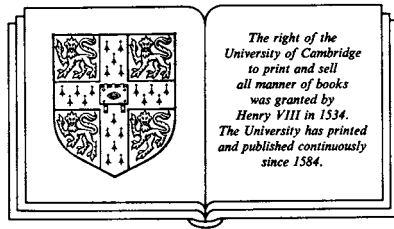


# CHEAP BIBLES

NINETEENTH-CENTURY PUBLISHING  
AND THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN  
BIBLE SOCIETY

LESLIE HOWSAM



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## 1 · SAINTS IN PUBLISHING

IN THE AUDIENCE CHAMBER AT WINDSOR CASTLE, the young Queen Victoria is making a formal presentation. She offers 'the Secret of England's Greatness' to the black man, perhaps an African prince, who kneels at her feet. He reaches up to accept her gift, a Bible. Both monarchs are magnificently dressed; so is the book, a quarto edition, thick and heavy, bound in fine leather and embellished with metal clasps. Prince Albert, Viscount Palmerston, Lord John Russell and a lady-in-waiting look on. The artist was T. Jones Barker: his work, painted about 1861 and now hanging in the National Portrait Gallery, is an icon of the cultural imperialism of the Victorian age. A gracious monarch offers the hope of salvation, accompanied by the promise of economic and political advancement. At the same time a moral rationale is suggested for Britain's pre-eminence in world trade and commerce. This painting (reproduced in figure 1) captures in a powerful way the 'Victorian cult of the Bible',<sup>1</sup> the popular obsession with scripture translation, with Bible format, and with the political potentialities inherent in the charitable distribution of scriptural texts.

It is not too fanciful to recast the Barker painting in terms of the social reality, rather than the Royal fiction. In place of the Queen might stand the large number of her subjects who were members of local Bible Societies, collecting funds for scriptures to be translated and distributed worldwide. The recipient has a double identity. He represents first the foreign heathen, slave and free, who were deemed to stand in need of immediate salvation. But the Society's objects were British as well as Foreign: the 'secret' is also conveyed to the English working class. The anonymous lady-in-waiting is a reminder that 'British ladies' were significantly involved in the great project. The Prince Consort and politicians, standing discreetly in the background, may be put in place of the Secretaries and officers of the Bible Society's London headquarters, the 'men at Earl Street' who managed both foreign and domestic Bible distribution. And the luxurious book becomes the plain, strongly bound cheap Bible circulated by the British and Foreign Bible Society.

The painting is a compelling example of the iconography of Bibles,<sup>2</sup> but by no means a reliable guide to the past. It portrays the Bible transaction in terms of a gift, not a purchase, and as a unique occurrence, not a continuous



Figure 1 Queen Victoria presenting a Bible in the Audience Chamber at Windsor, by T. Jones Barker c. 1861.

process: the relationship between giver and receiver is static, condescending, *de haut en bas*. But a static, merely charitable, Bible Society might well have failed. The BFBS 'secret' was its dynamic character. The London Committee recruited individuals experienced in commercial transactions of many kinds, as well as politicians, lawyers and diplomats. As new groups of professionals emerged and became a force in the larger society they were brought into the Bible Society. And in local Auxiliaries, large numbers of ordinary middle-class members – 37,500 by 1832 – created a way to involve the English poor in their own salvation, and even to make them pay for it, by inviting their participation in the mission to 'biblicize' the heathen.<sup>3</sup>

The dynamic nature of the BFBS can best be characterized as a 'Bible transaction', a complex set of relations that were commercial, personal, philanthropic and cultural. The transaction was inescapably commercial, based upon the purchase and resale of printed books. But its importance was characterized by contemporaries in terms that transcended the cash nexus. The Bible transaction was conceived as a personal relation, too, involving face-to-face encounters between people. Despite the commercial aspect, it



