

THE MOSLEM WORLD

A quarterly review of current events, literature, and thought among Mohammedans, and the progress of Christian Missions in Moslem lands.

Editor:—SAMUEL M. ZWEMER, D.D.

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The Moslem World

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EDITORIAL

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THE present crisis in the Moslem world calls for prayer. "We are convinced," was the message of the Lucknow Resolutions, "that the present apparent inability of the Christian Church to deal effectively with the great problem of the evangelization of Mohammedans is due above all else to the weakness of the prayer-life alike in the home Churches and in the branches of the Church which are springing up in foreign lands." The ministry of friendship and the ministry of healing never before had such splendid opportunity as they have to-day to win Moslem hearts. The symposium by medical missionaries in this number proves it; but we must not forget that the supreme ministry is the ministry of prayer. It is possible for all, everywhere and at all times; it is an omnipotent ministry. God is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." "He that spared not His own Son" for the Moslem world, "but delivered Him up for us all," and them all, "how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?" Prayer has proved mighty through God to the pulling down of nearly every political stronghold and barrier; shall it prove impotent to burst the barriers of the proudest soul and set free the captives of sin and darkness? What hath God wrought since our day of prayer, October 16th, last year! The coincidence of the events that followed would be startling had we not the promise, "Before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear."

The changed situation in all North Africa and the Nearer East with signs of disintegration and unheard of opportunities for evangelization has encouraged workers

THE RUSSIAN OCCUPATION OF NORTHERN PERSIA

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THE destiny of Persia seems to be decided. The past year shows yet more plainly its inability to set its house in order. Confusion and lawlessness are increasing in Southern Persia. The only prospect of relief is for Great Britain to step in and regulate it. What other result can follow than the extension of the Pax Britannica over the distracted provinces ?

Russia continues in practical occupation of Northern Persia, and under its military control the roads are safe and commerce and agriculture have resumed their accustomed state. One can anticipate no other outcome than a continued occupation and final annexation of Northern Persia by the Czar's Government.

We are not concerned, in the present discussion, with the ethics of world politics. But calling to mind our own Mexican War, pronounced by General Grant to be the most unjustifiable war in history, and our recent Panama landgrab from Columbia, it is not for Americans to gather up Pharisaic robes and cast the first stone at the actors in Tripoli, Morocco or Persia. The question which I wish to consider is this: What results will follow the occupation or annexation of Northern Persia, in reference to the position of Christianity and the conditions of missionary work ?

1. For Christianity in general and for the native Christian races, Russian annexation will bring a new epoch. Persia, unlike most of the provinces of the Turkish Empire, has never been under Christian rule. Yet God forbid that we should forget the noble history of the Church in Persia during many centuries, from the time that " Parthians and Medes and Elamites " heard the Word at Pentecost. The reason we do not find

millions of Christians in Persia now to enjoy liberation, as in European Turkey, is because they have been exterminated by Islam in the centuries past. It should be remembered to what a position Christianity had attained in Persia at the time of the Arab invasion.

It seems no exaggeration to say that Christianity was near to its triumph in the Sassanian Empire. The Church in Persia had passed through great tribulation, hundreds of thousands had attained the martyr's crown, under the tortures of Oriental cruelty, before complete toleration had been granted. The Church was aggressive and growing. The Queen of the celebrated Anushirvan Shah was an ardent Christian, and her son, the heir to the throne, was loyal to the faith of his mother. Khusrau Parviz was at one time a Christian, and his queen Shirin was a devout believer. Of this period, just preceding the Mohammedan conquest, Gibbon says: "In Persia, Christianity had struck deep root. Churches from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea were very numerous." Bishops and Metropolitans were in all the chief cities, and even eastward in Herat (Afghanistan) and Merv (Turkestan), Christianity was on the point of triumphing in Persia. Nor did it succumb to the fierce onslaught of Islam under the Arabs. It retained its vigor, and made efforts to bring Central Asia to Christ. Later it strove to convert the Mongol conquerors of Persia, and survived their acceptance of Islam. But dire calamity and extermination came to the Christians under the cruel Taimur-i-lang. He regarded himself as God's sword to put an end to Christianity. It was Islam or death. Nestorians and Armenians were massacred without mercy. Four thousand were buried alive at one time. Only remnants, small and scattered, remained, and these almost entirely in the north-western province, Azerbaijan.

Having killed off or forcibly converted the Persian Christians, the Shahs must needs import new sufferers. Shah Abbas, with terrible cruelties, set about making a wilderness of the Armenian provinces of Trans-Caucasia, and forcibly transported the inhabitants to Nakhijevan and Erivan, like dumb driven cattle. Cities and villages

were depopulated, convents emptied and plundered, thousands killed or drowned in the swift-flowing Araxes, and thousands more perished before the helpless bands reached new settlements in Mazanderan, Ispahan, and among the Bakhtiariis. There they became a prey to the Safavians, to the Afghan Mahmud and Nadir Shah, some denying their faith, some emigrating to India, and a remnant enduring the Moslem yoke to the present day. The founder of the present dynasty, Aga Mohammed Kajari, a little more than a century ago sacked Tiflis, massacred thousands of Georgians after they had laid down their arms, and bore many of them captive to Persia, where they became Moslems.

