholic and one Protestant) helped to highlight for some time the role of the R.T.S. in standing for the theology of the Reformation.³⁰

²⁵ Green. pages 19 – 20.

²⁶ Green. page 24.

²⁷ Green. page 28.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ Jones. *Jubilee Memorial*. pages 129 – 130.

³⁰ Green. *Story of the R.T.S.* pages 29 –30.

Supporting Overseas Gospel Work.

As the early years passed, the R.T.S. fostered similar institutions in several Swiss and German cities, followed by Societies in Stockholm and Iceland. They encouraged Societies which had been formed independently in Boston and in New York, the latter becoming the American Tract Society. Steps were also taken by R.T.S. people to form new Societies in Lower and Upper Canada.

Literature was made available to English people in India, in the hope that it would be translated in the main Indian languages. China was still a closed country to missionaries. Robert Morrison and William Milne had written and published tracts in Chinese at their own expense, including one entitled *A Summary of the Divine Doctrine Respecting the Redemption and Salvation of the World*. Tracts could go where missionaries could never go. So Morrison invoked the help of the R.T.S. After a special meeting, one hundred pounds were voted to this cause, and four hundred pounds additional followed in the next few years. In the Twentieth Report of the Society it could be announced that “considerably more than thirty-six thousand copies of Chinese Tracts and pamphlets, large and small, and of above twelve different kinds, had already been circulated...”³¹

The First Periodicals.

Following the great success in their efforts after 1820 in publishing children’s literature, the Religious Tract Society published the first of its monthly periodicals. The first one appeared in 1824, and was called *The Child’s Companion, or Sunday Scholar’s Reward*. Along with this there appeared one for older readers, entitled *The Tract Magazine, or Christian Miscellany*. This was the beginning of what became a great tradition of periodical publishing by the R.T.S. Both of these periodicals were still being published eighty years later, although their titles had changed a little.

In the eyes of the Committee, these magazines were aimed at providing clean and wholesome general reading material for public consumption, in order to counteract the “Romances, Novels, Plays, Farces, and Tales of a very improper description” which were widely available. The Committee said that one hundred and fifty thousand copies of this poorer quality literature were published in metropolitan London every week, apart from whatever else appeared in the rest of the country. Some of it was better than others, but much of it did not make any positive contribution to society.

Some members of the Society believed that the R.T.S. ought not to be involved in publishing this kind of literature, and there was a good deal of criticism at first. These critics thought that the Society should only publish material which was directly evangelistic and Christian in character. But the results soon silenced most of the objections. In the first twelve months of publication, *The Tract Magazine* sold two hundred and six thousand copies. *The Child’s Companion* sold three hundred and thirty-nine thousand copies.

The Tract Magazine was superintended by Mr. Stokes, who contributed many articles, including some about various aspects of Bible study. These were later published separately.³²

³¹ Green. *Story of the R.T.S.* pages 17 – 18..

³² Green. pages 30 – 33.

The Child's Companion included episodes of continuing fictional stories, short stories, poetry, stories about animals, pets, short moral pieces, accounts of heroic deeds, bits of scientific information, etc.

The success of these early periodicals led in 1828 to the production of *The Domestic Visitor*, which was intended to promote the spiritual instruction of families, especially of domestic servants. It went through an evolution over the next decade, changing from a quarterly to a weekly; and changing its name a few times. It became a magazine providing some Bible teaching, but also including many articles on matters of general interest – “instructive to the general reader.”³³

Distribution of these materials was aided considerably by local church organizations, voluntary groups and city missionaries, who used the resources of the R.T.S. in their own work, while some saw their task as being more directly distributors of the R.T.S. publications. This was seen as a good form of home mission work.

Books, as well as Tracts.

From these early years, also, the R.T.S not only published “tracts,” which were more clearly a treatise on one particular subject. They also published productions which fitted under the much wider classification of “books.” Among the earliest were editions of Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* and *The Holy War*. Soon books appeared on aspects of church history, and on the heroes of the Reformation. Others included Milner’s *History of the Church of Christ*, Boston’s *Fourfold State*, and Judson’s *Scripture Quotations*. This last volume was apparently like a topical index of Bible verses “from which thousands of young people in a past generation derived their first systematic knowledge of the Scriptures.” In some cases, the cost of publication of a specific book would be underwritten by a wealthy supporter.³⁴

Circulation numbers steadily increased, although fluctuations occurred, also. In 1839, the number of copies of all kinds issued was 18,042,539, and for the first time proceeds of sales for the year passed 50,000 pounds.³⁵

Also after 1830, some of the books published by the Society were quite large. Milner’s *History* certainly fitted into that category, as did a commentary on the whole Bible which was published that year. They also republished Doddridge’s *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, and John Angell James’s *The Anxious Inquirer after Salvation Directed and Encouraged*.³⁶

The series on the British Reformers was finished in 1832, with each volume containing nearly 500 pages. It included twelve volumes, including single volumes on Hooper, Bradford, Knox, and Jewell, a combined volume on Ridley and Philpot, one combined volume on Cranmer, Rogers, Saunders, Taylor and Careless, and one volume on Wickliff, Thorpe, Lord Cobham, Hilton, Peacock, the Lollards of Buckinghamshire, and Bilney. Generally, these volumes included a short biography of each person, and then reproductions of some of their writings.

Three publications were introduced from the United States. These were Albert Barnes’s *Notes on the New Testament*, Jacob Abbott’s *Young Christian*, and Todd’s

³³ Green. page 34.

³⁴ Green. page 35.

³⁵ Green. page 45.

³⁶ Green. page 50.

Lectures to Children. Abbott's book went through eighty thousand copies in the next fifteen years, and Todd's book became the forerunner of many other books in the future, demonstrating how books of 'sermons' can sometimes be made interesting to even the youngest readers. Other books published were abbreviated forms of Richard Baxter's *Saint's Everlasting Rest*, Pike's *Persuasives to Early Piety*, and Bishop Leighton's *Commentary on the First Epistle of Peter*.³⁷

More Overseas Missionary Work Supported.

Earlier, support for overseas missionary work in the first days of the Society was mentioned briefly. In actual fact, there can easily be a misapprehension about the degree to which the Society supported Gospel work overseas. One reason for this is that the ordinary British people did not tend to notice it, as the real impact of this work was not felt in Great Britain. The impact was felt in other countries. Serious historical study does not seem to have been directed toward the overseas part of the Society's work. Attention has been directed towards the role of the Society in publishing children's literature by a number of authors, and to the Society's publications about science by the historian, Aileen Fyfe.

In one way this is strange, because so much attention is paid to the overseas work in the *Annual Reports*, and in William Jones's *Jubilee History*. Jones uses the first 281 pages of his book to describe the first 50 years of the British work. The foreign work is then described, up to page 622 – more than half of the book. Fyfe says that, from 1870 onwards, the *Reports* "typically devoted around six pages to the British publications and tract work, and used the remaining two hundred pages to report on overseas activities, whether [these represented] the operations of foreign tract societies, or the efforts of individual merchants, diplomats and travelers, in distributing tracts on the other side of the world."³⁸

Perhaps such extensive coverage of the overseas work was provided in the *Annual Reports*, and also in Jones's *Jubilee Memorial*, because this very large overseas work would not be known about by ordinary supporters in England otherwise, and it also accounted for a great deal of the money which the R.T.S. spent on its various activities. It represented very generous support of missionary work world-wide.

For the period up to 1849, for example, with respect to India, Green reported that "upwards of a hundred religious works had been printed in thirteen different languages and dialects; that about nineteen millions of copies of twelve hundred Tracts in different languages and dialects, and nearly two millions of English ones, had been circulated through the land, and that for this great work, 30,786 pounds had been granted from the funds of the Institution."³⁹ But this was only one example. Reports were also made about the lesser degree of help that the R.T.S. gave to missionary work in Burma, China, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific islands, South Africa, Madagascar, British colonies in North America and in the West Indies, and Spanish America. To this should be added the smaller contribution that the R.T.S. made to Gospel work in the various European countries, Scandinavia and Russia.

³⁷ Green. pages 51 - 52.

³⁸ Aileen Fyfe, "A Short History of the Religious Tract Society," in Butts and Garrett. pages 29 – 30.

³⁹ Green. page 58.

The R.T.S., at the Jubilee year, printed books in one hundred and ten languages, and had made grants of funds to foreign countries totaling of 87,398 pounds in order to further the aims of the Society.⁴⁰

A Brief Overview at the Jubilee.

In discussing the many forms used to publish its materials, Jones discussed the retail prices of their books, as opposed to the tracts produced by the Society. There had been complaints about the cost of the books, as opposed to the prices of the tracts. Jones said that the books represented a large range (by 1849), and that this branch of the Society's production had always been self-supporting, and thus had not been a charge upon any funds which had been raised in order to subsidize free literature distribution. Not only so, but the sale of the books had actually helped to sell many of the tracts.