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was also philanthropic, because charitable funds underwrote the low retail prices that were charged to the Society's customers. Finally it was a cultural transaction, a medium through which the virtues of Protestant Christianity, as interpreted among the more prosperous classes of the British Isles, could be conveyed to less fortunate individuals, whether they lived at home in poverty or infidelity, or abroad in heathenism, or under the 'yoke of Rome'. This notion became identified as a mark of the British national character. Prevalent from the very beginning of the Society, the idea continued at least to mid-century. A pamphleteer of 1810 compared Britain to Napoleonic France:

What a glorious sight! – Great Britain standing in the attitude of presenting the Bible to all the world – contrasted with the tyrant of the continent wielding his bloody sword. – I confess I derive more hope of salvation to my country from Britannia in this posture, than from Britannia in her posture of *defence*, with her trident in her hand, and surrounded by fleets and armies. Let Britons only study, and practise, and circulate the Bible, and we have nothing to fear.<sup>4</sup>

The men and women of the British and Foreign Bible Society chose to direct their formidable energies towards the circulation of the Bible, in the expectation that study and practice would automatically follow.

The Bible Society, officially founded on 7 March 1804, was dedicated to the circulation of the scriptures, in foreign languages as well as in English, to readers who would otherwise have gone without. The founders of the BFBS were a committee of the Religious Tract Society, who first met on 7 December 1802 in the business premises of Joseph Hardcastle at Old Swan Stairs, on the north side of London Bridge. The Religious Tract Society (founded 1799) existed to produce attractive and improving reading materials for the newly literate working-class reader.<sup>5</sup> At the meeting, according to Bible Society legend, the Reverend Thomas Charles of Bala spoke about his experience in Wales, and told an affecting story. A little girl called Mary Jones wanted to have her own Bible in the Welsh language. Even when she saved the price of the book from her meagre earnings, and walked a great distance to make her purchase, there was no copy to be had. The story is said to have so strongly moved the Tract Society Secretary, Joseph Hughes, that he exclaimed: 'Surely a Society might be formed for the purpose; and if for Wales, why not also for the Empire and the world?'<sup>6</sup> Joseph Hughes was to become one of the first Secretaries of the BFBS, the Welsh edition was the first publishing project of the new Society, and a whole generation of children in evangelical households were told the story of Mary Jones and her Bible.<sup>7</sup>

Both the Bible Society and the earlier Tract Society were evangelical organizations, the projects of a group of people who believed passionately in the values of the New Testament and desired to disseminate those values very widely indeed. These were the politicians and philanthropists popularly called the 'Clapham saints', after the London suburb where many of them

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lived.<sup>8</sup> Under the leadership of people like William Wilberforce, the influential Member of Parliament who spearheaded the movement for the abolition of slavery, and the Thornton family of wealthy merchants who set records for philanthropic generosity, Clapham evangelicals organized and managed their campaigns for moral reform, the missionary societies and the Bible and Tract Societies which provided missionaries with the materials for conversion. Living in the aftermath of the Wesleyan revival of the eighteenth century, the leaders of this second historical stage of evangelicalism were 'pastors and organizers', who set for themselves the task 'to guide awakened and conscience-stricken people in the path of righteousness and to organize their resources for more efficient service to God and Man'.<sup>9</sup> Boyd Hilton, in *The Age of Atonement*, demonstrates in a powerful way how the doctrine of atonement for sins, national as well as personal, dominated the political and commercial lives of evangelicals, shaping their attitudes to social policy. Their charity was munificent, but it was doled out according to theories of expiation and regeneration. As Donna Andrew observes, 'the philanthropists of this period [the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries] seemed determined to use charity as an instrument of national regeneration'.<sup>10</sup> No plan seemed to them more appropriate for their purpose than the distribution of inexpensive editions of the scriptures. In the language of Barker's painting, the Bible was 'the secret of England's greatness', and its far-flung circulation would make up for the sins of England's past.

