WORK FOR THE BLIND IN CHINA:

SHOWING

How Blind Beggars may be transformed into useful Scripture Readers.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "WANDERINGS IN CHINA," "AT HOME IN FIJI," ETC.

"The people that sat in Darkness have seen a Great Light."

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MISSION TO THE 500,000 BLIND OF CHINA.

"I will bring the Blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make Darkness LIGHT before them, and crooked things straight."—ISAIAH xlii. 16.

NEVER in all the ages that have elapsed since these words of promise were spoken, have they been more literally and strikingly fulfilled than in this latter half of the nineteenth century, in that very remarkable work, by which the Rev. W. H. Murray hopes not only to bring Light and Life to the great multitude of Blind in China, but also to transform a considerable number of his students into active Missionary Agents, as Scripture Readers, and Singers of Sacred Song, such as invariably attract an attentive audience in China, as in most other countries.

Mr. Murray's work has only just come to the surface sufficiently to claim public recognition. Hitherto the little acorn which he has planted has been quietly germinating in the heart of the Chinese capital, known only to a handful of poor blind men, and scarcely recognized even by the little group of foreign residents in that great city; and though there is every prospect that it will assuredly develop into a wide-spreading tree of
healing and of knowledge, destined to overshadow the whole land with its beneficent influence, it is as yet but a feeble sapling, whose growth, humanly speaking, depends on the fostering care of the Christian public.

Only those who have attempted to master the excruciating difficulties of any of the numerous dialects of Chinese, or the terrible array of intricate written characters which the weary eye must transfer to memory ere it is possible to read the simplest book, can fully appreciate the boon which has been conferred on the legion of the blind in China, by means of the patient ingenuity of a Scotch working-man.

The calling to Mission-work of the benefactor who has been enabled in so wonderful a sense to open the eyes of the blind, reminds me of one of the Bible stories, of how often, when God selected men for special work, He summoned them from the plough, from the care of their flocks, from their fishing, mending their nets, or tent-making. And One Who was Lord of all, consecrated all honest work, by choosing to receive His early human training in the carpenter’s shop.

William Murray (who was born at Port Dundas, near Glasgow—the only son in a family of ten children) would, in the natural course of events, have adopted the profession of a saw-miller, but for an accident by which, when about nine years of age, while too fearlessly examining the machinery, he lost his left arm, and was thus disabled—an apparent calamity which was the first link in that chain of events leading up to a discovery
Work for the Blind in China.

which, if properly developed, may prove an incalculable boon to millions yet unborn in the Celestial Empire.

So rude a check to his love of machinery doubtless led to greater diligence in his school studies, and so soon as the lad was able to work for his living, he obtained employment as a rural letter-carrier in the neighbourhood of Glasgow. In this, however, the subject of Sunday work proved a serious difficulty, which he solved by giving up two shillings a week of his scanty wages in order to be freed from an obligation against which his conscience revolted. His sacrifice, however, bore good fruit, for the earnest remonstrances of this young postman proved the commencement of that wide-spread movement which has secured so large a measure of Sabbatical rest for his comrades in the service of the Post Office.

His own longing was to obtain employment in some form of Mission Work, and again and again he applied to the National Bible Society of Scotland. But though greatly attracted by the lad, the Secretary feared that one apparently so very simple and unassuming, would fail to prove a successful Colporteur, and, having given up the secure services of the Post Office, might be thrown, literally single-handed, on the world.

But, as the same Secretary now says, "What could he do against a man who was praying himself into the service of the Society?" For (though he knew nothing of this at that time) the young postman confided to him later, how he divided his long daily walk into three parts, and as he tramped along the
monotonous road he beguiled a third of the distance by the study of the Holy Scriptures in the original Hebrew; the second beat was devoted to the Greek Testament; while the last section was reserved for daily prayer that God would vouchsafe to employ him in direct missionary work, and that from carrying Queen Victoria's Royal Mail, he might be promoted to become one of the Messengers of the Great King in carrying His glad tidings to some far-distant heathen land.

At last, when in 1864 he renewed his application to the National Bible Society, his services were accepted, and he was commissioned to commence work among the ships congregated on the Clyde, and very soon the Society discovered that "it had never had such a Colporteur" as the gentle being who made his way among the sailors of all nations, readily acquiring such scraps of divers tongues as enabled him to effect more sales of the Holy Scriptures in foreign languages than had been accomplished by any of his predecessors. And yet (like another who, more than three thousand years ago, was called from the care of his father-in-law's flock to accomplish a great work) in his own mother tongue he is "not eloquent, but slow of speech."

This work amongst sailors was reserved for the winter months. In summer he was sent round wild districts in the Scotch Highlands, pushing his Bible-cart along many a lonely track of bleak moorland,— a task which, on hilly roads, must often have needed all the strength of this willing but only one-
armed colporteur, who all the time was longing to be employed in carrying the Word of Life to those to whom it was yet unknown.

I wonder whether in those years of probation, he often found encouragement in the thought of how only a hundred years ago, William Marsham, bookseller’s apprentice, sat down wearily in Westminster Abbey, grieving at the prospect of spending his life in carrying heavy book parcels, while Carey, the Baptist cobbler, was being snubbed by the assembled ministers for presuming to suggest the duty of commencing Foreign Missions! Yet notwithstanding all the drawbacks of general inertia, and the fewness of the workers, look at the results to-day of the work begun jointly by the bookseller’s apprentice and the poor cobbler!

