

THE BIBLE IN MOSLEM LANDS

A SYMPOSIUM

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I. ARABIA

WE do not know whether early Christianity gave the Bible to the people of Arabia. The evidence from manuscripts is all negative, but one could hardly expect any Christian book to escape the bitter extermination of Christianity from the Peninsula. The introduction of the Bible in modern times began in 1880, when the British and Foreign Bible Society opened a dépôt in Baghdad. The Society had previously sent colporteurs up the Persian Gulf, to Aden and up the Red Sea, and there were some efforts of individuals, but all these attempts were but intermittent. In 1886 a dépôt was opened at Aden. When the American Arabian Mission opened work in Busrah, arrangements were made in 1892 with the British and Foreign Bible Society to carry on Bible work in its field, which arrangement was extended as its field of operations enlarged. Later the American Bible Society took over a share of this work by making a regular grant-in-aid. When the Danish Mission opened work at Hodeida, a Bible shop was opened, but the work has been interrupted. Before the war an effort was made in a small way to introduce the Bible at Jiddah. Port Said cannot be claimed for Arabia, but there can be no doubt that its influence extends into Arabia, even as we find in East Arabia that the Book travels much further than we do ourselves. The writer will not undertake to define the boundaries of north-west Arabia and southern Syria. Even in the north-east there is doubt what territory should be reckoned a part of Arabia, Persia or Turkey. This indefiniteness creates a feeling of uncertainty in giving statistics for the country. Owing to interrupted mail service, records from Baghdad

and Aden could not be obtained. Fortunately, the Arabian Mission has complete records for the twenty-three years of its Bible work. They show a total distribution of 92,530 copies, of which 77,311 are sales to Moslems. By an estimate based on many years' experience of what a colporteur can accomplish in a shop or on tours, it will be safe to place the total sales in Arabia between 150,000 and 160,000 copies of Bibles, Testaments and portions since 1880. In East Arabia these Scriptures were sold in twelve different languages. Probably Baghdad and Aden will exhibit six additional different tongues. The great bulk of sales is in the Arabic language; the babel of tongues is confined to the coast towns.

The men employed as colporteurs are mostly Protestants from the Christian communities of Baghdad and Central Turkey. For these, Arabia is a foreign mission field in everything but language. In the year before the war the number of such employed from Baghdad to Maskat had reached eighteen. A few converts from Islam have been thus employed, Aden having had several. Except for the communities of Christians and Jews in Baghdad and Busrah and of Jews in Yemen, this work is exclusively for Moslems, as the record of the Arabian Mission shows. Too much stress must not be given to taking an average, for as soon as the sales of the Mission reached 7,000 or over, the average for such years was ninety-three per cent. to Moslems. In fact, the distribution of the Bible is the main evangelistic agency in this land to-day. This does not mean that medical work, for instance, is not evangelistic in its scope, but when evangelistic work *per se* is meant it corresponds to Bible work. The method has been to establish a Bible shop in the centres with a colporteur in charge and another, or more than one, on the road, working the bazaars and doing the touring. Experience has proved this the best way for the present. Most of the sales are by the men on the road, but the shops give the work stability and assure it a standing in the communities. These centres are, so far, all on the coast. But touring has carried the Word far and wide. Irak has been well covered, Hassa has been several times entered, Oman has

been crossed and re-crossed in many directions, and Yemen has been penetrated as far as Sanaa. Here we must also refer to the fact mentioned before, that the Bible goes where neither colporteur nor missionary has gone. Caravans going inland, in the north or south, have carried copies of the Bible and portions with them.