At RTS meetings through the winter of 1803, the Bible Society idea was developed and important patronage secured. William Wilberforce was present at one gathering, and wrote in his diary 'A few of us met together at Mr Hardcastle's counting house . . . on so dark a morning that we discussed by candle-light, while we resolved upon the establishment of the Bible Society.'<sup>11</sup> Joseph Hardcastle and his partner Joseph Reyner, cotton importers and shippers, were involved, along with William Alers Hankey, and Samuel Mills, who later drafted the constitution. Three future staff members of the Society were among the founders: Joseph Hughes and C. F. A. Steinkopf, both ordained ministers, were to become Secretaries, and Joseph Tarn would take over the paper work as Assistant Secretary. These people were motivated by dissatisfaction with the Bible publishing service provided by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. An exclusively Anglican organization untouched by the evangelical revival, the SPCK had been the customary source of Bibles for Anglicans, especially clergymen seeking copies of the scriptures for their charges. But a small edition of cheap Bibles in Welsh had been exhausted very quickly, and the SPCK saw no reason to rush any more into print. The Tract Society evangelicals, with their impatient energy, were unwilling to wait, and they were quite prepared to inaugurate an alternative source of supply. The new Society would soon be widely viewed as the chief rival of the SPCK, with the older Society symbolizing the

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values of the Anglican Establishment. An important early criticism of the BFBS on this ground was that of Herbert Marsh, Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, who campaigned in pamphlet and pulpit against the new Society, but finally had to admit defeat in 1813, saying that ‘when an institution is supported with all the fervour of religious enthusiasm . . . an attempt to oppose it, is like attempting to oppose a torrent of burning lava that issues from Etna or Vesuvius’.<sup>12</sup>

The most significant decision of the founders, and the reason for Marsh’s opposition, was their policy of including in the organization Dissenters from the Church of England, as well as members of the Anglican Establishment. Roger Martin, author of *Evangelicals United*, characterizes the trend as ‘pan-evangelicalism’, and shows how difficult it was for the Bible Society and others to achieve co-operation in the tense political atmosphere of the early nineteenth century. Dissenters were increasingly impatient with the limitations on their potential roles in politics and business. In 1811, for example, Lord Sidmouth presented a bill in Parliament to restrict nonconformist itinerant preaching, but it was defeated by a coalition of nonconformists and evangelical Anglican MPs, a circumstance that raised again the eighteenth-century cry of ‘the Church in danger’. High-Church Anglicans like Herbert Marsh believed that concessions to dissent constituted a threat to the privileges of Establishment. In 1815 and 1816 the pastoral charges of the Bishops of Lincoln, Chester, Carlisle and Ely all included opposition to the BFBS.<sup>13</sup> But for evangelical Anglicans, other concerns took priority. In Geoffrey Best’s words, they ‘sat loose to existing institutions and conventions in church and state’.<sup>14</sup> The last thing they wanted to see limited by denominational squabbles was the dissemination of the word of God.

The Society was officially instituted at a public meeting in the London Tavern, Bishopsgate on 7 March 1804, with Granville Sharp in the chair. In the course of the meeting officers were elected and the laws making up the Society’s constitution were agreed. The President and Treasurer headed a working Committee and its professional and clerical staff. John Shore, Lord Teignmouth, who served as President from 1804 to 1834, often said that his position with the BFBS meant more to him than his Governor-Generalship of India. He was no figurehead, even writing the annual *Reports* of the Society for the first few years.<sup>15</sup> Teignmouth was succeeded by Lord Bexley (the former Nicholas Vansittart) until 1851, and then by Anthony Ashley Cooper, Lord Ashley, who became Lord Shaftesbury shortly after his succession. The Presidents chaired annual meetings and many Committee meetings, and spoke for the Society when approaches were made to the government of the day. The Treasurers received and disbursed the funds of the Society, under the direction of the Subcommittee of Finance. Henry Thornton, who held this position until he died in 1815, was an authority on matters of finance, and lent his expertise to the Bible Society. In politics he was elected MP for

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Southwark in 1792 and supported Catholic emancipation. He wrote an important work on paper currency, and was an active member of the great banking house, Down, Thornton and Free. He was succeeded in 1815 by his nephew, John Thornton, who was to hold several senior Government offices in the course of a distinguished career.