Perhaps Murray remembered how seventy years ago Morrison began Mission work in China, alone and despised, having to wait fourteen years ere he baptized his first convert. To-day, 100,000 in that great empire own allegiance to his Master, and of these about 20,000 are habitual communicants in connection with one or other of the Protestant Missions.

Doubtless, too, Murray’s thoughts sometimes pictured the solitary Wesleyan missionary who fifty years ago landed on one of the cannibal Fijian Isles, in imminent peril of his life. To-day, not alone in the 200 isles of that fair Archipelago, but throughout the beautiful groups which stud the South Pacific, not a trace of old heathenism remains. Or his thoughts may
have travelled to Livingstone, the Glasgow cotton-piecer, and to scores of other humble human agents, and from one and all he would gather the same lesson of earnest care in doing the very best for the work now committed to each one of us—no matter how trivial it may seem, assured that it must be the best preparation for whatever else we may be destined to accomplish.

Ere long, Murray's remarkable aptitude for languages attracted the notice of some of the Directors of his Society. He was accordingly permitted to attend classes at the Old College in the High Street (a friend helping him to pay his fees), provided his studies nowise interfered with his regular work. All day long, therefore, through the gloomy Glasgow winters he stood in the streets beside his Bible waggon, hurrying back to his lodgings for a hasty supper; then studying till 9 o'clock, and rising daily at 3 a.m. on the chill wintry mornings in order to prepare for his classes at College from 8 till 10 a.m., at which hour he began a new day's work of street bookselling.

At length his seven years' apprenticeship as a home colporteur were fulfilled, and in 1871 he obtained his heart's desire, and sailed for China, where it was arranged that he should remain six months at Chefoo, engaged in the bewildering task of learning to recognize at sight the 4000 intricate characters by which the Chinese language is represented on paper.

The same aptitude for mastering crabbed symbols which
had facilitated his study of Greek and Hebrew, enabled this
diligent student to acquire about 2000 Chinese characters in
four months, when he started on his first pioneer journey to
visit a city about 250 miles in the interior of the Province of
Shang-tu. He invented a rude litter slung between four mules,
as the most convenient method of carrying his books, and thus
made his way safely along precipitous mountain roads, facing
bitter cold, and many difficulties, but sustained through all
discouragements by occasional gleams of great promise.

But it is not my purpose to enlarge on Mr. Murray’s many
and varied experiences during sixteen years of incessant work
as a colporteur in various provinces of China, as also on his
more adventurous expeditions into Manchuria and Mongolia,
though these are full of stirring human interest, by no means
lacking in quaint incident. Imagine travelling all day by
difficult paths, crossing dangerous rivers, and facing all manner
of perils, to find oneself at night glad to seek shelter in a
wretched so-called inn, which proves to be little better than a
miserable shed, wherein mules and men seek shelter together
from the pitiless storm, where the scanty food is of the coarsest
and most repellant to the foreign palate, and where the traveller,
blinded by the dense smoke which pervades the house, is
guided to the only “reserved” sleeping berth—the post of
honour—which proves to be the coffin which the host is
carefully cherishing for his own eventual use—the filial and
most acceptable gift of his dutiful sons!
Work for the Blind in China.

As regards work, Mr. Murray has sometimes had to face the discouragement and danger of waiting till riotous and antagonistic mobs grew weary of their own discourtesy to the gentle foreign teacher.

On one occasion, after he had thus patiently endured weeks of annoyance without effecting a single sale, the fickle folk suddenly veered round, and clamoured for the foreign "Classic of Jesus;" so that he could scarcely produce copies fast enough, and when evening came, he found he had sold 3000 books! After this the people in that city became so friendly that they would not hear of his leaving them, so he remained there for six months; his knowledge of machinery and of shipping details proving an unfailing source of interest to the crowds who thronged him; and it is almost needless to add that the influence thus acquired was invariably used as a means to edge in the subject which ever filled his heart.

Since his arrival in China he has sold upwards of 100,000 copies and portions of the Holy Scriptures in the Chinese and Tartar languages. Many of these have been purchased at great fairs by merchants and influential men from remote districts, and some copies have even found access within the sacred precincts of the jealously guarded Imperial Palace. Truly, were this the sole result of Mr. Murray's accident, it would have proved no trifling gain to his fellow-men.

But interesting as are all efforts for imparting spiritual light to those into whose hearts it has not yet shined, the work
which is so emphatically Mr. Murray's own peculiar Gift, is that of enlightening those who are also physically blind. One of the first things which deeply impressed him (as it must impress every traveller who looks around him in the densely crowded streets of Chinese cities) was the extraordinary number of blind men who mingle in every crowd, some going about alone, or guided by a child; others in gangs of eight or ten, each guided by the man in front of him, while the leader feels his way with a long stick—a most literal illustration of the blind leading the blind. A gentleman assured me that he had on one occasion seen no less than 600 miserable blind beggars all assembled to share a gratuitous distribution of rice!

This very large proportion of blindness is due to several causes, such as leprosy, small-pox, neglected ophthalmia, and general dirt, to which, in great tracts of North China, we must add the stifling dust and smoke caused by the lack of ordinary fuel, which leads the people, all through the long, parching summer, to cut every blade of sun-dried grass, and turf sods, to heat their ovens. This produces a dense smoke, which penetrates to every corner of the houses, causing the eyes to smart most painfully.