He then produced an interesting comparison between some of the statistics for 1827, and for 1849. "In 1827, soon after the Society commenced the issue of its larger works, the publications sent from the depository [the warehouse] amounted to 8,272,408, and the total gratuitous issues were 2,223 pounds. In 1849, the total issues were 18,223,955, of which 9,710,666 were tracts and 4,040,793 children's books, making together 13,751,459. This number does not include juvenile works, of one shilling and upwards. Its gratuitous issues amounted to 7,630 pounds – being 2,690 pounds beyond the whole of the benevolent receipts during the year."⁴¹

Aileen Fyfe pointed out that the "increased number and range of R.T.S. publications in the 1820s and 1830s, along with the greater retail price of some of these, meant that the Society's income from sales grew almost exponentially throughout this period, and dwarfed the benevolent income... In 1815, the Society had received just over 2,000 pounds in donations, subscriptions, etc., and just over 4,000 pounds from the bulk sale of its tracts. In 1835, its benevolent income had risen to 5,000 pounds, while the income from sales of tracts, periodicals and books was now an incredible 50,000 pounds. The Society therefore moved into the 1840s as a quite different organization [from] its 1810s predecessor. From its tiny origins, it had become a large publishing concern with over sixty employees, issuing a catalogue of over four thousand items, in 110 languages, for a range of different audiences, and in a sufficiently strong financial position to take on a charitable role, supporting tract and literacy enterprises all over the world."⁴²

The Religious Tract Society had started off like a little acorn, but had grown into an enormous tree.

Appendix 5 in Jones's book provides circulation figures for about 200 of their main publications, whether they were books for adults, tracts or children's books. We can only say that the number of articles the R.T.S. published in its first fifty years totaled many, many millions of articles.

A Glance at "Spiritual Returns."

There were many R.T.S. titles which were said to be used by God to produce spiritual growth in readers, and many through which people were converted to Christ, or through which real spiritual life came instead of formality only.

⁴⁰ Green. pages 66 – 67.

⁴¹ Jones. page 133.

⁴² Fyfe, in Butts and Garrett. page 23.

The most noticeable example of such a book was *The Dairyman's Daughter*, the story of Elizabeth Wallbridge. Abel Stevens, the Methodist historian, enlarged upon this fact. He called it "the most generally read of Christian idylls," and that it was "loved and wept by millions, in the palaces of the wealthy, the cottages and hovels of the poor, the log-cabins of emigrants in the frontier wilderness of America and Australia, and in the homes of converted heathen throughout most of the missionary world. No history of Methodism that should omit her name would be complete; for though her simple story touches no important chronological point of that history, none of its great public facts, yet what better illustration do its annals afford of the essential spirit of Methodism, the spirit without which the letter would be dead? ...reminding Methodists in all the world and probably for all ages, of the great lesson of their cause, its providential design, the preaching of the Gospel to the poor. And her life, obscure in itself, has become historical in its results; thousands have owed their salvation to its record; tens of thousands have received comfort and strength from it in their hours of extremity. It has been translated into at least thirty languages, and her grave attracts to her native island more pilgrims than go to see its unrivalled scenery, or to gaze upon the residence of the queen of her country, which adorns its beautiful coast."⁴³ While Stevens's description of the number of visits which people made to Elizabeth Wallbridge's grave may have been true in 1861, it is no longer true today. But we can see through this report the wonderful spiritual impact which this story produced in a great many lives, great and small.

As mentioned, William Jones's *Jubilee Memorial* contains nearly the first half of the book dealing with the R.T.S.'s British operations. A little more than the second half of the book deals with overseas operations. Thus, chapter 20 is entitled "Home – Gratuitous Operations," and outlines what was done to spread freely R.T.S. literature through the British Isles. Jones says that there is not enough room in the book to tell the story of what good was done in this way. However, he refers the reader to two of the tracts which contain two stories of the results he had in mind. Chapter 21 is entitled "Illustrations of the Usefulness of Home Operations." It contains about twenty stories of conversions and holier living as a result of distributing their publications. These stories illustrate the wide variety of ways that God apparently used to promote the work of Christ's Kingdom.

The final chapter, 44, contains a brief review, mentioning several major factors which flowed from the work of the Religious Tract Society.

He says that, if the founders of the R.T.S. could now see what their work had produced, and the enormous growth which had occurred, these "surprising and unexpected results would call forth their loftiest praises to God, whose blessing had so abundantly followed their efforts to glorify his holy name."⁴⁴

Regarding the work in Britain, he said, while it was true that some of their efforts had fallen by the wayside, some of the seed had fallen into good ground and had brought forth much fruit. "Sinners had been converted to God; Christians edified and comforted; back sliders mercifully restored; and numerous evils prevented by timely admonitions. The seed of the word had also been scattered in the midst of our population, and though spiritual benefits had not always been attained, yet it has been prolific for good in the moral and social ameliorations which it has conferred on the rising generation."

⁴³ Stevens. *History of Methodism*. Vol. 2, pages 341 – 348.

⁴⁴ Jones. page 633.

On the one hand, in France and Europe, where general education was totally secular, and where “infidel and licentious literature” exists on every hand, education has not produced better standards of morality in their societies. Better educated people have tended to produce more educated criminals, and politicians who are not so good at bringing peace and love into society. By contrast, Jones believed, England had been delivered from this dark picture. He believed that the difference was because education in England was almost invariably connected with religion. “The bible is the grand foundation of all instruction addressed to our children. Its hallowed lessons, affectionately enforced by the evangelical pastor and the devoted teacher, give a right direction to the power which knowledge imparts. Among a large portion of our day and Sunday-schools, millions of truly excellent books are in constant circulation, containing simple scriptural expositions of the duties we owe to God, our families, and our country.” Jones believed that while ever this situation continued, England would not need to fear the turmoil and atheistic lack of morality which seemed to abound in other European countries.⁴⁵

Whatever we may think of this view of English and European history, it is true that, through the years Jones is speaking of, a very high proportion of the children in England did attend Sunday schools run by the various churches. Many of the schools also were run with solid influence, especially from the established church. And the R.T.S. contributed a very large circulation of books into this sector of society.

Regarding the overseas work, Jones wrote, “The foreign proceedings of the Society, assisted by the disinterested labours of the missionaries of all denominations, have been productive of the most important benefits to the heathen and unenlightened nations of the world. In some cases, when the people were just emerging from a state of barbarism, the Christian press has given a sanctified character to the first literature they possessed. The rude language of the savage has, after being reduced to a written standard, conveyed to his darkened mind the truth as it is in Jesus. Among nations the most ancient, the leaven of the gospel has been diffused, the errors of ages exposed, and, in some cases, counteracted. Through the printing-press the Society has successfully assailed Popery on the continent, Mohammedanism in the east, and Paganism in heathen lands.”⁴⁶

Jones points out one great benefit of the Society’s work. This was that Christian writers have had their influence spread throughout the world. “Little did John Bunyan foresee that in future times missionaries would go forth to the heathen, and by twenty-eight translations of his enchanting volume interest the people of many nations...”⁴⁷

Jones also emphasizes that books can carry a message that can bless future generations, and not simply the people who read it when it was first published or purchased.⁴⁸ Not only can books be reprinted, and be kept in circulation long after the author may have died, but there is an enormous second-hand market in books, so that a book can bless someone when it is one hundred years old or more, and it can travel to countries where the author has never been. It can also be translated into other languages,

⁴⁵ Jones. page 634 – 635.

⁴⁶ Jones. page 635 – 636.

⁴⁷ Ibid. page 636.

⁴⁸ Jones. pages 133 – 134.

and bless people who know nothing of the original language in which the book was written.

In turning away from Jones's book now, we need to note what Gordon Hewitt says about the effects of the Hawkers' tracts, and consider to what degree these effects were part of the overall Evangelical Revival. In his all-too-brief history of the Religious Tract Society, Hewitt comments upon the effects of the tracts which were sold below cost to the hawkers, and the subsequent losses that the R.T.S. had to cover by other means.

"It was a bold stroke, but it succeeded. The new series took on with the hawkers and with the customers. The loss at first was heavy (by 1830 it amounted to 4,600 pounds), but half a million were sold in the first year, and gradually the shoddy wares which the hawkers had previously offered were driven off the market. This victory over self-consciousness on the part of the Committee was perhaps the most significant in the Society's history. The 'Hawkers' Tracts' did really get home to the people for whom the earlier series was also mainly intended. Apart from their efficacy in terms of personal repentance and faith, the 'Hawkers' Tracts' largely contributed to the new standards of morality which characterized Victorian England. A recent historian, writing of London about 1830, has said: 'The streets no longer resounded with bawdy ballads and on the market nights hawkers sold, not the penny histories of famous criminals which had delighted the populace of Johnson's day, but tracts containing some urgent moral lesson or the account of a sinner's conversion.' Nowadays when it is fairly easy to argue that religious tracts are socially irrelevant, it is well also to remember that they were one of the chief agencies of a moral revolution."⁴⁹

We should note that this moral revolution of which he speaks was part of a much wider revival movement in England which we now refer to as the Evangelical Revival. This wider movement would also reveal itself in the new public taste for religious tracts. Revivals such as this are a period of unusual responsiveness to the Gospel, and to the means used to spread the Gospel.⁵⁰

The final point to be made about "spiritual returns" relates to the *Annual Reports*, in which selected letters were published that had been received at head quarters. These letters contained replies from people who received free allocations of tracts, or packages of tracts which might have been paid for fully, or in part. They also contained conversion stories resulting from these tracts, and other remarks about what these allocations of books had achieved.

For example, the *Annual Report* for 1812 includes 24 letters reproduced. Of these, six are from European contacts, and two from Ireland. One is from Nova Scotia, and one from Philadelphia. This last one is from the meeting which founded a Religious Tract Society there, dated December 17, 1811, and signed "A. Alexander." – very likely

⁴⁹ Gordon Hewitt, *Let the People Read. United Society for Christian Literature. 1799 – 1949*. United Society for Christian Literature and Lutterworth Press. 1949. page 29. The book Hewitt quotes from is Maurice J. Quinlan. *Victorian Prelude*. Columbia University Press. 1941. page 3.