What has been the nature of the experience of those engaged in this work? As one looks over the reports of colporteurs, one gets a varied impression of lights and shadows. Nor are the shadows in excess. Comparing our accounts with what comes to hand from many other fields, we see a remarkable similarity of our field with others. We could parallel a story of welcome or persecution in a town of China or Bolivia with one from Oman or Mesopotamia, and we have seen the wisdom of the serpent and the harmlessness of the dove in the experience of "the man with the books" win the day here, too. In what was hitherto Turkish territory, there were the usual trials that only a Turkish official could pile up on one. Especially trying were the restrictions against travel among the dependent Arab tribes—*e.g.*, in Hassa and Yemen. The changes that the war is making will end some of these trials. Another set of difficulties are those arising from the continual wars and feuds of the Arabs. The dangers of travel must not be minimised; on the other hand, they must not be magnified. In East Arabia, after many years, with thousands of miles of touring each year, no one has been seriously injured, and the cases of loss by robbery have been few. The other difficulties are such as are natural to work in a Moslem land. Every worker in such lands knows the prejudice that is downright wickedness shielding itself in a great persecuting zeal. We have that, but generally it is a prejudice due to ignorance. This is notably true inland, and it is an ignorance that can be enlightened to such an extent that we have seen the Gospels placed in the village school as the reading book.

If the reader will take a map and note the territory covered up till now, he will see that there is still much land to be occupied. The changes now going on in the world are but the hand of God in present day history

opening wider the doors in this land. Will we Christians be ready to enter such open doors? Successful Bible work is always a labour of faith, and to occupy some of the provinces of Arabia will need great faith. But it will be a faith that may say, "It can be done because it has been done." F. J. BARNY.

Maskat.

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II. EGYPT

It is now over ninety-eight years since the Committee of the British and Foreign Bible Society first sent out an advance guard to reconnoitre the land of Egypt. The three brethren who undertook this mission were instructed to "investigate the religious condition of the peoples of the East and the best methods of propagating Christian knowledge." We find that voyaging in those days was almost as difficult as in the days of St. Paul, and that on one occasion the voyage from Malta to Constantinople occupied sixty-nine days.

Of the result of the investigation we are not told, but in 1818 we find that the Rev. Christopher Burkhardt visited Egypt; sold Scriptures in Cairo and Alexandria; obtained from the Coptic Patriarch credentials; and, returning by way of the Holy Land, died of fever at Aleppo. Thus the first messenger to carry the Scriptures to Egypt laid down his life in the work.

The first Bible dépôt to be opened in Egypt was in the city of Alexandria in 1859, and was located in the colonnade of a Mohammedan mosque! Surely an omen of the day of Egypt's blessing. A subsequent dépôt, with its entire stock, estimated together at £900, was reduced to ashes in 1882. When it was known that this amount would be drawn from the already oppressed fellaheen (peasants), the Bible Society immediately withdrew the claim and suffered the loss.

Lower Egypt had now become the centre of an agency, and Bible work was commenced in a more definite way. As illustrating the continual growth in the circulation of the Scriptures in this Agency during

the past thirty-two years, attention is asked to the following table :—

| Year. | Sales by Dépôts. | Sales by Colporteurs. | Through other channels. | Totals. |
|-------|---------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|---------|
| 1883 | 1,149 | 1,512 | 898 | 3,559 |
| 1892 | 5,007 | 10,184 | 6,453 | 21,644 |
| 1902 | 5,275 | 16,635 | 17,858 | 39,768 |
| 1912 | 6,777 | 51,318 | 22,662 | 80,757 |
| 1914 | 7,929 | 66,225 | 16,623 | 90,777 |

The value of colportage work in the distribution of the Word of God is thus seen at a glance. The third column, "through other channels," represents the volumes supplied to various missionary agencies.

The population of Egypt is now about 12,000,000—crowded into a narrow strip of cultivated land on the banks of the Nile. The density of the population is said to be 939 to the square mile, while the most populous country in Europe, before the war, was Belgium, with 571 people to the square mile. There are thirty towns with a population of over 20,000 in each, and over 2,144 villages are scattered over the Delta.