Now when you consider the size of the vast Chinese Empire as compared with our little England (which is barely the size of the smallest of the Eighteen Provinces, and not a third of the size of the larger ones), and recollect that in our favoured land, where the ravages of small-pox and ophthalmia are so
effectually kept in check, there are nearly 40,000 blind persons, to say nothing of the multitudes whose sight is seriously defective, and when you come to think that, although there is only provision for about 3000 in asylums, yet it is very exceptional to see even one blind person in England, you can readily understand that when we roughly estimate the blind of China at 500,000 (that is to say, an average of one in 600, supposing the population not to exceed 300,000,000), we are probably very far below the mark.

Many of these blind men and women are simply most miserable beggars, hungry and almost naked, lying on the dusty highway and clamouring for alms, or else yelling frightful songs in most discordant chorus, to an accompaniment of clanging cymbals, beating small gongs or clacking wooden clappers, producing such a din that the deafened bystanders gladly pay the infinitesimal coin which induces them to move on. A considerable number earn their living as fortune-tellers, and play dismally on flutes to attract attention. These men carry a board with movable pieces something like draughts, each marked by a symbol, by means of which they pretend to foretell lucky days, and answer all manner of questions. Thus for unnumbered centuries have the blind legions of China dragged through their darkened, dreary lives, a burden to themselves and to all around them.

And yet blindness seems to be the only form of human suffering for which the average Chinaman feels a certain
moderate degree of pity. Few are so utterly debased as to rob a sightless man, and such are generally addressed by a title of respect, as Hsien-Shêng, i.e. Teacher, although the adult blind are, as a class, about the most disreputable members of the community—so bad that even a hopeful soul like their friend Mr. Murray is compelled to admit that the majority appear incorrigible; and, indeed, the night-refuge where they chiefly congregate in Peking bears so vile a character, that Mr. Murray himself has never ventured to cross its threshold.

All his hopes, therefore, rest on training young lads, and so far as possible isolating them from their seniors; for those he fears that comparatively little can be done, but by taking boys in hand as early as possible—some as young as seven years of age—he has good hope that (as spotless paper may be evolved from foulest rags) so from this, the worst class of the people, he may rescue many, who, under careful training, may not only attain undreamt-of gladness for themselves, but may also be made the means of incalculable good to their fellow-countrymen—truly a bright star of hope now rising on their gloomy horizon.

Of course, in this sweeping classification of the adult blind, there is room for many bright exceptions, and, indeed, the first thing which attracted Mr. Murray’s attention to the present work was the fact that amongst the crowds who (with true Chinese reverence for all written characters) pressed forward to purchase the copies or portions of Holy Scripture which he offered for sale at a very cheap rate, many blind men came,
likewise desiring to purchase the "Christian classics;" and when he asked why they wanted a book which they could not see to read, they replied that they would keep it, and that perhaps friends who could read would sometimes let them hear it. Then he would tell them how, in Europe, the blind are taught to read and even to write; but this they never could believe, for he seemed to them as one that mocked, so utterly incredible did it appear that any one should learn to read with his fingers.

But the more he saw, the more grievous did it appear that absolutely nothing was done for those darkened lives by any Christian Agency known in Peking, and he began to plead their cause amongst the missionaries of various nations, whom he could reach. These, however, very naturally replied, "We Christian missionaries of all Protestant denominations put together, are in the proportion of one to one million of the population. How can we undertake any additional work? Perhaps in the next generation, if there are ten times as many missionaries, and ten times the funds now available, something may be done for the Blind of China."

Still, as he went about his daily task, mingling with ever-changing crowds, in scorching summer and freezing winter, this thought was never absent from his mind. Failing to awaken human sympathy, his soul was the more ceaselessly absorbed in prayer that some means might be revealed to him whereby he might help these poor neglected sufferers.
Ere leaving Scotland he had mastered Professor Melville Bell’s system of Visible Speech for the instruction of the deaf (which he found so greatly facilitated his own study of the very difficult language, that he has prepared a pamphlet on the subject, for the use of all foreign students). It occurred to him that this might be adapted to the use of the blind, his first idea being to reduce all Chinese sounds to symbolic forms. He went so far as to have these made in clay and baked, so that they could be handled. From these, some blind pupils have learnt to read; amongst others who have been thus taught is a deaf mute. But this system was cumbersome and unsatisfactory—all the more so, as it occurred to the teacher that as the Chinese adore their own written hieroglyphic characters, they would probably render divine honour to these clay symbols!

Moreover, during his residence in Glasgow, his interest had been so deeply aroused by seeing blind persons coming to purchase books prepared for their use, that he had set himself to master both Moon’s system of embossed alphabetic symbols, and also Braille’s system of embossed dots. Now he ceaselessly revolved in his own mind whether it might be possible to adapt one or other of these to the bewildering intricacies of the Chinese language, with all its perplexing “Tones,” which by an almost inappreciable difference of pronunciation, cause one word to convey a dozen different meanings. Of the difficulty of the task proposed, some idea may be formed from the fact
that in order to read such a book as the Bible, in Chinese ordinary type, the student, instead of mastering twenty-four letters of the alphabet, must learn to recognize at sight no less than four thousand distinct and crabbed characters—a task which generally requires about six years of study! Even to read the Chinese equivalent of Jack the Giant-Killer involves a perfect knowledge of 1200 characters!