⁵⁰ Ian C. Bradley. *The Call to Seriousness. The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians*. New York. Macmillan. 1976.

the person who was later a Professor at Princeton.⁵¹ Three letters were from naval and army establishments, prison ships and penitentiaries which had received grants of tracts. Nine letters were from different parts of England, mostly from ministers. One was from a minister in the process of leaving London for India, and who received a grant of tracts. One letter, from an unknown address, contained several stories of conversions as a result of tract distributions, several of which involved copies of *The Dairyman's Daughter*.⁵²

THE MIDDLE PERIOD – 1850 to 1899.

Apart from the founders of the Society, the giants of the first fifty years of the Society were J. Freeman Lloyd, George Stokes, and William Jones. In his *Jubilee Memorial*, Jones describes his work with these other two men as “the threefold cord” which provided the strength to the whole operation. By 1849, Lloyd had retired, but was still very active in the work. Stokes was dead, and Jones himself was to die suddenly, still in harness, in 1855. So, changes of personnel in the editorial work occurred from time to time, but very capable people became available to replace those who had laboured long and hard.

Books on More Learned Subjects.

Books of a more serious nature, and of a more directly spiritual kind, really represented the mainstream of the R.T.S.'s basic evangelical policy. This remained true despite the fact that an enormous amount of effort also went into producing better quality secular reading which was aimed at counteracting the flood of very poor literature.

After 1849, the stream of publications of all kinds seemed only to increase. A new Educational Series was commenced, which included a new edition of William Paley's *Evidences of Christianity*, and a new *Bible Handbook* by Dr. Angus. This *Bible Handbook* had a long and distinguished career as one of the Society's best publications. Dr. Angus also produced an edition of Butler's *Analogy*, with suitable notes, and a *Handbook of the Grammar of the Greek New Testament*. Several books on English literature were also published.

Special needs arose in this period because of the publication of the Oxford Movement's *Essays and Reviews* in 1862, and because of the arrival in England of German Higher Critical views about the Old Testament. The Rev. T. R. Birks provided two books. His book *The Bible and Modern Thought* was a reply to the Oxford book. The reply to the Higher Criticism came in his book *The Exodus of Israel*. A little later Ernest Renan's book *The Life of Jesus* appeared, expressing very unorthodox views about Christ. The R.T.S. published a reply which had been written by Dr. Philip Schaff of New York, and by M. Napoleon Roussel of Paris, entitled *On the Christ of the Gospels*.

⁵¹ The role of Archibald Alexander in the formation of the Religious Tract Society in Philadelphia is not mentioned in the biography by James W. Alexander, although it is clear from this biography that Dr. Alexander was in Philadelphia at the date and time that this letter was written.

⁵² *The Thirteenth Annual Report of the Religious Tract Society. M.DCCC.XII.* London. R.T.S. 1812. pages 17 – 42.

Another major problem lay in the rising number of scientific books which seemed opposed to Divine revelation. Professor Duns wrote a reply for the R.T.S. called *Science and Christian Thought*.⁵³

Again, in these years just after the Jubilee, much effort was taken to promote Tract distribution in other countries, especially European ones. For example, during the second Schleswig-Holstein War in 1864, and in the Franco-Prussian War in 1866, colporteurs were used extensively. The 1866 War did not last long, but the colporteurs had access to four hundred thousand French prisoners in German prisons for eighteen months, and to wounded soldiers who filled the hospitals for several years after the War.⁵⁴

Special tracts were also published to mark the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London. They were distributed in hundreds of thousands in many languages amongst those who visited. Another was published especially for the Duke of Wellington's funeral in 1852. Over one hundred thousand tracts were distributed amongst the sailors and soldiers involved in the Crimean War. Mining disasters, shipwrecks, disastrous floods, the opening of Exeter Hall for religious gatherings, the Cotton Famine in Lancashire, the remarkable Irish Revival, the illness and the recovery of the Prince of Wales, were all marked with special tract issues and distributions. An enormous number of tracts were produced in many languages for use in relation to the Great Exhibition of 1862.

In the twenty years between 1854 and 1874, the gross annual circulation numbers rose from 27,376,575 to 44,802,660.⁵⁵

Periodicals for Adults in the Middle Period.

In 1832 the S.P.C.K. had produced a magazine called *The Saturday Magazine*. It had been prompted by what was perceived to be a widespread separation of knowledge from religion in the popular periodicals. So it was an attempt to counteract the secularizing tendencies of the day. This effort, however, came to an end in 1844.⁵⁶

In trying to perform a similar task to this, the R.T.S. converted its older periodical *The Visitor* into another called *The Leisure Hour*, which rapidly became enormously popular. Its subtitle was "a Family Journal of Instruction and Recreation." The first copies of this new magazine appeared in 1852. In looking back on the history of this publication, Green said (in 1899) "it has long ministered to the intellectual improvement and delight of thousands of readers, carrying out its principle of treating all subjects of human interest in the light of Christian truth."⁵⁷ *The Leisure Hour* was a miscellany of secular instruction, in an attempt to drive out what was evil by introducing the good. This editorial policy operated behind several of the Society's major publications in this middle period. There was a great deal of concern about the enormous amount of trash literature which was produced in London each week. Lord Shaftesbury spoke out about it, pointing to the vast range of "penny dreadfuls" which flooded the London literature market, especially to supply the cheaper end of it. *The Leisure Hour* was an attempt to

⁵³ Green. page 76.

⁵⁴ Green. page 97.

⁵⁵ Green. page 71.

⁵⁶ Green. page 73.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

provide good quality reading on a wide range of subjects, but without any directly theological content which could frighten many people away. So it provided excellent educational input on many subjects, and it openly supported those higher standards of morality in society, business and politics, which we normally associate with the evangelical scene in the Victorian period in England. It was good, clean reading for the average person, and deserved its popularity.

Each year, there would be at least one long fictional story, with episodes from week to week, possibly two or three, and usually some poetry. In the 1885 volume, for example, there also appeared articles on the origin of life insurance, the letters of Napoleon Buonaparte, on the Coliseum, story-telling in all ages, the cross of Edinburgh, natural history anecdotes, the Krakatoa Eruption, the old homes of England, Berlin and the Berliners, greater London and its open spaces, singers and singing, the prairie, railway notes on the Canadian railways, the Indian rebellion, some facts about Australia, the effects of recent gold discoveries, a country holiday for town children, the printing and binding of the revised Bible, Indian fables, Victor Hugo, summer rambles in my caravan, the story of English shires, notable blind folks, and so on, almost endlessly. Some of these topics could have several weekly episodes to them. Each issue also contained a section called "Varieties," which contained single-paragraph comments on an enormous range of subjects.

By this time, also, the habit had developed of producing annual bound volumes of the issues of the R.T.S.'s periodicals for each year. So, in 1853, for example, the issues for 1852 were made available as a bound volume, and these also became very popular. Whereas separate monthly issues might become crumpled and torn, and be thrown away like a newspaper, the bound versions preserved the value of the contents of each issue for many years, providing enjoyable reading in later years, and even for later generations.

Another happy feature of these publications was that special colour plates began to be reproduced in them, which provided a rare attraction for ordinary people. Often these plates would be carefully removed and framed, and be hung on the wall of a more humble dwelling. Often enough, this was the only way that ordinary people could get better pictures to decorate their homes. Even today, when one ransacks the second-hand book market for copies of these books, one has to be careful to note whether the plates are still present in any volume which one might desire to purchase. Colour plates were rare events in popular books right through the Nineteenth Century.

Within two years of the appearance of *The Leisure Hour*, another outstanding periodical was brought out by the R.T.S., and under the same editorial control. It was called *The Sunday at Home*.

Most evangelicals of that time had very strict views about what should or should not be done on Sunday. Many Christians treated the day as one which was set aside for private and public worship, and Christian activities, and nothing else. Some would not even cook their food or polish their shoes on Sunday, but would make sure they did all of their preparations for the day on Saturday. *The Sunday at Home* was an attempt to provide better quality reading which would be suitable to be read on Sunday. Naturally, the R.T.S. received a lot of criticism for this new venture, being told by some friends that nothing should be provided for Sunday reading apart from pure religious truth "such as the experienced Christian might delight in." But the Committee members were aware that a widespread need existed for "lighter religious literature for the young and

uninstructed, and even for the wearied Christian in the hours of the Sabbath not devoted to more serious meditations.”⁵⁸

So, to some degree, the content of *The Sunday at Home* was like the content of *The Leisure Hour*, except that *The Sunday at Home* contained less fiction, but it also contained Bible study notes, articles about leading church personalities, stories about great missionaries, articles on particular Christian virtues, illustrations for preachers, pastoral articles, as well as some more carefully chosen fiction. The editors tried hard to make sure that the material was indeed suitable to read on Sundays, according to acceptable Victorian standards.

In 1861, another new periodical for children appeared called the *Cottager*, costing a penny a month. It had eight large-sized pages, with a full page engraved picture on the front. It soon attained a circulation of fifty thousand copies a month. In a few years the title was changed to *The Cottager and Artisan*, and soon the circulation doubled.

For example, the issue of *The Cottager and Artisan* for January, 1881, after the front page picture on page one, included, a family story about “Gurton and his boys,” an article about a mine disaster, one on the history of potatoes, with an engraving of the Elector Frederick in his Berlin kitchen garden in 1649. There followed two devotional articles set in larger type, and a final article on the Shetland Islands. Engravings appeared on almost every page.

Some of the older periodicals continued. For example, *The Child’s Companion and Juvenile Instructor* for 1890 had a smaller page size than *The Cottager and Artisan*, but had 18 pages for each month. It contained a serial fictional story by the famous author, Mrs. O. F. Walton, shorter serials, many articles and short stories about animals and country gardens, moralistic articles, and some poetry. It also contained Scripture competitions and puzzles.