The work of distribution is mainly carried on by humble Christian men, who go forth morning by morning from the various centres in each province where the Society has dépôts, offering the Word of Eternal Life to those who are for the most part fast bound in the chains of Islam. As a result they sometimes meet with scorn, abuse, and opposition from those who pretend to be well satisfied with the false system. Many will remember the time when it was very difficult to persuade a Moslem to receive a copy of the Scriptures as a gift. But in recent years a great change has taken place, and we find the Moslem is now the best buyer of the Scriptures. The following incidents, taken from colporteurs' journals, give a fair sample of their daily round of experiences :—

"Soon after setting out we passed a Moslem cemetery. A sherif was sitting in the shade of a tree and three others with him. A funeral procession had just arrived, and the sherif asked our business. At once we spoke about the Word of God, offering some copies for sale. The

sherif refused to buy, saying they wished to abide by the Koran. I urged the necessity of reading also the Taurat and the Injil, but they again refused and tried to keep the others from buying. Ultimately three copies were sold with difficulty, but we felt they were well placed."

"In the next village the people were much opposed to the Book. Selecting a reader, I asked him to read aloud a few verses from Matthew v., but their opposition continuing, I said: 'How can you condemn a book you have not read?' Ultimately the chief opponent bought a copy of Matthew."

"The chief clerk called us into his office; he wanted one of our best Bibles, offering a third of its price, and at last declared that the book had been altered, and sent us away."

"Toward evening we set out for a Moslem village. The omdeh (headman) listened to what we had to say, and invited us to stay the night. This gave us the opportunity of reading to him the Word of God. We found with him one of his relatives, who was mullah of the mosque, and some others. The omdeh appointed one to read the Bible, and the colporteur explained afterward. The mullah raised some objections, but was silenced. Late in the evening the omdeh bought a well-bound, large-type Bible for himself. I discovered next morning that he was intimate with the sheikh of a neighbouring village, who keeps a large open Bible in his house for everyone who wishes to read, and that the omdeh frequently visited him for that purpose."

On the other hand, the Bible-seller sometimes meets with encouragement, even from unexpected quarters, as the following story shows:—

"I met two Moslem sheikhs," says one of the colporteurs, "as they were coming from the El Azhar University; they probably thought I was selling novels. One of them took from me a copy of the Proverbs and began to read, remarking: 'These are very nice words. Who wrote this book?' 'It is Solomon's Proverbs, and a part of the Bible.' The other sheikh asked: 'What are all these other books you have?' 'They are other parts of the Bible.' 'But why do you not have them

all bound in one book ? ' I then showed them a complete Arabic Bible, saying : ' Here it is, the Old and New Testaments in one.' ' But the characters are so small,' he said ; ' I should like a larger one.' He gave me his address, and the next day when I took him a larger one another sheikh, who was sitting with him, bought a similar volume."

The writer once put into the hands of a green-turbaned sheikh the Gospel of St. John, which led to his reading the New Testament, and afterwards the whole Bible. The passages in John xiv. 6 and Isaiah liii. 6 arrested this man, who confessed his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and suffered much persecution.

In another town a Moslem sitting in his shop, after much persuasion from the colporteur, bought an Arabic Bible. Often he tried to return it, saying it disturbed his mind. The colporteur still succeeded in persuading him to read the book. After some weeks this man and his wife declared themselves Christians, were baptised, and left the questionable business in which they had been engaged.

There is not the deadly opposition to the Scriptures and to the work of distribution which was experienced by the Society's helpers in earlier days. This is clear from many little details which come to us from time to time through letters and journals from various parts of the Agency. Moslem sheikhs in many places are reading and pondering the Scriptures more or less openly. It may be that in some cases their motive for doing so is solely to try to refute its statements. Nevertheless we rejoice that the Book is being read, for none can read it with attention without hearing the living voice that speaks through its pages.

Shall we whose souls are lighted
With wisdom from on high,
Shall we to men benighted
The Lamp of Life deny ?

The answer rests with those who have by its life-giving beams been "brought out of darkness into His marvellous light."

C. T. HOOPER.

Port Said.