Such was the perplexing problem with which this would-be benefactor of the blind wrestled apparently without result, till one day, he tells us, that wearied with a long morning's work, he had lain down to rest awhile during the noon-day heat, and with closed eyes lay as if asleep, when suddenly, as clearly as he now sees one of his stereotyped books, he saw outspread before him the whole system which he has since then so patiently and ingeniously worked out, and, moreover, at once perceived with thankful joy, that by this system Chinese sounds could be rendered so accurately, that whereas to a sighted person learning to read or write Chinese by the ordinary method, it is the most bewildering of all languages, it would by this means become one of the easiest to acquire.

In this Vision (or Revelation as he believes it to have been—an opinion which I think few Christians will gainsay) he perceived that as the Chinese know nothing of alphabetic symbols, he must discard all attempts to produce any alphabetic system, but must make use of numerals, by which to represent the 408 distinct syllables which he found to be sufficient to suggest all
the sounds of the language, in place of the 4000 characters used in ordinary Chinese type. To represent these numerals, he decided that instead of using figures, he must substitute mnemonic letters, e.g. T or D for 1, N to represent 2, M for 3, R for 4, L for 5, Sh for 6, K for 7, F or V for 8, P or B for 9, S for 0. Furthermore he contrived that every Chinese word, no matter what its length, should be represented by only three symbols—units, tens, and hundreds, and for these he has arranged embossed dots grouped on Braille's system, which he adopted in preference to Moon's alphabetic system, the latter not being adapted for writing, or to represent music, which is one of the most marked features in Mr. Murray's system of training.

If all this sounds utterly incomprehensible to the reader, I can only try to console him by remarking that it is equally so to myself; but daily experience now proves it to be so extraordinarily simple to the Chinese intelligence, that any blind man or lad of average intelligence, can thoroughly acquire the arts of both reading and writing within two months, and a sharp lad can do this in six weeks.

It must not be inferred that Mr. Murray's Vision at once brought him "to the desired haven" in regard to its practical application. But the Inspiration thus received was as a chart by which he was enabled carefully to work his way through a thousand perplexities—a labour of love to which he devoted every hour that he could steal from sleep or rest, through eight
long years. For deeming himself bound to devote every moment of the day to direct work for the Bible Society, it was only after "business hours" that he allowed himself to work out the details of this, his special interest.

At last he so far arranged his system that he determined to try whether it could be acquired by a poor old blind man, "Mr. Wang," who was crippled with rheumatism, and like to die of want. He provided the old man with such creature comforts as ensured a quiet mind, and then with the aid of a native colporteur commenced teaching him, and soon, to the unspeakable joy of both pupil and teacher, the poor rheumatic fingers learned to discriminate the dots, and the blind man was able to read the Holy Word for himself.

Just then a blind man, upwards of forty years of age, was brought to the medical missionary, having been severely kicked by a mule which he had inadvertently approached, his long guiding stick passing between its legs. This man was induced to beguile the hours of suffering by the study of the new system. He proved an apt pupil, and within two months could read well, though his finger-tips were roughened by age and work.

The next pupil was a poor lad who had become blind, and who having no one to provide for him, had literally been thrown on to a dung-heap and there left to die. He was found by a man who had known his father, and said he was a good man, and that it was a pity to leave the lad to perish; so having heard of the foreign bookseller's extraordinary care for
the blind, he actually resolved to risk the expense of hiring a cart, and brought the poor starving boy to Mr. Murray's lodgings, begging him to try and save him. Three months of careful nursing, with good food and needful drugs, restored him to health, and he soon was overjoyed by finding himself able to acquire the honoured arts of reading and writing.

Mr. Murray next selected a poor little orphan blind beggar, whom he often observed lying almost naked in the streets in the bitter cold of winter, but who, notwithstanding his loneliness and poverty, always seemed cheerful and content, and who, moreover, had the special recommendation of being free from all taint of leprosy. He took this lad in hand, washed and clothed him, and undertook to feed and lodge him, provided he would apply himself in earnest to mastering this new learning. Naturally, the boy was delighted, and we can imagine his ecstasy, and the thankful gladness of his teacher, when within six weeks he was able, not only to read fluently, but to write with remarkable accuracy—better, indeed, than many sighted Chinamen can do after studying the ordinary method for upwards of twenty years! This simpler writing is also far more rapid—a good pupil being able to write on an average twenty-two words per minute.

It was at this stage that, in the course of my aimless wanderings, I chanced to visit Peking, and there made acquaintance with Mr. Murray and these first-fruits of his teaching (truly salvage from the slums of Peking); and it struck me as intensely
pathetic, as we stood at the door of a dark room—for it was night, but that made no difference to these blind readers—to hear what I knew to be words of Holy Scripture, read by men who, less than four months previously, sat begging in the streets in misery and rags, on the verge of starvation, now full of delight in their newly acquired power.