From the beginning, the public response to the formation of a Society with the exclusive object of printing and distributing Bibles was very positive. Joseph Hughes wrote and published a prospectus for the proposed organization, and announcements were placed in metropolitan and provincial newspapers. One early letter advised, 'I have sent you by the bearer . . . £2 6s 6d the produce of some Rings earrings & other Jewels, sent me by some Female Friends who stripped themselves of them when they heard of your society for printing the Bible into all Languages, & have devoted them to the Lord. You may intimate it on the cover of the Evangelical Magazine.'<sup>16</sup> More conventional donations and subscriptions arrived, and it became clear that the Bible Society idea had touched a chord.

The 'fundamental principle' of the new Society was the distribution of the scriptures, *without note or comment*, a rule which the founders hoped would avoid doctrinal disputes by organizing Christians around their common acceptance of the canonical books of the Bible. Prefaces and explanatory notes, interpreting the text according to the doctrines of particular creeds or of individual theologians, were explicitly forbidden. The second basic rule was 'that the translation of the Scripture established by Public Authority, be the only one in the English language to be accepted by the Society'.<sup>17</sup> These deceptively simple principles were not unproblematic. The Book of Common Prayer, for example, was regarded as a legitimate set of notes designated by Parliament to foster interpretation of the scriptures. Even more contentious were the marginal notes traditionally appended to English-language scriptures by the authorized printers at the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford and by the King's Printer in London. These notes cross-referenced Old and New Testament events and linked up prophecies with their fulfilment; they had been part of the conventional notion of the Bible in Britain since 1762, but no one claimed they were canonical.<sup>18</sup> And the second rule, ensuring that only the Authorized or King James version would be permitted for domestic circulation, landed the new Society squarely in the lap of the three Presses permitted to print that version. Nor did these rules prevent controversy over versions in other languages: translators felt the need to explain concepts like 'lamb' that were unfamiliar to readers in countries without sheep. But as we shall see, when they began to try to translate 'baptism', with foreign words that meant, specifically, immersion or not, they were thrown into theological dispute.

The 'fundamental principle' of distribution without note or comment was based upon the premise that the BFBS was not a religious society. As Luke

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Howard, the Quaker chemist and meteorologist said, 'It is a society for furnishing the means of religion, but not a religious society.'<sup>19</sup> This was a crucial distinction. Denominational differences made it impossible for Dissenters and Anglicans to combine together in their religious characters to distribute the scriptures. The publication of notes and comments would have raised disagreements over interpretation. So the members met as lay persons, agreeing to disagree about doctrine. It was a distinction between content and process: the scriptures themselves were religious, of course, but the process of distribution had to be a commercial one, stripped of all religious trappings, if squabbles over doctrine were to be avoided.

Some critics, particularly Church of England stalwarts, found the notion of unsectarian distribution outrageous. It undermined the idea of one national church, established by royal and Parliamentary authority. One prolific High-Church critic of the Bible Society was Thomas Sykes, who styled himself 'A Country Clergyman'. Sykes believed that:

It is to be expected, that each member of your heterogeneous society, will draw his portion of books for the promotion of his particular opinion: for it is easily seen, that a Bible given away by a Papist, will be productive of popery. The Socinian will make his Bible speak, and spread Socinianism: while the Calvinist, the Baptist, and the Quaker, will teach the opinions peculiar to their sects. Supply these men with Bibles, (I speak as a true Churchman) and you supply them with arms against yourself.