III. THE PUNJAB

INDIA, according to the last census (1911), had a Moham-
 medan population of over 66,000,000, and of this total
 nearly one-third was recorded as living in the north-west
 section of the Empire, viz. : in the Punjab, Kashmir, the
 North-West Frontier Province, Sindh and Baluchistan.
 The proportion of Moslems to the whole population in
 each of these provinces exceeds fifty per cent., and even
 in the Punjab where the proportion is lowest it is only
 in the eastern hill division and eastern and south-eastern
 districts that the followers of Islam are in a minority.
 Generally speaking, the Mohammedan proportion in-
 creases from east to west—in fact, the whole of the west
 and south-west parts of the Punjab are mainly Moham-
 medan. The distribution of the Mohammedan popu-
 lation can best be shown by the following table :—

| Province. | Area sq. miles | Population. | Mohammedans | Literate Moham- medans per 1000. |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------|---|
| Punjab ... | 136,330 | 24,187,750 | 12,275,477 | { 27 male 2 female |
| Kashmir ... | 84,432 | 3,158,126 | 2,398,320 | { 15 male nil female |
| N.W. Frontier | 39,000 | 3,819,027 | 2,048,599 | { 24 male 1 female |
| Sindh ... | 46,986 | 3,513,435 | 2,639,929 | { 24 male 2 female |
| Baluchistan ... | 134,638 | 834,703 | 782,648 | { 47 males per 10,000 of in- digenous Mo- hammedan population |
| Total | 441,386 | 35,513,041 | 20,144,973 | |

The above provinces form the field included in the Punjab Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

A glance at the last column in the table will be sufficient to show that the educational position of the Moslems is not high. In the Punjab, where the proportion of literates is highest, they are reported to be the most backward; the figures for other religions being: Hindus, 95 male, 7 female; Sikhs, 94 male,

12 female ; and Christians (Europeans omitted), 44 male, 35 female per thousand. It is only in Simla that the extent of literacy among them compares at all favourably with that among other religions, the figures being per thousand, male 232, female 35. Delhi with 90 males and 12 females comes next, while Lahore has only 52 males and 9 females literate per 1,000. In Kashmir the Mohammedans are the most depressed class educationally, and in Baluchistan the Baluchi and Brahui instinctively regard education as a mysteriously insidious enemy of ancient custom ; and ancient custom is dearer to the tribesman than anything else, more revered than religion itself. The conditions of this province do not lend themselves to education, for out of the total population 659,433 are engaged in pastoral and agricultural pursuits and thirty-three per cent. have practically no permanent habitation.

With such a backward field, educationally, to work in, a comparatively small circulation would naturally be expected. It seems that as far as the Punjab itself is concerned, ignorance is the chief hindrance to sales, though in some parts, especially the western and south-western, bigotry is very marked. In Sindh the majority of Moslems are poor and very bigoted and often in mortal fear of the Christian Scriptures. From Baluchistan comes the report of a man who left the hospital without treatment rather than listen to the preaching. The doctor reporting this states that he hardly ever remembers such a case.

The reason for the small circulation cannot be put down to the lack of suitable versions. All missionaries are agreed on this point, that the needs of the Mohammedan community are adequately met at present by the existing versions. In Urdu, the language chiefly read by educated Mohammedans in all parts of this field, the whole Bible has existed since 1844, it has also been published in both Kashmiri and Pashtu. The New Testament has been printed in Arabic Sindhi, also some of the Old Testament books, and in Persian Punjabi, in which Genesis has also been translated and is now in the press. In Balochi, all the books of the New Testa-

ment and a very considerable number of the Old as well ; in Jatki, or Derawal, or Western Punjabi, the four Gospels ; in Balti, two Gospels, and in Brahui, one, have been published. Persian Scriptures are now generally obtained from London, though in former years certain editions were printed in Lahore.