In 1870 yet another new periodical appeared, called *The True Catholic*. It was primarily meant to present “the vindication and enforcement of evangelical belief.” It was considered to be important as part of the effort by the R.T.S. to alter the popular understanding of the word “Catholic,” so that it applied to Christians of every church affiliation. It also stood against claims being made by the Roman Catholic leadership in Rome regarding, for example, the intercessory role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and claims of Papal infallibility, which were then being promulgated.⁵⁹ Circulation of this paper was never large, and it lasted only for six years.

The Main Period of Books for Children.

During this middle period, the Religious Tract Society published a vast range of books for boys and for girls. Main authors of books for boys included Jules Verne, R. M. Ballantyne, Major Charles Gilson, Arthur Conan Doyle, Talbot Baines Reed, J. G. Wood, W. H. G. Kingston, Percy Westerman, Gordon Stables, and G. A. Henty.

There were two main genres of book in this class. The majority of these books were gripping, dramatic adventure stories.

For a while, there was almost an entire genre of books about school life for boys. It was introduced by Thomas Hughes in 1857, with his book *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, and one year later by Dean Farrar’s book *Eric, or Little by Little*. Neither of these had

⁵⁸ Green. page 74.

⁵⁹ Green. page 75.

been R.T.S. publications. The main writer to develop this genre was Talbot Baines Reed, whose school stories were published by R.T.S. between 1883 and his death in 1893. But there was a long list of other writers who followed this style of story through until the Second World War, and later.⁶⁰ Many of these stories were first published in the *Boy's Own Paper*, and later appeared as separate bound books.

Similarly, an extensive range of fictional books also appeared for girls. The main authors included Mrs. O. F. Walton, Hesba Stretton and Amy Le Feuvre.

Mrs. O. F. Walton published her first books anonymously, which was part of the cultural practice of the time around the 1870s in England that authoring a book was not a woman's place. These early titles were also wrongly catalogued in the British Library as a result of this anonymity. Mrs. Walton had a terrific output of writing, and all of her books were published by the R.T.S. Her most long-lasting story was *Christie's Old Organ*, published in 1874.⁶¹ It was a story of very poor people in which one of the main characters has an evangelical conversion experience, marries well, and progresses well in life. The story is well-written and interesting, and was the means of bringing the gospel to many of her readers. Another of her best known titles was *A Peep Behind the Scenes*.

Popular titles like *Jessica's First Prayer* by Hesba Stretton appeared first as installments in *The Sunday at Home*. They were then published separately. A long list of books by Hesba Stretton soon followed.

Concerning *Jessica's First Prayer*, Lord Shaftesbury wrote "This beautiful tale exhibits a singular, minute, and accurate knowledge of that class (i.e. the destitute children of the metropolis), its wants and its capabilities. As a literary effort it will hardly find a rival for nature, simplicity, pathos, and depth of Christian feeling. The writer is doubtless a woman; no man on earth could have composed a page of it."⁶²

A new format was adopted for a more expensive series of children's books. In the past, the books had been smaller, and had been very cheap, often costing only a farthing. Now a series was commenced in which each volume cost a shilling. So, the content was much more substantial, and more trouble was taken to include in these stories direct moral and religious teaching, and useful information about other countries, with the social and cultural features of those countries. Books on some of the ancient civilizations were also included, especially those relating to Bible history.

Cleaner Quality Periodicals for Children.

For more than twenty years after 1850 there continued to be concern about the production of clean and wholesome literature to replace the literature of poorer quality that was widely available. *The Leisure Hour* had been the Society's attempt to cope with this problem for adults, and it had been very successful. But the feeling increased that something should also be done for boys, and then for girls. There was a good deal of apprehension about whether such an enterprise would succeed, and many thought it ought not to be done because books of children's fiction would not be spiritual enough. There would be an insufficient effort to proclaim the Gospel in them. They would simply be like good quality secular magazines. As a result, there was some serious criticism.

⁶⁰ Robert Kirkpatrick, "Different Schools of Thought – Other Stories for Boys." in Butts and Garrett, pages 145 – 161.

⁶¹ Morna Daniels, "The Search for Mrs. Walton and her World." in Butts and Garrett. page 119.

⁶² Green. page 79.

In 1879, the R.T.S. produced the first issues of *The Boy's Own Paper*, as a monthly periodical. Almost immediately it became a weekly production. Both Dr. Patrick Dunae and the last editor of *The Boy's Own Paper*, Jack Cox, have described the struggle that took place between the proposed editor of this new magazine and the Directors of the R.T.S. The Directors wanted a paper with much more directly religious content, and made instructions accordingly. Initially, the proposed editor, Mr. George Hutchison, drew up plans for a paper with much less directly religious content, but filled with exciting stories which had a "Christian tone," especially when compared with the cheap trash that they all hoped it would replace, and which flooded the market. Probably to help keep Hutchison under better control, the Directors brought in Dr. James Macaulay to be the editor, and relegated Hutchison to being sub-editor. Macaulay was a much older man, and had established his reputation as the editor of *The Leisure Hour*, and of *The Sunday at Home*, having been largely responsible for making them so successful. However, Macaulay believed in Hutchison much more than the Directors did, and, although his plans had to be modified a number of times to please the Directors, Hutchison provided the real editorial force when the *Boy's Own Paper* was launched in 1879, despite Macaulay being nominally the editor.⁶³

Immediately, it was enormously popular. In three days the first issue was almost sold out. Green said, the great success of it surprised the Committee members. The circulation was aided not only by the boys in a good many of the Sunday schools, far and near, but also by the spread of the railway system throughout the country, and that W. H. Smith and Son, had opened book and newspaper stalls on these railway stations, so that there were 1,000 of them by the time the "*BOP*" was published.⁶⁴

Lord Shaftesbury said that the contents of these early issues were "very wise." "It is done with a degree of penetration of knowledge of boys' character, and proper selection of subjects and mode of handling them, that is most admirable..."⁶⁵ Herein was real support for Hutchison's editorial policy, although some of the Directors kept up a rearguard action against the more secular content, despite the "Christian tone" that some of it certainly had.

Print runs of 665,000 copies per week were common in the 1880s, and readership estimations claimed that one and a quarter million people read each issue. It was thought that, on the average, several people would read each copy, in each home. Perhaps it is not hard to believe this when we remember that the "*BOP*" was not only issued in weekly and monthly versions, but that the large *Boy's Own Annuals* were very popular as well. These books had 800 pages, containing most of the contents of the weekly papers from the previous twelve months, and would be sold for eight shillings. The twelve months of each volume covered from November to October, so that the *Boy's Own Annual* for a certain year would be available to purchase at the end of that year.

Butts says that the magazine claimed in 1890 that "The *Boy's Own Paper* has a larger circulation than all the other boys' journals put together" and that "this has been the case for many years."⁶⁶

⁶³ Dunae, pages 129 - 131.

⁶⁴ Cox, page 15.

⁶⁵ Dunae., page 133.

⁶⁶ Dennis Butts, "Quicquid agunt pueri nostri farrago libelli. (Whatever boys do is the subject of our little book.): The *Boy's Own Paper*." in Butts and Garrett. page 135.

Apart from the strong component of exciting fiction, the “*BOP*” contained non-fiction articles on any subject which the editors thought would interest boys. From the beginning, there were articles on skating, monkeys, birds’ egg-collecting, bees and bee-keeping, athletics, sports of every kind, and team games. There were many articles on outdoor activities, like boating, canoeing and cycling, including detailed instructions on how to build a boat. Dr. W. G. Grace provided articles about cricket.

Religious articles appeared which were usually shorter pieces, possibly about explorers and missionaries. There would often also be poetry, either a reproduction of one by Wordsworth, or a new poem on some suitable subject.

There were regular competitions which might consist of asking for an illustration or painting on some chosen topic, or to complete a short story to follow a start which was provided. Articles on hobbies, such as chess and stamp-collecting, never lost their popularity.

After the first few issues, an extensive correspondence page developed (300 – 400 letters per week). Boys could send in questions of any kind, signed by their initials or by a pseudo-nom. The editors chose from amongst the many questions they received, and published the initials or pseudo-nom, followed by a short response. The question was never published, and replies were never sent by post. “During the first year of the *BOP*’s existence” advice was asked on such “topics as preserving flowers, keeping chickens, mice and rats, and asking for recipes for making sponge cakes, ginger beer and toffee.”⁶⁷ Medical questions were answered by one of the authors, Gordon Stables, who had practiced medicine before he wrote for the magazine. It was Stables who got other members of the medical profession to write for the “*BOP*”, including his friend, Dr. Arthur Conan Doyle.

Again, the early “*BOP*” authors included W. H. G. Kingston, R. M. Ballantyne and Jules Verne. It is a surprising fact, and not known to many people, that the bulk of Jules Verne’s literary output consisted of stories which were first published in English, in the *Boy’s Own Paper*. Originally written in French, they were sent across to England and translated, and then edited to suit an English juvenile readership, before being published.⁶⁸ Talbot Baines Reed joined the authors in 1881 with his first school story, *The Fifth Form at St. Dominic’s*. He contributed eight other full-length stories before his untimely death in 1893.

Unlike some of its R.T.S. predecessors, the *Boy’s Own Paper* also achieved widespread critical success. The fourth volume of the *Boy’s Own Annual* received special permission to be dedicated to the Prince Edward and Prince George of Wales. In 1888, literary writer Edward Salmon praised it “because the *Boy’s Own Paper* is the only first-class journal of its kind which has found its way into the slums as well as into the best homes.” Butts says that, “in 1899, the *BOP* celebrated its twenty-first year with a Coming of Age Dinner in London at which the Archdeacon of London spoke of the paper’s ‘wonderful power of good in raising the moral tone of the youth of our nation both at home and abroad.’⁶⁹

Samuel Green’s comments on the *Boy’s Own Paper* emphasized that the Directors dearly wanted it to play a strong evangelistic role, just as all of the R.T.S.