Even in the present-day the depletion of the Christian races has not ceased, although the Kajars, notably Nasru 'd Din Shah, were favorable to the Christians, and although the Russian, British and French Governments, directly and through the missionaries, have afforded them protection. Who has not been struck, while travelling in Persia, by observing the number of villages, formerly Christian, which are now occupied by Moslems? The district of Pers-Armenia—from Karadagh to Salmas—is a striking example. In Karadagh the Armenians have been driven to the high and rugged hills, abandoning the beautiful and fertile valleys to the Moslems. The traveller notices a shrine, or a church, possibly in ruin, apart or in a Moslem village, and is informed that it was formerly surrounded by a Christian population. In some cases the bishop retains the title to glebes where no Christian remains. To relieve their co-religionists from oppression some emigrants from Karadagh, now grown wealthy in Russia or in Tabriz, have purchased a score or more of villages from the *aghas* or landlords and placed them under the protection of the Armeno-Russian Political Agent. On the border of Salmas is a so-called Kurdish tribe, composed of families which were Christian at no distant day. Under my own observation Christian villages have disappeared, north of Tabriz. In Khoi, Maku, in Persian Kurdistan, in Irak and Luristan, we find the same condition. During the Armenian massacres in Turkey, the Persian Kurds joined in the massacre of

refugees from across the border, and several Christian villages disappeared. The Nestorians in the border villages have lived for years in terror for their lives. They, with the Christians of Baranduz, have within a decade been subjected to plundering and slaughter. It was in an effort to protect Nestorians (including Protestants) from massacre, and to punish the rape and murder of Christians, that the American missionaries incurred the enmity of vicious Moslems, which led directly to the murder of the Rev. B. W. Labaree. Russian annexation will bring to an end this age-long oppression and continued depletion of the Christian population.

2. Russian occupation will put an end to the legal disabilities of the Christians. These arise from Moslem law and customs. For example, the testimony of a Christian is not received in court against a Moslem. Blood money for the murder of a Christian is the equivalent of a donkey load of wheat. The new pervert to Mohammedanism, called *Jadid-i-Islam*, becomes the cause of endless trouble to the Christian relatives, for the pervert's Moslem relatives by marriage never cease to despoil them of their property. This injustice is the more keenly felt as the pervert is generally a girl who has been beguiled from her home, or some man who, burdened with debt or accused of crime, escapes torture by forsaking his faith. True, some of the old annoyances have passed away; for instance, the prohibition of the Christian's going out in the rain lest his wet garments should pollute the passing Moslem, or the command to wear a red patch on his clothes to mark him as an infidel, or to dismount if he met a Moslem *agha* on the highway. Old men have told me that when they used to go to a wedding they would wear old coats over their new ones in the street, that a passing Moslem might not see them and deprive them of them.

The Nestorians of Urumia, suffering under these civil and religious disabilities, have longed in vain for redress. Some were declared null through the mediation of Queen Victoria on behalf of the Nestorians. They have looked to the French Roman Catholic and American Presbyterian Missionaries to protect them. They petitioned the Arch-

bishop of Canterbury, who sent missionaries that were ready to instruct—but unable to protect. Finally they sent a deputation to the authorities in St. Petersburg, offering to accept orthodoxy if assured of efficient protection. Answering their call, a delegation of Russian priests came to Urumia, and going from village to village, enrolled Nestorians to the number of 15,000 in the Orthodox Communion. They longed for Russia's strong arm to relieve them. Now they welcome her political domination. The Moslems have unjustly used their power for centuries to deny the Christians their natural rights. Hence they look on the Russians as deliverers.

3. The Russian Government gives to Christianity an external position and influence which lowers Islam. For example, in Trans-Caucasia Sunday and Christian festivals are observed as legal holidays, offices and banks then being closed, while Moslem days are ignored. Even custom houses on the border of Moslem countries are closed on these days. Russia displays no spirit of truckling to Islam. She would rather cow the Moslems than curry favor with them. We are told that British officers are sometimes unduly favorable to Islam, and that in their efforts to be strict and impartial they lean backwards and give advantages to Islam which favor its spread in Africa, and increase its privileges in India and Egypt, beyond what is necessary. Russian administration will not do this. Its policy is more courageous in dealing with Islam. It will not display a neutrality which may be mistaken for weakness, despised and taken advantage of. The galling of the Tartar yoke is still too well remembered to allow them to be indifferent.

