

## THE FIRST AMERICAN MISSION TO AFGHANISTAN

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THE pioneer missionaries of the American Presbyterian Church began their work at Lodiāna, which was the north-western station of the British East Indian Company's possessions in India. Here was located the army with its cantonment and the Political agent. Here too were resident the Afghan refugees, the blind king Zaman Shāh with a considerable number of his relatives. Here too was Shāh Shujā-ul-Mulk, another Princely refugee.

It was natural that the missionaries should have their minds directed toward Afghanistan as a Muslim land soon to be opened up to evangelistic effort. When, later on (1837), the English Government in India, with their Sikh neighbors, formed an expedition to invade Afghanistan and to restore to his throne Shāh Shujā, the way seemed to be open. Accordingly a colporteur was sent along with the army with a supply of scriptures in the Persian language, the court language in Cabul. The colporteur was promptly arrested and deported and his scriptures distributed among the Ameer's for safe keeping. The Gospel being a sacred book it was not thought right to destroy it, and yet it would not do to allow it to be read by the common people. Soon after the close of that unfortunate war, a proposal was made by Major Couran of the English army to the American missionaries to establish a mission in Afghanistan. The way for this had been opened by the conquest of the Punjab and the occupation of Peshawur, the city which stands at the entrance of the Khaibur Pass. Major Couran offered £5000 to meet the initial expense of the mission. After much correspondence with the Board of Missions in New York, a missionary was sent out as the pioneer of this mission to the Afghans.

This missionary was a remarkable man, the Rev. Isidor

Löewenthal, a convert from Judaism, a profound scholar, a master of the classical languages of Europe as well as of Hebrew and its cognate languages Arabic and Chaldee. The mission had arranged for Mr. Löewenthal to begin his work of language study at Rawul Pindi, where he undertook the study of Persian and Urdu. As soon as a suitable house could be secured in Peshawur, he went there with a view to learning the vernacular Pashtu, the ordinary language of the people, and also to determine upon the place he would occupy in Afghanistan.

In the meanwhile the Church Missionary Society had also undertaken missionary work at Peshawur with special purpose of entering into Afghanistan. Accordingly Colonel Martin of the Church of England Mission at Peshawur wrote to Mr. Löewenthal inviting him to join hands with them in the prosecution of their common work "so far as his relations to the Mission and his own views of duty would warrant" with the understanding that he should regard Peshawur as a station of his mission and that he should be free to leave the plains for the cooler climate of the mountains in the hot weather; Mr. Löewenthal co-operated with the Church Mission, especially in the work of Bible translation.

Some effort had been made in the way of producing a translation of portions of the Bible into the Pashtu language by Dr. Leyden, Professor of the Hindustani language in the College of Fort William, Calcutta. In 1811 he had finished a translation of the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark, but his death brought this work to a close. The Baptist missionaries at Serampore then took up the work. They employed the Indian translators, who had worked for Dr. Leyden. They completed the translation of the New Testament which was printed at Serampore in 1818, of 1000 copies printed, the bulk remained in the depository at Serampore; a few copies found their way into European libraries; and some doubtless reached Afghanistan through the Lohani merchants. The American missionaries at Lodiana undertook to distribute some of these. The Peshawur missionaries were unable to make much use of this version because of numerous mistrans-

lations and serious errors. The Rev. Robert Clark of the Peshawur Mission sent eleven chapters of St. John to be lithographed at the Agra Orphan Press, and with it Captain H. James' translation of St. Luke; but both of these MSS. disappeared in the general wreck of the Agra Press during the Mutiny.

The Serampore missionaries printed the Pentateuch in Pashtu in 1821 and in 1832 they issued an edition of the Historical books, 1000 each. Excepting a few copies in European libraries there seems to be no trace of these books anywhere. These facts, however, illustrate the obstacles in the way of the new mission to the Afghans. The question arose whether it were worth while to produce a new version of the Bible in Pashtu. Some missionaries thought that the Persian language would be the best medium by which the literate people of Afghanistan might be reached. Mr. Löwenthal's investigation led him to an entirely different conclusion. He discovered the existence of an extensive literature in the vernacular (Pashtu), "consisting not only of original compositions, but also numerous translations of various popular Persian and Arabic authors." He also made known the fact that at that time nearly all the women were able to read Pashtu, and Pashtu only. The need of a vernacular version of the scriptures was therefore very evident.