During the eight years which have elapsed since then, Mr. Murray has continued to work on, almost unknown, elaborating the details of his system, and training as many pupils as he could feed and teach. But the work has hitherto been crippled for lack of time and of funds, its development having been limited to what could be accomplished by the continual self-denial of the Working-man to whom it owes its existence. Not only, as I have already said, was he bound to devote all his hours of recognized work to bookselling and street-preaching, but he has also all along taxed his slender salary to the very utmost, in order to provide board, lodging, and raiment for his indigent blind students. (For even a frugal Chinaman cannot be respectably clothed and fed for less than £10 a year.) And yet when one poor helpless lad after another seemed thrown upon his hands, he felt that it was impossible to reject those so manifestly entrusted to his care, and so the modest income supposed to suffice for one man, has been made to feed and clothe a dozen.

Very touching is the story of most of these poor waifs. For instance, having resolved to adopt a blind lad who came to
his door begging, Mr. Murray visited the wretched parents in their miserable home, where the father lay suffering tortures from rheumatic fever, and the only other child was also blind. Soon afterwards the father died, and the mother brought her second boy to commit him to the care of this good friend. But in giving her two sons the parting kiss, the poor bereaved creature sank to the ground in an agony of tears and lay prostrate, weeping bitterly for two hours; her grief appealing so intensely to the sympathy of the other blind lads and men, that all united in a chorus of sobs and tears. So deeply were the neighbours touched, that notwithstanding their own deep poverty, they raised a small subscription, to help her on her journey to a distant friend; the blind lads adding the few cash which they had received as presents.

One of the most satisfactory pupils in the school is one of two brothers, aged twelve and fourteen, who came to Mr. Murray’s door on their first begging tour, having already travelled 150 miles from their native town, where both parents had died of fever. The elder brother, whose sight was good, said he could work, and earn enough to keep himself, but could not provide for two without having recourse to begging, from which he shrank; so he entreated Mr. Murray to take charge of his brother, promising to return ere long, to ascertain whether he was found capable of learning. But, evidently fearing lest the blind lad should be returned to his care, the elder brother did not return for two years, by which time the bright little fellow
had proved himself an eminently satisfactory scholar, the best hand at stereotyping, and most reliable in all departments of work; having moreover, so marked a talent for music, that he has since then become organist in the Chapel of the London Mission. When the elder brother returned, Mr. Murray took him into the school, and without speaking a word placed his hand in that of the younger, who instantly recognized the touch; the two stood speechless for a moment, then tears began to flow, and he retired, leaving the two together to talk over their varied experiences.

It must not, however, be supposed that all the pupils turn out as satisfactory as these. Sad to say, the very first boy taught, whose prospects seemed so hopeful, was tempted, just for one day, to rejoin his former associates that he might display his various attainments. He was decoyed away by a wandering blind minstrel, and though, after a while, he returned to his benefactor expressing much contrition, and was once more received into the school, he was found to have suffered such complete moral shipwreck, that for the sake of the others, his expulsion became necessary—a very bitter sorrow to the patient friend who had so rejoiced over his early promise.

Of course, tidings of the wonderful gift thus conferred on a chosen few, have brought others who, being able to maintain themselves, have come as self-supporting pupils. Thus one blind man arrived who had travelled 300 miles to put himself under Mr. Murray's tuition. Another came who was found to
be endowed with talents which seemed so specially to fit him for the ministry, that he has been transferred to an institution at Tien-Tsin where candidates are prepared for Holy Orders. Another very encouraging pupil is a young man who lost his sight when he was about twenty. He rapidly acquired the blind system of reading and writing, and then set to work to stereotype an embossed Gospel of St. Matthew in classical Mandarin Chinese, which is the lingua franca understood by all educated men throughout the Empire.

But the colloquial language of the illiterate people varies in every Province, and the dialects spoken between Canton and Peking are so different as to necessitate the publication of, at least, eight different translations of the Bible, for the use of sighted persons. Hence it is evident that all these must be reduced to the dot system ere the blind beggars of the Central and Southern Provinces can share the privilege already open to those of North China, so far as to possess in stereotype five books of the Bible and some small books on sacred subjects; also a considerable number of music books.

The Peking School also possesses many other books in manuscript, and both these, and those stereotyped for the use of all fellow-sufferers, will rapidly increase; for Mr. Murray has taught his pupils to do everything for themselves in the preparation of their books, even to the stereotyping, which by a very ingenious mechanical contrivance of his own invention,
they are able to do so rapidly, and with such accuracy, that any one of these lads can with ease prepare considerably more work than three men in England will turn out in the same time, and will also do it more accurately, and at a far cheaper rate; and, of course, as long as such lads are students, they gratefully work for their keep. A London workman endowed with sight considers three pages of stereotyping to be a good day's work. A Chinese blind lad will easily produce ten pages a day.*

I think we could not have a better illustration of the wonderful laws of compensation, than this proof of the additional sensitiveness imparted to the finger-tips of the blind. Certainly amongst sighted persons, few of the most delicate hands possess so keen a sense of touch as to be able with closed eyes to follow even a line in primers prepared for English blind readers.

Another compensating circumstance is that the blind seem almost invariably to be endowed with a marked faculty for music, and though, when left to themselves, they naturally indulge in the horrible caterwauling which passes for music in the Celestial Empire, they very easily acquire European tunes, and not only pick up a new air very rapidly, but remember it accurately—a very important qualification for all engaged in pioneer Mission-work, in which the value of singing,

* See in Appendix, Mr. Murray's own description of the method he has devised to facilitate this part of the work.
as the handmaid of preaching, is being more and more fully recognized in all parts of the world. *

Now here is another marked advantage of Mr. Murray’s ingenious adaptation of Braille’s system. So marvellously does it lend itself to the representation of sound, that he has found no difficulty in thereby expressing all musical notes, and terms in the study of harmony, which indeed had already been done in Europe, where a considerable musical literature therein has been prepared for the blind of various nations.