4. Russia will curb the persecuting power of Islam. The death penalty which now hangs over the convert to Christianity will no longer be enforceable. In the past, converts from Islam have fled to Russia and found a safe refuge. They will certainly be secure in the provinces which shall be annexed. It is true that a very considerable degree of liberty is now enjoyed in Persia, for missions working among Moslems and converts are unmolested. Yet we know that the fundamental law of

Islam has not been changed and cannot be. We know how a liberal-minded Prime Minister ordered the execution of the martyr Mirza Ibrahim, and afterwards justified himself by saying, "By our law he ought to die!"

The new constitution did not change any of the old laws. It declares that Shiah Islam is the religion of the state, that no law can be passed contrary to the *Shariat* (religious law), that no Christian can be a minister of state, that nothing can be published contrary to the religion. The modern liberals and so-called social democrats did not have the power, and probably not the desire, to effect a change in the old laws and in the attitude of Persian Islam towards Christianity and the Christian propaganda. In truth, some of the Nationalists, though themselves irreligious, had already begun, before the present crisis reached its climax, to work against mission schools, using arguments from religion and making adherence to Islam a test of patriotism. It is rather probable that a reaction against intolerance would have set in. But under Russian administration the power to persecute and to execute the penalties for apostasy will be annulled. It is possible that Russia may begin missionary efforts among Moslems in Persia, for it has such missions established in Central Russia, and so recognizes the desirability of them. In any case, the essential liberty to profess Christianity will be assured to the convert from Islam.

5. Russian law is allowing greater religious freedom. There will be reactions doubtless and difficulties, but the tendency is toward fuller liberty. Definite and large advance was made in the Czar's Manifesto of 1905, which was designed, to quote its own words, "to give to the population the immutable foundations of civil freedom on the principles of effective inviolability of person and freedom of conscience, speech, union, societies and association." On the basis of this, a law has been passed by the Duma aiming at religious tolerance. Mixed marriages have been allowed, the privilege has been granted to the members of any religious denomination, where they number fifty in any place, to build a church and have their form of worship. A clause prohibiting propa-

ganda is vague. Much depends on the attitude of the governor. In many provinces liberal-minded governors are, under these laws, permitting a larger freedom of worship and of association. The edict of religious liberty is not a dead letter, as some suppose, though reaction has followed the revolutionary movement. That movement had two great weaknesses. One was that the liberal Russian element was so outnumbered by the supporters from the Jews, Poles, Finns, Armenians, etc., that the movement took on the appearance of being anti-Russian or at least non-Russian, and was called unpatriotic. Another reason was the irreligion of the liberals. The "intelligents" are so inclined to scepticism that the religious masses recoiled from being led by them, just as the Armenian people in Turkey shrink from their irreligious revolutionary leaders. It should be our prayer that liberal movements among the Russians, as well as among the Armenians, may be led by men imbued by the religious spirit of Lincoln and Gladstone. Better slow progress towards liberty, conserving the good of the Christian heritage, than a cataclysmic breaking away from faith and worship. The recognition of the principles of religious freedom in Russia and the general tendency towards the exercise of it, give hope of favorable conditions for mission work in Russian dependencies.

6. The amount of evangelistic work now allowed in Russia points to the same conclusion. There has been a great deal of direct and powerful Christian work carried on in Russia in past decades, and it has increased. I remember that when Mr. Watts, the agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society in Russia, visited Persia more than thirty years ago and became acquainted with our mission work, he remarked, "There is much more missionary work being done in Russia than in Persia." Since then it has increased in volume and in power. No one can read the reports from Russia without being impressed with the Christian activity in the empire. Not the least part of this is the wonderful Bible distribution under the Russian Bible Society, assisted by the British and Foreign Bible Society. Bible distribution is encouraged, colporteurs and Bibles have free passage on

the railroads, sales to the soldiers and donations to the prisoners are freely permitted. The Bible work enjoys so many privileges that it has been found advantageous for the American Bible Society to transfer its work in Persia to the British and Foreign Society, that the Bible work in Persia may thus be brought into connection with the Russian Bible Society and partake of its privileges.