But John Owen, by then the Anglican Secretary of the Society, responded, identifying himself as a Sub-Urban Clergyman:

The line of business is, with few exceptions, as direct at the Bible Committee as it is at Lloyd's; and there is as little reason to expect the peculiar tenets of Calvin or Socinius to enter into a debate for dispersing an edition of the Scriptures, as there would be if the same men were met to underwrite a policy of insurance.<sup>20</sup>

The tension between spiritual ends and commercial means, embedded in the constitution because of contemporary political realities, was to shape the policies of the Bible Society throughout the nineteenth century.

The Society was administered not by a single executive director but by three Secretaries, all ordained ministers. They were highly competent executives who guided the organization through the diplomatic difficulties of sectarian politics. Because of those difficulties there had to be one for the Church of England, one for Dissent, and a Foreign Secretary. It was their task, under the direction of the Committee, to manage a burgeoning publishing business, to remind the Society's subscribers of the fundamental principle of unsectarian distribution without note or comment, and to manage the public image of an organization that distributed Bibles, aggressively and worldwide, but was nevertheless not a religious society. Their primary responsibility was to handle the foreign and domestic correspondence of the Society. They attended all Committee meetings and many

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gatherings of Subcommittees. The Secretaries travelled for the Society, the Churchman and Dissenter within Great Britain attending local Auxiliary meetings and fostering the creation of new Auxiliaries, the Foreign Secretary abroad, forming a liaison with the Continental Bible Societies. Travel by coach and horseback was rigorous enough at home: abroad in wartime it was dangerous, potentially fatal. But as we shall see, the Secretaries made light of the physical and political strains entailed by their work. For each of them, it was a mission. In fact, for many years they were not paid for their work for the BFBS.

The Secretaries at the outset were John Owen, Joseph Hughes, and Carl Friedrich Adolph Steinkopf. These three were fancifully described in an 1892 memoir as ‘the head, and heart, and lungs of the Bible Society ... the eloquent Owen, the sagacious Hughes, the gentle and John-like Steinkopf’.<sup>21</sup> Owen came to the Society from his rectory of Paglesham in Essex. He served as Church of England Secretary through the difficult early years, and wrote the first history of the BFBS, at its tenth anniversary. He was described in Stoughton’s *Religion in England* as ‘a fervid, indefatigable man, with a pen almost too fluent ... the prince of platform speakers; a warm and steady friend’. Owen not only contributed several pamphlets to the controversies of the first two decades of the Society, but performed a valuable service by gathering and binding the contributions to both sides of these debates, producing a now very rare collection of pamphlets.<sup>22</sup>

Owen died in 1822 and was replaced by Andrew Brandram, whose recruitment marked the beginning of salaries (£300 per year each) for the Secretaries. He was characterized by Stoughton as ‘a clergyman of robust constitution and character, of commanding presence, frank in manners, and full of platform power’. George Borrow, in his book *The Romany Rye*, has a character describe Brandram as ‘a big, burly parson, with the face of a lion, the voice of a buffalo, and a fist like a sledge-hammer’. Stoughton added later that

To eminence in learning, he conjoined a masculine mind, an uncompromising spirit, active habits, strong affections, and devoted piety. I think I see him now, with the appearance of a country gentleman, portly in figure, honest in countenance, with a loose coat, a large hat, a thick neckcloth, and a bag of papers in his hands, entering a committee room before the commencement of a meeting, with an open hand to return friendly grasps, given by friends waiting for his arrival.<sup>23</sup>

The personality and business style of this highly competent executive, vividly sketched by his admirers, becomes evident in the pages below.

The first Dissenting Secretary was the ‘sagacious’ Joseph Hughes, who ministered to a Baptist congregation at Battersea. He was Secretary of both the Bible Society and the Religious Tract Society for over thirty years, until his death in 1835. Hughes was educated at Aberdeen University; he tutored at the Baptist College in Bristol, then moved to Battersea where he was friendly with Clapham evangelicals. The Rev. George Browne, minister of

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the Independent congregation at Clapham, succeeded Hughes. Stoughton noticed that it was the Dissenter Browne who resembled a dignitary of the Church. Unlike his colleague Andrew Brandram, Browne was 'careful in dress, polished in manner, gentle in disposition', and Stoughton continued, he was 'a good man, a diligent worker, respected by everybody'.<sup>24</sup>