⁶⁷ Dennis Butts, in Butts and Garrett. page 139.

⁶⁸ Cox. *Take a Cold Bath, Sir!*. pages 35 – 37.

⁶⁹ Dennis Butts, in Butts and Garrett. page 136.

publications were intended to do. While it might provide “Christian tone” to a wide range of subjects, as Hutchison wanted, they also hoped I would form links in a chain which would lead young men to conversion to Christ, and a thorough-going surrender of their lives to God.⁷⁰ Of course, Hutchison wanted this to happen as well, but would not allow the evangelistic flavour to drive people away, as that would defeat both purposes.

Although the *Boy's Own Paper* reached its peak in the 1890s, it continued to circulate at 400,000 copies every week through the first decade of the Twentieth Century.

The famous London Congregational preacher of the early 20th Century, the Rev. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, said that he took the first issue of it when he was young. Although the “unspiritual” criticisms of it continued for years, he was a keen supporter of it, and he said that his sons, in their turn, were subscribers to the *BOP* also.⁷¹

A year after the appearance of the boy's paper, the first issues of *The Girl's Own Paper* appeared, and this publication was perhaps even more successful. Strangely, perhaps, the first editor was a man, Mr. Charles Peters. It was he who was mainly responsible for making the *GOP* so popular.

Mary Cadogan made some observations about the differences between these two papers. The *GOP* took the view that girls became home-makers and mothers far sooner in their lives than boys became men. So the girls were, at first, given uplifting domestic stories. But, as the decades passed, society changed, and the religious content of the fiction in the magazine changed. So, the girl's paper “soon began to reflect and to influence the new, expanding, educational and career expectations of young girls. Lively persuasion through appealing stereotypes and role models fairly soon replaced didacticism and, because the paper was so widely circulated, it moved towards classlessness, and internationalism. The more liberal mood began to be conveyed in fairly vigorous tales of adventure, school and sporting endeavour.”⁷² The role models might include female members of the royal family.

“The *GOP* felt a special responsibility for girls of the ‘lower orders’ for whom domestic service seemed the only respectable occupation. (As late as 1911 there were in Britain 2,100,000 women in service, far more than in any other work.) In its stories and articles the paper constantly punched home the message that working girls should settle for this kind of employment and, above all, never allow themselves to be seduced into following theatrical careers. ...it stressed ‘the poverty, blighted lives and unnatural excitement of the 21,000 actors and actresses’ in ‘this great wilderness of London...full of pitfalls for the young and ignorant.’”

After 1900, the flavour changed to “modernity.” Charles Peters (died 1907) made this paper achieve a greater circulation than the boy's paper, but always managed to keep his fiction and features acceptable to the mothers of the younger readers and to the husbands of the older readers.⁷³ One of the keenest supporters of the *Girl's Own Paper* was the famous literary critic, John Ruskin, who admired the paper greatly.

⁷⁰ Green. page 128.

⁷¹ Morgan. op cit. page 651.

⁷² Mary Cadogan, *The Girl's Own Paper (1880 – 1956) and the New Woman*. in Butts and Garrett. page 162.

⁷³ Cadogan. page 164.

In 1980, Wendy Forrester published her celebration of the first twenty years of *The Girl's Own Paper*, entitled *Great-Grandmama's Weekly*. She describes how the girl's main adventure stories were about love and marriage, and earning one's own living. There were two fictional serials running at a time, and occasional short stories. There were articles on health and beauty, dress, needlework, housekeeping, cookery, hobbies, foreign countries, doing good, and music (with some scores being provided by Queen Victoria's youngest daughter, Princess Beatrice.). There would also be jokes, anecdotes, poems, competitions, and a weekly page of answers to correspondence.

The circulation quickly rose to over a quarter of a million copies, and for most of the time outperformed the boy's paper. The revenue allowed the R.T.S. to increase its support of missionary work overseas.⁷⁴

It needs to be emphasized here, that these two weekly magazines were GIANTS in the production line-up of the Religious Tract Society. They far outstripped the other productions in quantity, and in the attention that was paid to them.

The fortunes of both these magazines after 1900 will be considered later in this paper.

Scientific Subjects.

Earlier in the paper we noted that some of the wonders of the creation were included in some of the productions of the Religious Tract Society, especially for children, but by no means restricted to juvenile literature. We also noted that, when there was a popular upsurge in the idea that there was a basic conflict between science and Christianity in the Nineteenth Century, Professor Duns wrote a book for the R.T.S. which attempted to combat the idea that any basic conflict existed.

In the last decade, an excellent piece of historical research has been carried out by Aileen Fyfe, and published by the University of Chicago, showing that the Religious Tract Society's main thrust was not to combat the supposed conflict between science and Christianity, but was to reveal in some detail the wonders of creation, as these had been found by the world's most reputable scientists, and to set out this non-religious information within the framework of a Christian world-view, and with "Christian tone."

No attempt was made by these writers to debunk or ridicule ideas about the great age of the earth, or any known detail about fossils, or about the size and age of the universe, as believed by scientists at that time.

What the writers and editors of the R.T.S. did was to publish books on some scientific subject but to include a separate section at the end of the book which would attribute the creation to God, and would also include a presentation of the Gospel in such a way as possibly to lead the reader to salvation through Jesus Christ. The religious section was produced in such a way as to avoid any idea that the purely natural factors which had been described in the main part of the book were in any way mistaken. The actual scientific content of these books was the same as one would have found in any other science book dealing with the subject under discussion.

In the later part of the Nineteenth Century the Religious Tract Society produced Monthly Volumes on various scientific topics. Over a period, there appeared 150 of

⁷⁴ Wendy Forrester. *Great Grandmama's Weekly*. Lutterworth Press. 1980. pages 13 – 15.

these volumes, which, naturally, came to cover a vast range of scientific subjects, and contained an immense amount of fascinating information.⁷⁵

Even More Support for Overseas Missionary Work.

When we try to consider the extent and details of support for overseas missionary work in the Middle Period between 1850 and 1900, there are only two sources of information now about this part of R.T.S. operations. These are Green's Centenary history, and the *Annual Reports* for those years.

Aileen Fyfe has summarized the situation. After describing the enormous growth of R.T.S. involvement in the British literature market through its books, tracts and especially the new periodicals, she says: "...an examination of the Society's *Annual Reports* from the 1870s onwards would suggest that most of its concerns were overseas. The *Reports* typically devoted around six pages to the British publications and tract work, and used the remaining two hundred pages to report on overseas activities, whether the operations [were] of foreign tract societies, or the efforts of individual merchants, diplomats, and travelers in distributing tracts on the other side of the world."⁷⁶

Fyfe also says that benevolent income from R.T.S.'s various sources usually amounted to about ten thousand pounds annually for overseas work through these years. But the profits from the sale of periodicals were such, between 1880 and 1900, that an extra thirty thousand pounds, at times, could be added to the subsidies which were spent on R.T.S.'s overseas work.

The only *Annual Report* for a year in the Middle Period that I could buy and examine was the *Report* for the year 1853, which is really too early in the Middle Period to be the most useful. This *Report* is NOT like the ones described by Fyfe, above. After an introductory fifteen pages, there are 98 pages summarizing the foreign work. Then Home Operations are described in twelve pages. But this comparison is deceptive, because the Report goes on to describe many other aspects of R.T.S. work. Under the heading of "General Grants," there is a list of 328 grants made to "Libraries for Destitute Districts," worth 874 pounds. This is followed by a list of 470 grants to libraries for Sunday and Day Schools worth 853 pounds. This is followed by sixteen select school libraries which were given one hundred books each for the price of two pounds, and four other school libraries which received fifty books each, plus other library classifications. Twelve pages allow all the new publications from the previous twelve months to be listed, and some of them [such as *The Leisure Hour*] are described at length. Forty pages then describe in summary all of the financial incomes, legacies, etc., for the year. Everything mentioned so far comprises the first half only of the pages in the book.

Then there follows four Appendices, comprising 84 pages.

Appendix 1 provides the cumulative totals, year by year, of items published by the R.T.S. in 112 languages. (one page).

Appendix 2 presents letters from people about how tracts and other materials were used in Britain. (39 pages).

⁷⁵ Aileen Fyfe. *Science and Salvation: Evangelical Popular Science Publishing in Victorian Britain*. Chicago and London. University of Chicago Press. 2004. See also my review of this book in *Church Heritage*, Historical Journal of the Uniting Church in Australia. Vol.15, Number 2, September 2007. pages 113 – 115.

⁷⁶ Aileen Fyfe. "Short History of the R.T.S." in Butts and Garrett. pages 29 – 30.

Appendix 3 provides similar letters from foreign countries. (40 pages). These two appendices are the published “spiritual returns,” and other related matters.

Appendix 4 provides a list of the number of packages of materials given to emigrants upon leaving British ports, giving the names of the ships, and the destinations to which the ships were going, from July, 1852 to 31st March, 1853. (Three pages.)

Then follow two and a half pages of new publications in various languages which appeared after March 31. It is dated 21st June, 1853. [At this stage, it is not clear to me how this list fits in with the other earlier one.]

Then we are given about forty unnumbered pages of the names of the Life Subscribers, and the Annual Subscribers to the Society, and other Benefactors, listing also the amounts of money which they gave.