The students in the humble school at Peking now write out musical scores from dictation with wonderful accuracy; their writing-frames and paper being adjusted, all wait with style in hand, ready to begin, and in about fifteen minutes they produce a perfect score, perhaps one of Sankey’s hymns with all its parts. Then, with great pleasure to themselves they pick out the tunes on the piano, harmonium, or organ,—beginners being taught by having the embossed symbol pasted on to each note; so then each student reads the

* So fully is this the case in regard to America’s Foreign Missions, that the New England Conservatory of Music at Boston now invites all who are studying for Mission-work to accept its teaching free of charge, that they may not only have the opportunity of studying Church and chorus music, and sight-singing, and may be instructed in piano and reed-organ tuning, but may also acquire such a knowledge of the fundamental principles of harmony, as may enable them to arrange native music, and write the accompanying parts;—in short, that they may be taught how to teach others both vocally and instrumentally. This musical training is now offered, because experience has proved that much of the deadness and apathy in many Missions has been due to its neglect, whereas the most successful Missions have invariably been those in which singing was largely employed.
written score with one hand, while with the other he finds out the notes.

Having thus mastered the tunes, the blind organist and choir sing their Christian lyrics in the chapel, which is open to all comers; and when a good congregation has assembled, attracted by the music, one of the students, who is a very gifted scholar, addresses the people, and at the close of his exhortation, recommends them to purchase a copy of the Holy Book, that they may study it for themselves; and at the close of the day the sales by the blind lad are often found to have been larger than those of the Bible Society's authorized agent. Indeed, it is said to be largely owing to his preaching and singing that it has been found necessary to pull down the old chapel and build a much larger one.

No wonder that to their countrymen it should appear little short of miraculous that blind beggars should be thus cared for by foreigners, and endowed with apparently supernatural powers—indeed, had it not been that Mr. Murray had so thoroughly won the confidence of the people by his constant intercourse with them while Bible-selling in the streets, they would assuredly have attributed the whole work to magic, and thus irreparable harm would have been done. As it was, many even of the adult Christians found it so incomprehensible that, for awhile, they deemed this reading with finger-tips to be accomplished by clever jugglery—a sort of sleight of hand.

For this reason, Mr. Murray does not consider that it would
be expedient for him altogether to give up the bookselling and street-preaching by which he keeps on such friendly terms with the ever-changing crowds; but it certainly is very desirable that this uniquely gifted man should henceforth be enabled to devote half his time exclusively to the development of the work, which assuredly has been so specially committed to him. Hitherto, as we have seen, this patient toiler has only deemed himself entitled to work for the blind in hours stolen from the night, often after long days of hard travel, exposed to scorching summer sun, or freezing wintry blasts.

Surely such a story as this may well incite many to prove their interest by some act of self-denial, which may enable them to help so earnest a worker. (For we all know how very apt we are to limit our giving-power to such a sum as we can spare without involving much self-denial!)

Would that some who read these lines would consider for a moment what life would be to themselves were they deprived of gifts so precious as SIGHT and LIGHT, and would each resolve to present for this branch of God’s work such a sum as he shall really miss—not taken from the total of his accustomed offerings, but as a Special Thank-offering for these precious gifts—a portion of that money-talent which we know we only hold in trust, as we so often need to remind ourselves when we say, “Both riches and honour come of THEE, and of Thine own do we give THEE.”
The unprecedented depression now affecting all classes in Great Britain has also told grievously on the income of a multitude of charitable institutions, so that in their chorus of pathetic appeals, this low cry from China has called forth an utterly inadequate response. Little over £2000 have as yet been received, where ten times that sum could be so profitably laid out; for assuredly no Mission-field is more certain ere long to yield fruit an hundred-fold than this Chinese Empire; and I know of no Agency which is more surely destined to work among the masses, as an ever-spreading leaven of all good, than this training of Blind Scripture Readers, who year by year may be sent forth from this school to read the Sacred Message in the streets of Peking and other great centres of heathenism, holding forth to others the Light which has gladdened their own lives.

From the singular reverence of the Chinese for all written characters, and for those who can read them, it is evident that a blind reader there occupies a very different position from that of the men whom we are accustomed to see in our own streets. Furthermore, in no other country have so many converts attributed the conviction which has induced them to face all the persecution that almost invariably follows the renunciation of idolatry, solely to their solitary study of some copy of the Scriptures which has casually fallen into their hands. Hence it is obvious, that as assistant colporteurs, blind Scripture Readers may prove most valuable agents in spreading the knowledge of Christian Truth.
This New Mission will certainly appeal, as no other has yet done, to two of the strongest characteristics of China's millions, namely, *their reverence for pure benevolence, and their veneration for the power of reading.* To see foreigners undertaking such a work of love for the destitute blind, will go far towards dispelling prejudice against Christians and their Master, and will prepare the way for the workers of all Christian Missions.