C. F. A. Steinkopf came from Württemberg in South Germany to London in 1801 as pastor to the German Lutheran Church in the London district of the Savoy. At the foundation of the BFBS he was twenty-eight years old, 'handsome, winning, eloquent, and eager to enter into the furtherance of every religious enterprise'.<sup>25</sup> He travelled widely for the Society, even while England was at war on the European continent. Born in Ludwigsburg in Germany and educated at the Evangelical Theological Seminary at Tübingen, Steinkopf was in 1795 appointed Secretary of the German Christian Society in Basle, *Deutsche Christentumsgesellschaft*, which was a network of German-speaking religious and pietistic societies stretching across Germany and Switzerland into Denmark.<sup>26</sup> For a time simultaneously Foreign Secretary of the BFBS, the London Missionary Society and the RTS, Steinkopf remained involved with the Society until he died in 1859, though he resigned his office in 1826.<sup>27</sup> No one replaced Steinkopf as Foreign Secretary. By the 1830s, matters of editing and translation were of crucial importance while contact with European societies was greatly diminished. Four years after Steinkopf's retirement the BFBS engaged an Editorial Superintendent, William Greenfield, to supervise the production of translated texts. Greenfield died almost immediately and in 1831 the redoubtable Joseph Jowett, rector of Silk Willoughby in Lincolnshire, took his place. A relative of Benjamin Jowett of Balliol College in Oxford, Jowett was a competent scholar. Brandram said this of his colleague: 'He is one of the best advisors. His judgment is sound, and he has admirable tact in expressing himself clearly on difficult subjects.'<sup>28</sup>

At the beginning, the Secretaries were assisted by only two staff, a clerk and a collector/accountant. The responsibility for the great mass of business correspondence, and the handling of relationships with suppliers of publishing services, fell upon Joseph Tarn, the Assistant Secretary. He was a Calvinistic Methodist, who had been a member of the Tract Society committee that formed the Bible Society. Tarn had to resign a situation in Ironmongers' Hall, where he had worked for Thomas Pellatt, a solicitor who was an active member of the Committee. From 1804 until his death in 1837 Tarn was Assistant Secretary. He became Accountant also in 1810, because – as we shall see – the first accountant, Thomas Smith, had to be sacked. A letter from Tarn to the Committee on this occasion shows how his work escalated during the first years. Tarn told the Committee that the dual arrangement would be sensible as a good deal of money passed through his hands already. The new system, however, required that his primary office of Assistant

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Secretary be rearranged. In 1804, he wrote, it had been 'a pleasant occupation of leisure hours'; by 1807 the job had extended to consume an average of two hours per day. During 1809 it occupied more time than the business of his office in the City. He had to hire another person to copy letters and minutes into the record books. Committee meetings were so busy that he could not write proper minutes, but had merely to enter items briefly, then 'sit down later with the letters & frame them so as to embrace the substance of the correspondence'. Tarn estimated that the work was equal to the superintendence of a large mercantile concern.<sup>29</sup>

The increasing complexity that the Secretaries and their staff had to handle may be charted in their dealings with their first Collector/Accountant, Thomas Smith, a merchant of Little Moorfields. His position must have seemed straightforward in the early days: he had only to receive the subscriptions of wealthy supporters, enter the amount in his book, and turn the cash over to the Society's Treasurer. He also kept the stock of Bibles on his own premises, and sent them out to subscribers. For this he received a commission of 5 per cent. But even before Auxiliary societies and Bible Associations began to burgeon, the mere bulk of the transactions became overwhelming. The minutes of the Subcommittee of Auditors tell the tale, interspersed with increasingly harried letters from Smith to Tarn: 'I am again in the vortex of perplexity in the want of English *Brevier Testaments* and *Welsh Bibles*. Can you help me?' Before long Smith was feeling aggrieved. He said he was willing to accommodate the Committee because of their mission, but that 'otherwise, considering their recent conduct, after having most ardently devoted my self to their cause, I have reason enough to have terminated my vassalage abruptly months ago'.<sup>30</sup>