In the case of Urdu, Persian Punjabi and Arabic Sindhi Scriptures, it is impossible to calculate how many copies were taken by Mohammedans, though in the case of Arabic Sindhi some idea may be gathered from the fact that after the Gospels were revised in 1907, separate editions (2,000 of each Gospel) were prepared to suit the requirements of both Hindus and Mohammedans ; and whereas of the former a second reprint has already been published, the first editions of the Mohammedan version are not yet exhausted. For general guidance the following table of issues may be useful as giving some idea of the demand for Scriptures in languages chiefly used by Moslems, but it has its limitations, since it is quite impossible to classify purchasers according to religions.

BOOKS (BIBLES, TESTAMENTS, PORTIONS).

| <i>Language</i> | 1906-10 | 1911-15 |
|---------------------|---------|---------|
| Arabic | 433 | 503 |
| Balochi | 3 | 124 |
| Balti | 210 | 18 |
| Brahui | 6 | 3 |
| Jatki | 108 | 144 |
| Kashmiri | 231 | 9,298 |
| Panjabi Persian ... | 5,105 | 13,070 |
| Pashtu | 2,501 | 4,631 |
| Persian | 2,679 | 1,259 |
| Sindhi Arabic ... | 11,362 | 25,050 |
| Urdu Persian ... | 135,531 | 241,056 |

The reduction in the selling price of Gospel portions in Kashmiri, Persian Punjabi and Pashtu, and the issue of revised editions in the two former and Sindhi, must be considered contributing factors in the increased circulation in these languages during the second period.

Though the difficulties are neither few nor slight, the work of Scripture distribution is accompanied by much encouragement. For instance, one missionary writes :

“ We had one very special bit of encouragement : a young educated Mohammedan of a good zamindar family heard our bazaar preaching, and attracted by the Gospel story put himself under our instruction. He was discovered by his father one day reading the Gospel and was turned out of his home, but he persevered and is now a baptised Christian. He has lost all—his mother, sisters, estate, etc., but is rejoicing in Christ, though his faith is often sorely tried. It is a remarkable testimony to the changed attitude of the Mohammedans here that an open-air baptism of a local convert was possible in such a bigoted centre.”

Another sign of encouragement in this part is the increasing stress that missionaries are putting on Scripture circulation and the enthusiasm with which many of them are taking up this work instead of leaving it entirely to their Indian workers. The circulation on the Frontier and in Kashmir is chiefly effected through the mission hospitals ; the issues from the Srinagar hospital last year were over 4,500, chiefly in the out-patient department, in Urdu and Kashmiri. Reports from Sindh and Baluchistan seem to show that even in those hard fields the bigotry is not as marked as it was ten years ago. From the Ludhiana district word comes that the Mohammedans have shown more interest lately in the Scriptures ; the war suggests to them the last times, and many are expecting the advent of Jesus. From Delhi a missionary writes of a changed attitude, much less bigotry and opposition, and the obligation to study an opponent's books is admitted. Another, in a very backward part of the Punjab, records his sales of complete New Testaments in five years as follows : 1st year, 6 ; 2nd, 18 ; 3rd, 25 ; 4th, 260 ; 5th year one for each working day of the year, and more than a month of the year remains. This same missionary writes : “ These little preachers go far and wide where the missionary cannot go. A brother three hundred miles away, wrote for my encouragement, that he had baptised a Mohammedan who got his start from a book bought from me in Rawalpindi. Just last month a man from the very border of my district came for baptism, who

said that three years ago he bought a portion from a worker, then shortly after got a full New Testament which he had studied, with the result that he became a believer. I could not agree to take the responsibility of this large district did I not have these books to go forth and preach in parts where I may never be permitted to go."

Incidents of encouragement might be multiplied many times, but the above go to show that there is abundant cause for thankfulness, and that with the spread of education an increased circulation may be confidently looked for, which, under the blessing of the great Lord of the harvest, will be followed by a great ingathering of souls, for has He not promised that His word shall not return to Him void ?

Lahore.

W. H. L. CHURCH.

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IV. MOROCCO

ALL that gives courage or inspires hope, all that makes missionary work worth while, all that encourages the sower to keep on sowing the seed, is the result of what the Bible has done and is doing in Morocco. The Bible is working the same miracle here that is being worked every day and in every land. It is silently gathering in the elect of grace. It is the lamp which is guiding, here in Tangier, there in Fez, and away in the South, to the Light, souls who were in darkness and who could find no satisfaction or peace in Islam.