A serious difficulty had now to be faced. The vernaculars of Afghanistan differ greatly, so that a man who speaks Pashtu in one quarter can hardly understand the people in another. For this reason it was most important that the translation of the Bible should be made in that dialect which could be used by at least a considerable number of people. Mr. Löwenthal constantly yearned for an opportunity to travel in Afghanistan. He made earnest appeals to his mission for permission to undertake such a journey, but the permission was refused. He, however, set himself to learn the language and became proficient in its use. He then undertook the translation of the New Testament from the original Greek in which he was an adept. In this work he was in no way hindered by the Sepoy rebellion. He preached in the bazars of

Peshawur and sometimes visited villages in the regions nearby. Mr. Löewenthal had made a study of the problems which confronted the men who would evangelize the Muslims of Afghanistan. I shall here quote a passage from one of his reports dealing with this subject.

"He who would undertake the glorious task of giving the Afghans the beginning of a real literature, of a Christian literature, who would undertake to translate the Bible for them, would first have to ascertain the most prevalent, the purest, intrinsically and extrinsically the most worthy, the best understood dialect, and not rest satisfied with translating into the language of the frontier. Frontier dialects are always mongrel and inferior. "An additional task will be his, who shall endeavor to bring the Afghans to Christ, through the instrumentality of religious treatises or tracts. He will probably find it highly advisable, if not actually necessary, to compose them in the form of verse and rhyme. There seems to be a period in the history of every nation, when prose cannot live, when the distinction between prose and poetry is unknown, and the instructors of a people can only speak to them in measured language; when prose to them is prosy and rhyme reason. So it is with the Afghans of this day: there are prose works in their language, historical and religious, but while these are merely read by some learned men here and there, the works in verse are extremely popular among all classes, and are recited and sung on roads and streets by old and young."

"Viewing the peculiar nature of this enterprise it is impossible to resist the conviction how entirely the work of missions is the work of the Lord. He must appoint the men for it; He must endue them with the needed qualifications; and He must open the door of faith."

"The peculiar nature of the difficulties with which this mission for some time to come will have to contend, appears to demand two men at least, of robust health and strong constitution; health and constitution that have been tried and found full weight; with mind not dried up in the study and spirits not evaporated by high pressure; let the system be but sound, and the theology need not be

so profound. They must be able to stand the scorching sun and the stifling simoon, as well as intense cold; they must be able to make daily marches of from 25 to 30 miles either on foot or on camels, as water is scarce; and they could not well travel except with caravans of merchants, who do not make such long marches; they must be willing to live for weeks with no other protection from atmospheric influences but the canvas walls and roof of their tents; they must be willing to forego that prime luxury of Christian civilization cleanliness, and not wash more than once a week, nor be of a sanguinary disposition towards the lower orders of creation; for nothing alienates an Afghan so much, nothing seems to make him more inaccessible, than customs different from his own, especially if they be harmless, or still more, if they be good and useful. Let them be able to handle a gun, for often their dinner will depend upon their skill as sportsmen; and an Afghan respects an armed man much more than an unarmed one. Let them possess some knowledge of medicine and carry with them a good supply of the commonest remedies. And finally, to their love of souls and zeal for God, they must add an entire willingness to lay down their lives; and that not merely in that general sense in which missionaries are said to go forth with their lives in their hands; for having once left the British territory, surrounded as they then will be by political fanatics, religious zealots, and the most blood-thirsty robbers, the likelihood, humanly speaking, is small of their ever seeing their friends again."

These words set forth the ideal of the man whom Löewenthal set before himself. He had deliberately entered upon the mission of a dangerous service, more than once he sought permission to go beyond the border line. His visits to the Peshawur Bazar and the near by villages were always made in peril of his life. More than one European fell a victim to the fanatic's knife.

The brilliant career of this devoted man was suddenly brought to a close on the 27th of April 1864. Mr. Löewenthal suffered from excruciating pains in his head and frequently sought relief by walking in the veranda of his

house, or in the garden outside. On the night of his death he was thus engaged, when he was shot down by his Afghan watchman. His death was instantaneous. No one knew why the deed was done, save the watchman, who reported the deed saying he had mistaken his master for a thief. The man was given the benefit of a doubt and escaped punishment.

The death of Mr. Löewenthal led the American Missionaries to abandon their mission to the Afghans. The Church Missionary Society, with which he had co-operated continued the work. Mr. Löewenthal's manuscripts and much of his library were made over to the missionaries of Peshawur. His literary work culminating in the translation of the New Testament into Pashtu, remain as a memorial to his service in the Army of the Lord. "He being dead yet speaketh."

His fellow missionaries erected a memorial tablet over his tomb which bears the following inscription:

#### ERECTED

To the memory of the Rev. Isidor Löewenthal, missionary of the American Presbyterian Mission, who translated the New Testament into Pashtu and was shot by his *chaukedar* April 27th 1864.

"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the Power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Rom. I: 16.

E. M. WHERRY.