Finally, there are provided 56 numbered pages of absolutely all of the R.T.S. publications of every description which are available in English at the R.T.S. depository. And then there are sixteen unnumbered pages of all of the R.T.S. publications in other languages, with the costs of purchase in each case. This *Annual Report* is an exhaustive document, and one of William Jones’s last productions before his death.⁷⁷

Samuel Green divides the years from 1850 to 1900 into two parts of 25 years each. He spends fifteen and a bit pages describing British work, and then twenty-six pages on foreign work, for the years from 1850 to 1875. For the years 1876 to 1900, he spends twenty pages on the British work, and seventy pages describing some of the foreign work. While the European work was always talked about first, by this time much more emphasis was being given to the work in India, China, Japan and Korea.⁷⁸

A Glance at “Spiritual Returns,” for the Middle Period.

Before mentioning more purely “spiritual” returns, we need to remember the very significant impact produced upon a great many girls and boys by the *Girl’s Own Paper*, and the *Boy’s Own Paper*. This is indicated not only by the tremendous circulation figures for nearly thirty years up to the First World War, but also by the great volume of correspondence which flooded into the R.T.S. offices continually every week.

Another indication of this is seen in the fact that a number of headmasters of schools wrote in to the R.T.S. to testify that these magazines had raised the tone of their schools.⁷⁹

The “Christian tone” which was being aimed at in the *Boy’s Own Paper*, in the *Girl’s Own Paper*, and in the scientific publications, also produced a significant “spiritual return”. Clean adventure stories, and informational articles about all sorts of subjects, were presented to the public within the context of a Christian world-view, and with some accompanying Biblical teaching. This is an important educational technique, which helps to inoculate the readers against unduly secular outlooks, and thus makes it easier for them to become Christian believers at some future date. It also helps to save the already Christian from feeling that a prevailing secular world-view somehow undermines the credibility of his or her Christian beliefs and faith. Also, when a boy or girl became attached to one or other of these periodicals with a Christian tone, they could easily

⁷⁷ *The Fifty-fourth Annual Report of the Religious Tract Society for circulating religious publications in the British Dominions and Foreign Countries.* London. R.T.S. 1853.

⁷⁸ Green. pages 69 – 204.

⁷⁹ Dunae. page 135.

become interested in some of the other Religious Tract Society publications which might present a more direct evangelistic challenge to them and to which they might respond.

Perhaps as an example of this we could quote from a speech given by George Hutchison on 31 October, 1899, at the Coming-of-Age Dinner for the *Boy's Own Paper*, at the Holborn Restaurant in London. Jack Cox says that all the contributors and artists were invited to the dinner. The Archdeacon of London was chairman for the gathering, and spoke of the paper's "wonderful power for good in raising the moral tone of the youth of our nation both at home and abroad." Cox says that Hutchison was a powerful and eloquent speaker in pulpit or on platform, as a Baptist lay preacher, Sunday school superintendent and Liberal politician, and he replied to the Archdeacon's words.

He said, "For twenty-one years we here, all of us, have worked together with a definite purpose to help boys to live straight. Often and often boys in trouble write to me frankly about themselves. It has ever been my aim and joy to advise to the best of my ability, and to aid in the making of manly God-fearing citizens. I have received many proofs from all parts of the English-speaking world that the work has not been in vain."⁸⁰

Samuel Green says that, in 1880, in order to develop further the directly evangelistic impact of the juvenile periodicals, another magazine was introduced, called *Friendly Greeting*. It was made more attractive in appearance, with more illustrations, cost a half-penny, and could be used for personal evangelism. It ceased production after six years, and to replace it, more evangelistic content was put into the issues of the *Sunday at Home*.⁸¹ The *Friendly Greeting* did, however, re-appear some years later.

In attempting to study the impact on people of the R.T.S. publications, we need to remember the lop-sided nature of historical research at the present time, which was mentioned earlier, because juvenile literature and the writings about science are the only areas which have been studied by research historians, we must turn to Samuel Green's history, and to *Annual Reports*, to find our best sources of information about "spiritual returns" in this Middle Period.

Green devotes a few pages to "Some Results" at the end of his long description of overseas operations up to 1900. As a result, the incidents that he describes apply only to results flowing from these overseas activities, and he includes, almost in passing, just a few instances from the British work.⁸²

His first example refers to a translation into Tahitian of a tract called *The Sinner's Friend*. The author of this tract had been very grateful upon hearing of numbers of conversions occurring through people reading his tract, so he paid for 2,000 copies of the Tahitian translation to be printed and sent to Raratonga. The missionary sent an autograph letter from the King of Raratonga, which said that the previous king "died with faith in the blood of Jesus the Messiah," and it was believed this was the result of reading this tract. Green then quotes another story, this time from France. A military officer was dying, and rudely rejected the visit of a Protestant pastor. But a copy of the French translation of this same tract was left, and it led to the conversion of this officer and his wife during the officer's last hours of life. These two stories are followed by a series of other instances of professed conversions arising from the reading of tracts.

⁸⁰ Cox. page 78.

⁸¹ Green. page 129.

⁸² Green. pages 201 – 204.

Perhaps the most fascinating of these stories is the following. “Dr. Griffith John writes from Central China, ‘One of the brightest Christians we have is a man who was brought to Christ through reading our Tracts’; and another missionary from the same region gives an interesting account of a country farmer, about fifty years of age, who, coming into possession, with other books, of the Christian treatise called *The Trimestrial Classic*, set himself to learn it by heart, and thence, with his wife, proceeded to worship as best they could, until an old Bible-woman, the first Christian they had ever seen, found them, and led them into further light. Shortly afterwards they were baptized, and a Church of eight members, with many earnest enquirers, now exists in their native village as the result, by God’s blessing, of that one little book.”⁸³

Green says “Facts like these come continually to light and indicate much more [than] can ever be known on earth.”

We have already seen that two Appendices of the *Annual Report* for 1853 contained seventy-nine pages of “spiritual returns” applying to letters received at the depository in the twelve months previous, in that year alone. And these would be simply a selection from amongst many others, no doubt chosen to reflect the range of letters that were received. So, when we consider what would have been in each and every one of the other *Annual Reports* as well, we can see at least some of the spiritual results of the work of the Religious Tract Society in the Middle Period.

Just one example will be provided here. The R.T.S. received a copy of the Thirty-third Report of the Orange Street and West London Religious Tract Society. After enumerating the many tracts which had been distributed in their area, they provided a few instances of the results which their members saw and reported.

“One pleasing instance of the usefulness of the tract *The Swearer’s Prayer*, has come under my notice. A few months since, on my way to the district, my attention was arrested by a group of idle youths, using the most profane and filthy language. When I reached them I offered a tract to each, which was received with great respect; but one appeared more interested than the others, and when I returned from my visitation I found him waiting for me. He had read the tract. It appeared that the Spirit of God had sealed it home to his heart; he told me something of his early history, and inward desire to leave his bad companions and lead a more steady life. It was my happiness to know that soon after he obtained employment and has conducted himself well. He has purchased several articles of clothing from his earnings, and now attends Divine worship every Sunday evening. And when I pass the spot where I first met with him and his sinful associates, my ears are not saluted with the sound of his voice uniting in oaths and curses, but I usually find him reading the tracts or the Bible to his aged mother.”⁸⁴

We ought to add that the tract *The Swearer’s Prayer*, figured in reports about the conversion of people in this R.T.S. *Annual Report* on several occasions.

Similarly, we must remember that conversions would have occurred amongst the children, and interest in spiritual matters would have been engendered in many of them, through the writings of Mrs. O. F. Walton and Miss Hesba Stretton, and through other books similar to the ones written by them, many of which were published by the R.T.S.

⁸³ Ibid. page 203.

⁸⁴ R.T.S. *Annual Report* for 1853. Appendix 2, page 12.

The extensive link that existed between the R.T.S. and many Sunday Schools no doubt contributed to this. The R.T.S. was one of the main sources of Sunday school prizes, in England.

THE THIRD PERIOD – AFTER 1900.

Sources of Information.

At this stage of the story we are past the period covered by William Jones's writings, and by Samuel Green's book written for the Centenary. While we still have several sources telling us about the juvenile literature, and the scientific publications, we must now rely almost totally upon the *Annual Reports* for information about the more spiritual side of the work, upon Gordon Hewitt's brief book, and a few other minor sources.

After the Floodtide.

“Over the course of the nineteenth century, the Religious Tract Society grew from a small organization into a large, modern trading charity. Its story is one of an expanding sphere of operations, from industrial Britain, to Europe and North America, , to the entire world. In the early days the Society's officers had a fairly limited conception of their British market as made up of ‘people like us’, and ‘the working classes in need of conversion.’ By the end of the century, the range of products available amply illustrates that the Society had become aware of the diverse needs of audiences which differed by class, by age, and by gender, as well as by native language. In developing its extensive range of products, the R.T.S. was responding to the changing circumstances in which it operated. It had begun at a time when cheap print was virtually unknown, and literacy levels were poor among the working classes. It could only survive in the increasingly competitive market for cheap print after mid-century by adapting to the competition, and to the changing expectations of its audiences.”⁸⁵

The peak of the history of the Religious Tract Society was reached, perhaps, late in the 1880s. The main problems were the increasing secularization of society, and a very steep increase in the competition of other publishing houses which tried to make money from producing books and periodicals which had been pioneered by the R.T.S., and which previously the R.T.S had possessed almost without challenge.

Although the British book trade expanded steadily through the 1890s, and until the First World War, the Religious Tract Society began to have difficulties during this period, which led ultimately to a time of retrenchment and reorganization.