The Bible is also destroying the prejudice of centuries. For example, a *sharif* to whom we read the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, and the twenty-first of Luke, exclaimed when we had finished, "Verily, I must testify that these are none other than the Words of God." A month or so after this he surrendered himself to Him who was and is the Word.

That the Bible is reaching the hearts of men and women is evident. Speaking to a group of men and women in a village outside Tangier, I was once called upon to witness. "All right," I said, "listen. There is one God and one Mediator between God and man, the

man Christ Jesus." "Stop, be quiet," shouted the men, "that is out of your *Injil*. We all know that it is corrupted." "What matters if it be different from ours?" replied a woman who had been listening with eager eyes; "these are burning words, for they have lighted a fire of desire in my heart to know the truth of it all."

A Moor was attracted into our dépôt by the text which hung opposite the door: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify Me." These gracious words seemed to go right to his heart, for he came in and asked: "Who spake those words, and where are they to be found?" I replied, "God spake them through His servant David." "Indeed! then I must buy a copy of that book." So I selected a copy of the Psalms, which had a copy of the Gospel of Matthew bound with it, and after turning down the leaf at Psalm l. 15, I drew his attention to Matthew i. 28: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Ah, rest! That is what the heart wants," said he; and as he left he remarked, "Words like these are not to be found in the Koran."

Another Moor, of the better class, came into the dépôt for a talk. Among other things he said, "While everyone must admit that there is much good advice given in the Koran, it cannot be compared to the Old and New Covenants; for while you read the *Injil*, you seem to feel that a living Person is in it, drawing you to Him."

At Azzimur an intelligent Moor said to me, "No, we won't buy your books, for they will make Christians of us." "Exactly so," I replied, "that a book is capable of doing what you have just said proves it to be a book of power; and when it changes a man's heart and conduct, it proves it is what it claims to be—the Living Word of God."

The Bible is working in places where there are no missionaries. A lady missionary in Fez told me the following story: "We were visiting in Sifrou when a country woman came in and asked to see the 'Nazarene'

woman who knew the words of Christ. As I went on with my teaching I noticed that this country woman seemed quite familiar with the facts of the Gospel. 'You understand, I suppose, that I am speaking about my Lord, Jesus.' 'Yes, of course, for He is my Lord, too.' 'How is that? You are quite a stranger. Who has taught you?' 'Yes, I am a stranger, and I have never seen a Nazarene's face before; but years ago a man passing through our country left a book with my father, who read it to us. It told us of the Saviour, and my father, believing in Him, died trusting in Jesus, and I am trusting in Him also.' " Bible distribution is bread cast upon the waters.

One of the Moorish boys, trained in the Raymond Lull Home, Tangier, had learned there long passages from the Magrebi version of the Scriptures. On leaving the Home he was apprenticed at a printing office in Tangier. Thence he drifted to Casablanca, where he grew careless and indifferent, and seemed to unlearn all he had been taught. When war broke out, he enlisted in one of the Moorish regiments of the French army, and was ordered to France. There he was wounded, and found himself in hospital at St. Malo. Far from home, solitary, and lying on a bed of pain, in that hospital the Lord met him. The Holy Spirit brought to his remembrance the passages of Scripture which he had been encouraged to treasure up in his memory, and through those passages he was led to take refuge in the Lord Jesus Christ. The missionary of the Raymond Lull Home has received many letters from this soldier, which testify brightly not so much to his love for God, as to God's wonderful love for him.

From all over the country, one hears that the people are talking more freely about the contents of the Bible, and discuss its teaching, and even admit that it does produce change in the lives of those who believe and practise it. This attitude reflects the thoughts of the bulk of the Moors, and shows something of what the Bible is doing in Morocco.

ROBERT STEVEN.

Tangier, Morocco.