Let us merely glance at the Gospel work in Trans-Caucasia. There congregations of evangelical Armenians worship and carry on their Christian work unmolested. In one case the Russian Governor assigned to them a separate village, at their request. They have schools and churches under the shadow of Etchmiadzin, with full cognizance of the Armenian Synod and the Russian administration, and are not interfered with. For the Armenian Church has ceased to molest Protestants, and the Russian authorities recognize them as a law-abiding element. The Protestant Syrians (Nestorians from Urumia) have full permission for their services in Tiflis, and are an authorized communion. Let me give you an experience which greatly impressed me. On Easter eve (O. S.) I arrived in the city of Baku, which not many years ago was an old Persian town, and in which the old fortress of the Khan is still standing. It has 80,000 Moslems, and the same number of Armenians. The city was full of the great Easter night celebration, and the Russian Church was thronged, for now 30,000 Russians have settled there. Sunday morning I hunted up one of our Tabriz Armenians, who, as a staunch Protestant evangelist, had been at work for twenty-five years in the Caucasus. First I accompanied him to a meeting of the Malakans, who are ever ready to welcome the sermons of the Protestant evangelists. They have considerable religious feeling and life, and resemble Protestants in doctrine. Next we went to the Russian Baptists, of whom there are several congregations, live and earnest, in the city. Their congregational singing was led by a precentor and was heartily joined in by both men and women. They heard a good Gospel sermon, in Russian, by the pastor of the evangelical Armenians. Three or four hundred were present. They are building for them-

selves a good church. We had time to look in on the German Lutheran congregation, of whom there are 5,000. Then we went to hear the service in the Armenian Lutheran Church. They have a cut-stone church with a manse and school, and a yearly budget of 8,000 roubles. These Protestants are the fruit of the former Basel Mission. Their pastor is a graduate of Dorpat University, and emphasized our unity by inviting me to preach. In the evening I preached for the Evangelical Armenians. They are fervid in spirit and were just beginning a series of meetings. I spoke to them three evenings in Armenian. At the same time a meeting of mission workers in Trans-Caucasia came together and at night continued the services, at the conclusion of which thirty were added to the church. This mission committee consisted of a Swedish missionary, one of the English Plymouth Brethren, and of the Armenian evangelists from several cities of the Caucasus, in each of which there is a group of evangelical Christians. I was told that it was the habit of these Russian and Armenian brethren to keep the numerous Russian holidays by holding one or two extra religious services daily. It encouraged one's heart to see all this religious activity in this old Moslem city; and one wonders whether some of our old Persian cities may not show even greater things after fifty years of Russian occupation.

7. Lastly, let us inquire as to the standing which missionary work will have in Persia under Russian occupation. The missions are American, British, French and German. The American Presbyterian Missions, the French Roman Catholic, German Protestant, Archbishop of Canterbury's Mission, British work among the Jews, and the chief station (Ispahan) of the C.M.S., fall in the Russian "sphere of influence," and will doubtless fall under Russian rule. It may be assumed that this established work will be recognized and authorized by the Russian Government. Aside from the fact that it will have no reason to interfere with the missions, seeing they are simply religious establishments free from any political propaganda, it will be ready to recognize them as an act of comity and right to the friendly governments,

under whose protection these missions are founded. That this opinion is correct may be seen from a report of the expectation of the American Government, as given in "The Foreign Doctor" (Life of Dr. J. P. Cochran), p. 224. This view of the American Government was given in reference to this very contingency, namely, the possible passing of Azerbaijan under Russian control. Dr. Robert E. Speer and Dr. J. P. Cochran went to Washington and interviewed General John W. Foster, former Secretary of State, who was a firm friend of missions and especially acquainted with its conditions, and Mr. John Hay, then Secretary of State. Mr. Hay asked for a written statement embodying the facts concerning the extent of the mission work and the long-continued recognition of its rights. Dr. Speer writes: "Mr. Hay was very attentive to the statement made to him, and at the close spoke with a positiveness which surprised his visitors of the assurance which they might feel that, even if Russia should take possession of Northern Persia, the missionaries should not be dispossessed of any of the rights which they enjoyed."

Certainly the missionaries will adapt their work to the new conditions; for example, in the matter of language. The missions should cordially adopt the Russian language as the basis of instruction and the principal language of the curriculums in the schools. We do not read the Great Commission, as was suggested by a German speaker at the Edinburgh Conference, as meaning to us Anglo-Saxons: "Go ye into all the world and teach the English language." Russian will suit our purpose for education. Especially it can be a union language for Persian-Tartars, Kurds, Nestorians, and Armenians, whose combination in one school has always been difficult. For North-west Persia the Persian itself is a foreign language. For the past quarter of a century we have taught Russian in our school in Tabriz and for some time in Urumia. I have repeatedly advised the Armenian National School to make Russian the language for all higher studies as a matter of preparation for the business of life. For Russia's entrance, with its higher civilization, will greatly augment the demand for educated

men and increase profitable avocations. Incidentally this will benefit mission work by decreasing the emigration of educated young men from our Protestant congregations. The whole opportunity for giving Christian education will be increased, for heretofore many have been prevented from taking advantage of mission schools through fear of the mullahs.

In view of these considerations we can regard the outlook in Persia as favorable. Under Russian rule Christianity in general will hold a much improved position, and mission work will not be hindered, and in certain ways will have fuller protection and greater opportunities.

S. G. WILSON.

Tabriz.