It is hoped that all the principal Christian Missions may send agents—either Europeans, or carefully selected Chinese converts—to be trained by Mr. Murray, that they may carry his system to every existing Mission Station. One such *sighted* Head-Teacher in each district could there found a Blind School, and train Chinese Scripture Readers, and thus the work may be ceaselessly extended in every direction, till it overspreads the whole vast Empire like a network.

Probably the very strongest point in favour of this Mission, is its bearing on the admission of Christian influence into the dreary homes wherein about 150,000,000 Chinese women, of all ages, live their monotonous lives in strict seclusion. Some of these patriarchal households number from 60 to 100 women, ranging from great-grandmothers down to their female slaves, and including the wives, widows, and other relations of father, sons, grandsons, and uncles. Of course, with the exception of the very few foreign ladies who have been able to make themselves acceptable to their Chinese sisters, no direct missionary
influence can possibly find entrance within these jealously guarded homes.

But Chinese women are quite as intelligent as those of other lands, and though very few can read even their own dull books, and much of their time is occupied in gossip, the care of their clothes, and ceaseless offerings of food and other gifts on the household altars, either to the gods or to their own ancestors, they can grasp a new idea, and ponder over it, and if it commends itself to them, they hold it with surprising tenacity, and endeavour to impress it on their neighbours. Hence it is that the staunch Chinese converts, both men and women, so frequently become active witnesses for the Truth.

Now it is evident that each blind woman who can be taught to read the Holy Scriptures, will readily obtain access to some of these secluded homes, where she will certainly be a centre of unbounded interest, and may become a living power. Sooner or later, her words will impress many, and thus the truth will make its way insensibly amongst the mothers who exercise such life-long influence over their sons—an influence now bitterly antagonistic to Christianity, on account of its enmity to that worship and propitiation of the dead (Ancestral Worship) which is the main principle of Chinese life.* It is a big and

* In my Wanderings in China (published by Blackwood), I have given very full details of this extraordinary system of religion, and of the manner in which it permeates every phase of Chinese life; also of some points of deep interest in the working of various Christian Missions, and I venture to ask all who are interested in the subject to refer to these chapters.
powerful giant; but as weak things of the earth are so often chosen to confound the mighty, there is good reason to believe that these humble blind readers are destined to prove powerful agents in the fight, and in undermining this citadel.

As yet, owing to Chinese prejudice on this subject, Mr. Murray has only been allowed to teach one blind woman, namely, a handsome newly-married girl of eighteen, who had lost her sight shortly before her marriage. Her betrothed, however, proved faithful, and brought her to Mr. Murray's care, and in a few months she mastered the mysteries of reading, writing, and music, to her great joy. In this case both bride and bridegroom are Christians, and received their education at the American Mission. Hence the husband's consent to the wife's being taught by Mr. Murray.

Now, however, that the latter has returned to China as a married man, he hopes that the teaching of blind women will become easier, and that European and American ladies may be induced to study his system, and thus endeavour to obtain access to their sisters who so literally "sit in darkness."

Mr. Murray's brief visit to Scotland has been marked by another important change in his lot. In the course of some of his Bible-selling expeditions in remote districts, he has on several occasions been visited by unmistakably genuine converts, who had become so, solely from reading the written Word, perhaps accompanied by some teaching from another convert. These have come to him, asking for Christian baptism, although
fully realizing all the persecution that would probably ensue. It was most painful to have to explain to such earnest seekers that he was not qualified to bestow the Gift they desired, especially as it was more than probable that they might never again come in contact with any foreign missionary. Mr. Murray therefore resolved that on his return to Scotland he would ascertain whether any branch of the Christian Church could dispense with the usual lengthy course of Theological Training, and grant him Ordination after less than a year of special study. Finding that the United Presbyterian College in Edinburgh might possibly do so, he entered himself as a Divinity Student, and absorbed himself in the close study of Theology, Greek, and Hebrew, as a pleasant relaxation from the various Chinese and Tartar dialects in which he has been steeped for the last sixteen years.

It is pleasant to learn that the merits of this earnest student were so fully recognized, that eminent representatives of the three Battalions of the Presbyterian Regiment took part in his Ordination, the venerable Dr. Andrew Bonar of the Free Church, and the Rev. Dr. T. Elder Cumming of the Established Church, having gladly accepted the invitation of the United Presbyterian Synod to assist in the service, which was held in Berkeley Street Church, Glasgow, on the evening of the 23rd June, 1887.

Now it only remains for me to say that practical evidence of sympathy, in the form of donations in aid of this very promising
Mission, will be gladly welcomed by William J. Slowan, Esq., Secretary of the National Bible Society of Scotland, 224, West George Street, Glasgow, Scotland.

The Bible Society does not recognize that the preparation of the Holy Scriptures for the use of successive generations of this vast multitude of darkened lives, lies within its own province. It has, however, agreed to pay a small annual sum towards the expense of preparing and printing stereotype plates for the use of the blind, and a special effort has been made in the last year to raise an independent fund in aid of Mr. Murray's work, and several influential members of the Bible Society have agreed to act as trustees for this promising Mission, which has thus secured a recognized official position.

I would earnestly entreat all who have already helped it, not to allow their interest in the subject to flag, but on the contrary, to do all in their power to awaken that of others. For though I am fully convinced that this Blind Agency is destined to do a very great work in China, it is as yet only a Baby-Giant, and stands greatly in need of the care of as many foster-mothers as possible—(in the way of collectors).

