

THE OPEN DOOR IN PERSIA

A PLEA FOR MEDICAL MISSIONS.

The open door has become a synonym in missionary phraseology to describe conditions where it is possible for missionary agencies of one kind or another to reach the people with the Gospel message. In Persia, if anywhere in the world, the door is wide open to the missionary physician and surgeon. One who knows whereof he speaks says, "If ever medical missions have justified themselves it has been in Persia, where their pioneer value has been abundantly vindicated." It has been proved that the thing can be done, but that is about all, the Church has not yet risen up to do it. Why does she not use, use largely, the method of approach that has been shown to be most successful?

The door is not yet fully open to any other Christian agency. Illiteracy stands up to cut off the usefulness of the printed page. Many, many thousands of the men cannot read, and hardly any of the women. The evangelist? He must still proceed with the utmost caution, whether he be native or foreigner. Public preaching services for Moslems can be carried on only in the largest cities and are attended only by the boldest and most enlightened. The Christian school? It is only after some other lines of intercourse have been established, often for years, that Moslems begin to send their children to our schools. But I venture the assertion that the well equipped and tactful physician *can go anywhere in Persia today*, and find a welcome, and have his hands full to overflowing with work.

There is no class or condition that he cannot touch. Would you bring the Christian religion to the notice and understanding of those who should be the leaders, the rich and powerful, the government officials, the men with great retinues of retainers, relations, servants, wives and concubines, the patriarchal heads of great establishments?

It is very seldom indeed that they will come to your preaching services or drop into your centers for inquiry. They are usually inaccessible to the ordinary colporteur, and if the evangelistic missionary has intercourse with them it is apt to be very formal. But they and their wives and children fall sick just as lowlier people do, and the foreign physician is gladly admitted and his word is valued. He acts as the introducer of all the rest of the mission force. Does it seem important to reach the great middle class, the merchants, the officers, the class from which comes the *Mullah*, the *Hadji*, the religious man of the community, the more or less intelligent, who can "give a reason for the faith that is in them," and where Islam is strongly intrenched? It is there that suspicion and prejudice have most to be overcome, and it is to them and to their families that the dispensary and hospital especially make their appeal. Is it the increasingly large class of young men who have received more or less of modern education and have become agnostics and atheists, and are now without hope and without God whom you would influence? The young debauchee shot in a gambling quarrel is sure to be brought to the mission hospital if there is one, and there he will listen to the reading of the Bible as he would do no where else. How can we best and most quickly—for "Oh, they die so fast"—bring some saving knowledge of Jesus to the great mass of the people, the ignorant villagers, those who have least knowledge of any world outside their own little one, where superstition is strongest and life most animal? Go to any village, large or small, and as soon as it is known that foreigners have arrived, perhaps before your horses are unhitched, to some one in your company the inquiry will be made, "Is there a doctor?" You may travel from one end of the country to the other and the village in which a physician is to be found will be the rarest exception. The people are born in misery. The infant mortality is tremendous, but those who do survive grow up in the midst of dirt, contagious diseases and infections of all kinds and go to a suffering old age without help or alleviation. Although there are many instances

in which these villagers have made long and toilsome journeys to reach the foreign doctor, to the great majority of them the doctor must go, and when he does go there is no lack of welcome for his professional services, and furthermore the dispensary may at once become the center for evangelistic and educational work if there are the workers to do it. Does the pitiful plight of the secluded women appeal to you? They cannot read, they may not go to hear the missionary preach, and it will often be that even the missionary lady who comes to call will be held at arms length. But the doctor may lift the curtain of that closed doorway and go in to that sad abode of physical, mental and spiritual helplessness and misery and bring to the mothers of the land a knowledge of what Christianity really is. One might go on to tell of the abject poor of the cities, who even where there are doctors, have no money for their fees or to buy the expensive medicines prescribed. These are the beggars, the outcasts, to whom the rich Moslem tosses a coin worth half a cent and feels that he has earned a credit in heaven thereby. These are they who when famine or pestilence comes, die like flies and with as little accounting. How shall one tell of the lepers, rotting away through long years in absolute hopelessness? Who *can* bring them any gospel of hope like the doctor or nurse who can first give them some surcease of agony?

The opportunities are unlimited, there is no native system of medicine worthy of the name, the people themselves are beginning to realize that for their desperate need there is help in Western medicine, and that they are utterly unable to bring it to themselves. The doctor may go anywhere and demonstrate, as no one else can, to a people singularly difficult of approach from any other side, the heart meaning of the Good News. Where are the doctors for this wonderful service, and where is the church to equip them and send them to it and stand back of them with the mighty power of prayer, to the end that Persia may come to call Him Lord?

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