Hewitt says that the decline of Evangelicalism was observable as early as 1875. Evangelicalism was still “the dominant influence in the morals and religious attitudes of the people from the Court downwards; the Moody and Sankey mission of 1875 gave it for a time new strength and vitality, but the growing commercial prosperity, which had provided its social opportunity, was now beginning to tell against it. The Prince of Wales and his set were not the only ones who were beginning to find the Victorian sabbath irksome. When the state's museums and art galleries in London were opened to the public on Sundays in 1896 it was in answer to a popular demand. Rationalism and ‘free-

⁸⁵ Aileen Fyfe, in Butts and Garrett. page 32.

thought' had been making steady, if inconspicuous, progress, and the new education acts from 1870 onwards gave it impetus. Elementary education, which had previously been a religious preserve, was forced by the squabbles of Churchmen and Dissenters to attempt a denominational neutrality, which too easily sank into religious indifference."⁸⁶

The inner strength of Evangelicalism was also in question. "Lord Shaftesbury, the greatest of its lay figures, as early as 1869 was complaining of 'the coldness and insincerity of the bulk of Evangelicals, their disunion and their separation in place and action'; and a leading article in *The Times* of January 31, 1879, described "the Evangelical party, once so powerful and triumphant' as wearing 'somewhat of the aspect of one of those seaports from which the sea has long since ebbed away.'"⁸⁷

Hewitt says that education was not the only cause of division. Nonconformists began fighting against an established church "which could no longer claim to be a nation at prayer." Spurgeon, and others, had said that the very nominal Anglicans ought to withdraw from church membership, and that hypocrisy was embedded in the idea that the children of such people were regenerate, when they were baptized. The higher criticism of the Bible, and the rising Tractarian movement created other opponents against which the Evangelicals had to fight. The Roman Catholic Church was also growing, and becoming more settled in Britain.

The Religious Tract Society reflected all these trends. After 1884, and up to the turn of the Century, there was a sharp decline in its production and sales figures, and consequently in the amount of money which the R.T.S. could spend on its overseas operations.

The R.T.S. responded to the upsurge of secularism by providing prizes for voluntary examinations in Bible knowledge, and by publishing the *Boy's Own Paper*, and the *Girl's Own Paper*, with "an implicit Christian basis."⁸⁸ We have noted that these papers were enormously successful for several decades. Hewitt quotes Harvey Darton, who said that Hutchison, the first real editor of the *Boy's Own Paper*, "perhaps had a stronger indirect influence on English boyhood than any man of his time. He was an ideal editor; unobtrusive... thorough, determined without dogmatism, always alive and keen and, not a necessary corollary, equably sane. Only those who know the inner workings of any sort of periodical can understand what such a character in the editor meant. It was not a number of lively, competing voices, and it was not a committee meeting of moralists. Its well-rounded policy amounted to a strong compost of varied manliness and naturalness."⁸⁹

In the Third Period, from 1900 to, say, 1950, naturally enough, many changes took place.

The *Leisure Hour* was discontinued in 1906. In 1908, Charles Peters, the editor of the *Girl's Own Paper*, retired, and was replaced by Flora Klickmann, and the title was changed to the *Girl's Own Paper and Woman's Magazine*, to reflect the fact that they were also now catering for somewhat older women.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Hewitt. page 59.

⁸⁷ Ibid. page 60.

⁸⁸ Hewitt. pages 61 – 62.

⁸⁹ Ibid. page 63.

⁹⁰ Ibid. page 76.

George Hutchison retired from being editor of the *BOP* in 1912, and died in 1913. In order to appreciate the value of his contribution, Hewitt quoted the words of Dr. W. G. Grace about the *BOP*, “I remember what boys’ journals were like in the old days and how they changed within a few years of its appearance into imitations of it, more or less, though they never caught its distinctive tone.”⁹¹

The First World War gave the R.T.S. great opportunities to serve, and to spread their publications, but during the War the costs of production rose steeply, and there were problems in getting supplies. Twenty of the employees enlisted, and, more sadly, nine of them did not return.

In 1929, a special Golden Jubilee Luncheon was arranged to celebrate fifty years of the *Boy’s Own Paper*. The main speaker was the Prime Minister, Mr. Stanley Baldwin, who had long been a supporter of the paper. He proposed the toast, and was photographed reading the current issue as he walked over Westminster Bridge.

A major piece of reorganization occurred in 1932 when the Religious Tract Society changed its trading name to Lutterworth Press. This name began to be used on some of the R.T.S. publications, and the change became complete in 1941, when the new name was used on all of the publications.⁹² One reason for this change was that the word “tract” had changed its meaning over time, and the word no longer conveyed to people the meaning of what was the main agenda of the Society in Britain. So far as I can tell, the Lutterworth Press represented the publishing arm of the Society in Britain, and should not be confused with the Religious Tract Society itself.

In 1935, the R.T.S. merged all of its overseas tract activities with two of the other major tract organizations with which it had worked for so long. The Christian Literature Society for India had been formed in 1858, and later had been expanded to include Africa. The Christian Literature Society for China had been formed in 1887. In 1935, therefore, these three societies were merged, and became known as the United Society for Christian Literature (USCL). The Chinese organization had a more complex previous history, originally existing as four different societies. One had served Central China, one served North China, and two had served East China. A West China society had also existed, and later it disbanded in favour of the new arrangement.⁹³

The Second World War had a much greater impact on the R.T.S. Rationing of materials became a very great problem, and substantial taxes were imposed on books and periodicals. While none of the staff members who enlisted were killed, on the night of May 10 – 11, 1941, the London headquarters, and the main London warehouse, were totally destroyed in the last of the fire-bombing air-raids. There had been a partial move out of the city beforehand, but the loss of books in these fires was very great. The staff struggled to keep up their production schedule, and did remarkably well. The main publication which was discontinued during the War was *The Sunday at Home*, which had provided Christians with Sunday reading for ninety years. It had been greatly loved and valued by many people.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Ibid. page 63.

⁹² Hewitt. page 77.

⁹³ Adrian Brink. “The Lutterworth Bicentenary: The Publisher’s View”. in Butts and Garrett, page 200, see also Hewitt. pages 90 – 91.

⁹⁴ Hewitt. page 79.

Major changes were also taking place in the cultural features of British society, and in the overseas countries. In 1957, the girls' periodicals were all terminated, and the same fate befell the *Boy's Own Paper* in 1966. The various educational institutions which had used R.T.S. publications so extensively also changed their nature, and changed what they spent their slender financial resources upon.

In 1984, the financial situation of Lutterworth Press had become so parlous that the Committee of USCL decided to sell it, and it was bought by Mr. Adrian Brink, who continued it as a going business, although this, too, has had a problematic history.

Authors for the Children's Literature in the Third Period.

Naturally enough, the authors which had entertained, taught and served the children in the late Nineteenth Century grew old and died. Hesba Stretton died in 1911, and Mrs. O. F. Walton died at a great age in 1939. The same fate befell Kingston, Conan Doyle and G. A. Henty.

Butts says that the doyen of the authors for boys in the 1920s was George E. Rochester. Between 1926 and 1934 he wrote several serials about a young hero names "The Black Beetle." These were flying stories. Another writer who provided very popular articles about various aspects of flying was Captain W. E. Johns. Johns also provided stories about his famous hero "Biggles," which were published in the *BOP*, and were enormously successful. Other authors before the Second World War included Percy Westerman, with stories of the sea, and S. T. James's stories of the railways.

There were also many articles on aspects of sports of almost every kind. One of the most noted authors who wrote articles about soccer was the dribbling wizard, Stanley Matthews.

W. E. Johns continued writing for the *BOP* after the War, and many of his famous "Biggles" titles appeared first as serials in the *BOP*. Other post-war authors included some of C. S. Forrester's "Hornblower" stories, and thrillers by Ralph Hammond – better known as the author Hammond Innes.

Amongst the authors whose stories appeared in the *Girl's Own Paper*, or whose books for girls appeared separately, were Evelyn Everett-Green, Mrs. George de Horne Vaisey, Mabel Winifred Knowles, Dorothy Dennison, Mrs. A. C. Osborn Hann, Elsie Jeanette Oxenham, Phyliss Matthewman and Marjorie Phillips. During the Second World War, however, W. E. Johns also contributed to literature for girls with his books about "Worrals," and these also appeared first in the *GOP*.⁹⁵

Adult Non-fiction Publications.

Throughout what we have called the Third Period, the Religious Tract Society, and then Lutterworth Press, continued to publish many books. For example, in the latter years of his life, Samuel Green produced a *Handbook of Old Testament Hebrew*, and also a *Handbook of Church History*. These were later revised by Canon L. E. Elliott-Binns. In 1907, there began a series of *Devotional Bible Commentaries* to which well-known evangelicals contributed. In 1915 there appeared the *Universal Bible Dictionary*; in 1916 a new edition of Young's *Analytical Concordance*, and in 1930 a thoroughly revised edition of Cruden's *Concordance of the Bible*.

⁹⁵ Hilary Clare and Sue Sims. "Twentieth Century Secular Publishing for Girls". in Butts and Garrett. pages 173 – 198.