As yet, all we have succeeded in raising, is a sum sufficient to enable us to purchase the School premises in Peking, which have hitherto been rented for the use of the Blind Students, and further to guarantee an annual payment of £75 towards Mr. Murray's salary, that the Bible Society may set him free to devote half his time exclusively to preparing the Holy Scriptures
and other books for the use of the blind, and otherwise developing his system.

This was the primary necessity; so we have still to look to the public for all the needful funds for maintenance of indigent students and other desirable and—from a Mission point of view—remunerative outlay.
Murray's System for Teaching the Blind of China.

By the Rev. W. H. Murray,

School for the Blind, Peking.

The plan that would most naturally commend itself to one wishing to teach the blind, would be to adopt phonetic spelling. I found, however, that "numeral" spelling was greatly to be preferred.

Chinese, as a spoken language, may be reduced to 408 syllables. Now I take a representative written hieroglyphic of each of these 408 syllables, and for my own convenience, place them in alphabetic order in a horizontal line. The Chinese know nothing of alphabetics.

Then in a line running parallel above that line of representative sounds, I write its equivalent in numerals; but instead of figures I use mnemonic letters, viz. T or D represents 1, N stands for 2, M is 3, R is 4, L stands for 5, Sh is 6, K is 7, F or V means 8, P or B is 9, and S stands for 0.

Then, as the Chinese have no alphabet, I choose simple syllables, as Ti for simple T or D, Ni or No for Q, &c. Therefore the two lines run thus:

Ti  Ni  Mi  Rhi  Li :—mnemonics.
Gna  Gnai  Gnan  Gnang  Gnao :—Chinese.
Shih Kei Fei Pei Tze:—mnemonics.
Cha C’ha Chai C’hai Chan:—Chinese.

EXPLANATION.

These are the first ten mnemonic words, Chinese equivalents that stand for the numbers, and written in a large character, begin the sentence, which, according to the custom of ordinary Chinese books, is written perpendicularly, and is read from top to bottom.

The under line represents ten of the 408 Chinese syllables, and these also in a larger character than the intermediary ones, are at the bottom, and finish the sentence. Thus: TI, shih, shuan, tsai, t’ien, shang, che, hua, shih, nan, hsin, GNA.

There are thus 408 simple sentences, and the pupil is required to commit these to memory, and thenceforth to write the one, and read it as the other. This he does like a chain of events, and in a very short time, at the rate of about twenty sentences in a day. This is, in fact, his spelling lesson. I know that this description must appear complicated, but in daily practice it is found to be quite the reverse.

The superiority of this method over “spelling” is immense. As an example of its advantages I would instance the Chinese word “C’huang Q” = a bed. It would require eight letters to spell this word, but by this plan I only need three, i.e. units, tens, and hundreds. There are no spaces or contractions to be a burden to the memory.
Then we only require ten numerals for our "alphabet." But I saw the advantage of employing the other letters thus: namely, using the deep letters, as K, L, M, N, in four sets of four to stand in the first space to represent the hundreds, and by that means they would answer a double purpose, namely, indicate also to which of the four "tones" the word belongs, each having a choice of four letters for each of the 408 sounds.

Let the sound and the number of its tone be indicated along with its aspirate, which is thus—C'huang Q, and be understood to be the hundredth in the order of the syllabary; and as regards the four "Tones" to belong in that sense (i.e. a bed) to the second. The letters K, L, M, N equal 100, and in that order indicate the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, or 4th Tone. Then LOO equals C'huang Q. A person acquainted with the Braille alphabet will perceive that as only three letters are thus required, the L takes top, middle and lowest points, while the first line of Braille, which supplies tens and units, has only top and middle points, and consequently the word has always one deep letter, and two hollow, making a wedge-like form: Hence there is no need to separate the words in writing, and thus all space between words is saved, which of itself is no small gain, and at the same time greatly simplifies the fingering to the reader.

When time, material, expense, storage, and porterage are considered, it will be seen how important are all these points, which tend to reduce the inevitable bulk of books for the
blind. The fact of each word being represented by three letters, and having thus a definite length and somewhat triangular form, is a great advantage in stereotyping.

It occurred to me that I could simplify the process of stereotyping, so instead of holding the punch in one hand, and having only the tip of the little finger to guide, while the other hand holds the mallet, I designed a table with a lever at one side, and a mallet to work by a treadle,—the mallet always to strike the centre of the table, and squared off the plain, over which the block would have to describe. The treadle is of course worked by foot, and with side woods, the width of two words, and woods the width of a double line, which exactly correspond in size with the latter; for the guide in shifting the block upwards in the plain of the fixed mallet, as the other, the side woods keep the position sideways; the stereotyper moves these as he finishes two words at a time, the top piece, at the finishing of the double line, is taken from the top, and pushing up the block, he puts that wood at the next foot, and then the block is in proper position for striking the next, and is firm and fast in its position.

Thus, the right hand, which would otherwise have had to hold the mallet, is left free to handle the manuscript, and to relieve the tip of the little finger, and take to guiding. Now, with us the process is so simplified that the operator can pell-mell with great speed and pleasure.

The advantage will appear best in the results, when I tell
you that the boy can do with ease in one day what would take
three men and one-third in England to do in the same time.
So what a sighted man would take twelve months to do, my
blind boy will do in three months, and the quality of the work
is struck more perfectly.