The Subcommittee tried to relieve the pressure on their staff by arranging that Leonard Benton Seeley become their official bookseller. Smith complained that 'The present arrangements with the Bookseller, believe me, I am thankful for, but the manner in which it has been done, would have disgraced the character of worldly men, acting upon worldly principles to accomplish a worldly project.'<sup>31</sup> Smith may have been over-sensitive to an imagined slight. But his criticism may also be regarded as early evidence of the pragmatic attitude taken by the Committee to many of the 'worldly' aspects of their business decisions. In any event almost a year went by before Smith's employment was terminated. It was decided to separate the offices of Collector and Accountant 'in order that one may be a check on the other'.<sup>32</sup> The minutes of the Subcommittee for 5 July 1810 record that 'Mr Smith attended; &, having thrown down two parcels, which appeared to contain books & papers ... & [having stated] that he considered the auditors had personal animosity to him, he should withdraw ... Mr Smith then immediately withdrew, in a state of great perturbation.' The accounts were found in disarray. A few days later William Blair reported that Smith had been found



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by his apothecary 'in a state of insensibility, arising from a high degree of nervous affection'. Blair later reported that Smith's quarrel was with Mr Davies, chairman of the Subcommittee of Auditors. This was presumably James Davies, who was a member of the BFBS Committee in 1808. The Committee decided that the explanation was unjustifiable and they could not take cognizance of it.<sup>33</sup> The 'Subcommittee relative to Mr Smith's business' included some of the most prominent members of the Society: the scholarly Methodist divine Adam Clarke, the leather merchant Samuel Mills, Dr William Blair, the law publisher Joseph Butterworth, Granville Sharp, Robert Howard, and the cotton shipper Joseph Reyner. Also on the Subcommittee was Anthony Wagner who had served on the General Committee from the foundation, and who in 1810 became Collector.<sup>34</sup> In August 1810, Smith was prevailed upon to resign, but the case continued to reverberate. It was finally sent to referees, who discovered over £100 unaccounted for, but nevertheless found 'nothing to impeach the integrity of Mr Smith' and ruled that he was to receive funds due to him.<sup>35</sup>

The unfortunate Smith was probably no more surprised than his superiors to find himself the collector for such a wealthy organization. The annual *Report* for 1811 showed a balance of £33,092 11s 1d. William Wilberforce himself had never expected the Society's income to exceed £10,000 annually.<sup>36</sup> The Smith affair shows the Society moving away from the awkward and amateurish style characteristic of some voluntary organizations, and towards a set of sophisticated and businesslike arrangements. It is also the first signal that Committee members were prepared to act decisively, even ruthlessly, to promote their ends. They reported Smith's breakdown in the minutes, but they took their case against him to arbitration and tried to get a ruling to avoid paying him.

By 1810 the BFBS had become a substantial concern. They were fortunate to have in Joseph Tarn an officer who shared the ideological vision of the founders, while also possessing the administrative and clerical skills required to put their plans into practice. Tarn, who served the Society until his death in 1837, seems to have received little recognition for his diplomacy and efficiency although he was undoubtedly a very powerful person behind the scenes. It is clear from minutes and correspondence that however competent and capable the staff, they were expected frequently to refer to the Committee for decisions, and to keep that body informed in detail about events. Especially in the case of any controversy or dispute, Tarn and the Secretaries deferred to their thirty-six directors.

Almost from the beginning there were plenty of disputes for the Society to settle. Its business proceedings were frustrated by doctrinal and political conflicts. Throughout the 1820s and 1830s, the politics of Bible distribution constituted a seismic test for the various religious and political upheavals of the period. The Society's history of conflict may be set into the context of