The *Devotional Bible Commentaries*, mentioned above, were certainly not “Critical” commentaries. They did not raise, take seriously, or answer, any of the destructive issues which the higher critics of the Bible had pursued. Nor did they primarily explore the deeper meanings of Hebrew and Greek words. To some degree, they explored the exegesis of passages, but their main aim was to describe how these passages related to the daily spiritual experience of Christian believers in the early Twentieth Century. So, they were commentaries which an average believer could read, understand, and profit from. The underlying theology assumed to be true was that of English Evangelical Protestantism at the time, which took Bible passages at their face value, and interpreted them according to principles similar to those used by the English Puritans. So, the authors were not chosen for their academic expertise, although the value of this was not denied, but for the insights into the experience of the Christian life of the average Christian which they could illuminate. The authors included men like the Revs F. B. Meyer, W. H. Griffith Thomas, H. Elvet Lewis, and Bishop Handley Moule. For example, Thomas contributed a three-volume commentary on the book of Genesis, and three volumes on Romans. Meyer contributed two volumes on Exodus, and a volume on Philippians. Moule’s contribution was on Second Timothy. H. Elvet Lewis, historian of the Welsh Revival, wrote the commentary on the book of the prophet Jeremiah. At least 48 volumes were eventually published, A5-sized and with about 350 or 400 pages each.

In 1932 there commenced a new theological series called *The Lutterworth Library*. The series included Emil Brunner’s famous book *The Mediator*, and Olive Wyon contributed well to this series with more of her translations of Brunner’s German material. Eventually 35 volumes were produced, including some important missionary works.⁹⁶

Support for Overseas Missionary Work.

This aspect of the R.T.S. work continued to be supported as extensively as was possible in this third period. As already noted, the money which could be afforded to spend in this direction declined in the early years of the Twentieth Century, and War situations would have made things worse in many different ways. Also it should be noted that the British Empire was changing its nature. Colonialism was dying, and Nationalism was taking the form of independence for many of the world’s former colonies. This steadily changed the character of what could be done by all of the mission organizations, including the R.T.S. The Annual Reports continued to portray some of the details of this work, and it indicated the extent of it which was carried out, despite the difficulties.

In the early days, the war with France had made it difficult for any overseas missionary work to be done by the R.T.S., but this was slowly overcome, and branch offices were slowly created in a number of the European cities. In some European cities and countries, Roman Catholic persecution of Protestants continued, often making open colportage work and open tract distribution impossible, and making the opening of storerooms and offices impossible as well. Nevertheless, there continued a heavy emphasis by the R.T.S. in helping mission work in Europe as much as was possible. By the end of the Nineteenth Century the emphasis was slowly changing in the direction of India and China, instead of Europe. Despite this, the R.T.S. supported mission work in

⁹⁶ Hewitt. page 75.

every part of the world, at least to some extent. This trend towards India and China came to a culmination in the union of the R.T.S. and the other Societies to form the UCLS, which was noted above. This literature work continues in various forms until today.

A Final Look at “Spiritual Returns.”

Brief comments about “spiritual returns” have appeared in various books and sources throughout the research that I have done in order to set out the history that has been written here. Generally speaking, these have been noted at the time.

A study of the subject of “spiritual returns” is severely limited because I have only managed to find, purchase and study four volumes from amongst all of the R.T.S. *Annual Reports*, so far. There is also the obvious difficulty that the original R.T.S. correspondence was largely or totally destroyed in the London Blitz.

Regarding this third period, especially during the first half of the Twentieth Century, I have examined the *Annual Reports* for 1912 and 1914.

The *Annual Report for 1912* begins with several pages of advertisements of various mission organizations in England, and basic information about the Society, and there is an address from the Committee members. All this happens before page one. Page one begins a 12 page abstract of the Report. Page 13 to page 80 presents an account, detailed at times, of the work in European and Mediterranean countries. Then follows 32 pages on the work in India, China and Japan, This is followed again by tiny reports relating to Korea, Africa, North and South America, and Oceania. From this it is possible to see where the emphasis lay. Pages 121 to 190 contain the report of home operations, giving some details about the varied forms of work, reports from the various country district branches of the R.T.S., financial statements, lists of the 273 languages in which the R.T.S. now publishes materials, and an Index. There is no special section for “spiritual returns,” but various bits of news of this kind are scattered right through the book.

For example, one of the English societies which the R.T.S. supplied was the Christian Colportage Society. Under this heading, the *Annual Report* says that during the year 375,000 tracts had been given freely to this Society, with half of the costs (fifty pounds) coming from the Cocker Fund. The Christian Colportage Society had 115 colporteurs using these tracts. The Secretary of this Society wrote: “Incidents of blessing through tracts formed quite a feature of the Colporteurs’ Meeting, and I am only sorry I cannot send you all the cases mentioned. It has been cheering to hear at our meetings generally how greatly the tracts have been blessed in leading men and women to Christ, and in cheering and strengthening many faint-hearted Christians. I think I can say that I have not attended, as deputation, any of our district meetings during the past year without hearing of some definite case of conversion through the tracts given.”

One example the Secretary provided was “A tract, *The Five Alls*, has been the means of the conversion of a working-man in my district, and he now attends the means of grace on week-days as well as on the Lord’s Day.” Seven pages of examples are given from this Society.⁹⁷ The London City Mission provided six pages of other examples, and there were other shorter reports. Letters of appreciation were also presented very briefly relating to several of the R.T.S. magazines.

⁹⁷ *Annual Report for 1912*. pages 126 – 134.

One of the London City missionaries was in the habit of leaving copies of the magazine *The Cottager* in a certain beer-house. "...as I was speaking to a man, [the beer-house keeper] called me into a private room, and told me of a similar man who had borrowed a *Cottager*, which the landlord placed on a bar after reading it. He missed his customer for about three days; at the end of that time he returned to give the paper back, but stopped the landlord who was about to draw his usual drink.

'No, I don't have that,' he cried, 'I'll have ginger beer.' 'Why, what's the matter?' 'Oh! that paper hasn't 'arf shown me up, and I'm going to have no more of it!'

'That man, sir, has never been in my house since, and though it is against my business, I am glad; for he, like the man you were speaking to, drank too freely, and I don't want to feel I am ruining homes for the sake of profit. Your paper is always looked for.'"⁹⁸

From the overseas reports, one example only, from many others, will be given. This one comes from Japan. In some cities, Industrial Exhibitions were organized by the local authorities, and Christian missionaries and their helpers would try to distribute tracts at these events. However, the main problem was getting the tracts. In this case, the R.T.S. made grants to the Japan Book and Tract Society. From the Exhibition in the city of Tsuchiura, the report came back. "We had the tent work for five days and distributed the 20,000 tracts that the Tract Society granted us. There were about 10,000 visitors to the Exhibition each day and our workers estimate that altogether at least 6,000 entered the tent and heard the Gospel message. They secured over 400 signatures and addresses of people who wish to learn more of Christianity. Most of these are in the neighbourhood of Tsuchiura."⁹⁹

The *Annual Report* for 1914 is similar in layout to the 1912 volume, and with almost the same number of pages. Both volumes contain interesting photographic illustrations. An even greater number of "returns" came in from the London City Mission, and from the Christian Colportage Society, and from individual tract distributors. The other normal societies also contributed as usual. Another whole range of "spiritual returns" could be reproduced here.

Conclusion.

When we ask the question, therefore, "What of Spiritual Returns?" we can truthfully say that there were many positive spiritual results flowing from the work of the Religious Tract Society, which showed themselves in a variety of ways.

Perhaps a more appropriate question would be to ask "Why does the sub-heading at the beginning of this paper call what has been written **a preliminary survey**? Why is this paper a preliminary look at the spiritual impact of the work of the R.T.S., as well as a preliminary look at its history as a whole? While more history can be found in some of the titles which have been used as resources in writing this paper, there is so much of the history of the R.T.S. that has not been properly explored, that it is only proper to call this paper "preliminary," and even to say that all of the history that has been written so far, in all of the books consulted, is also only preliminary.

Part of the answer to this question requires us to notice again the lop-sided nature of historical research into the history of the Religious Tract Society. We noticed that this

⁹⁸ Ibid. pages 124 – 125.

⁹⁹ Ibid. page 109.

research has centred mainly on children's literature and writings about science, which, while important in their own way, represent only a relatively small part of what the R.T.S. was on about. Of course, historians have often shied away from trying to evaluate matters of the mind, and have been even more frightened of trying to cope with matters of the spirit. As a result, much secular history is able to evaluate only matters which are superficial, and cannot plumb the motives of the people involved. Especially this is so if the motives are religious.

Part of the answer is that I was only able to secure FOUR of the *Annual Reports* covering the years from 1800 to 1935, or more. This reinforces in our minds that many of the relevant documents are not available to me, for one reason or another.

Another part of the answer is seen in the fact that the overseas activities of the Religious Tract Society have never been researched properly by an historian. If this research was done, **I believe there is a good probability we would find that there was much greater social, cultural, political, and spiritual value and importance in the overseas work of the Society than in the Society's work in the British Isles.** This question would involve a consideration of the whole impact of Western civilization upon colonial countries, and upon the rest of the world, and the role that Christian missionaries played in this impact. This question involves all of the cultural and social repercussions of mission work upon the countries where the mission work was done, and events in international politics and diplomacy of all kinds, including the history of colonialism and mercantilism. It would involve looking carefully at the impact of the Protestant revival movements upon these countries, and also considering both the negative and positive reactions to the West.

It is the author's belief that the spiritual factors are ultimately more valuable and important than most other factors which receive a great deal of attention from ordinary people, and from historians. Not only is this true theologically, so far as the Kingdom of God is concerned. The spiritual factors are basic features in every world-view held by individuals, including all those world-views which have such determining influences upon human society. So, spiritual factors are of vital importance for the welfare of human society. Spiritual factors are also vitally important for an historian, if he or she is to understand the people about whom the historian writes. Historians who ignore this aspect do not understand the people they are studying, and are betraying these people they are trying to represent to the present world.

The result is that we have only just started to study the Religious Tract Society. And the same can be said about very much else of Christian work, including the way it has impacted upon the world generally, and upon the individuals who live in it.

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