

How could this lone man defy the entrenched hosts of Islam? It was an object lesson in the courage that comes from the fear of God, which dissipates the fear of men.

Soon after this, Benjamin left Shiraz to tour the larger towns of the surrounding district. In some of them he met opposition and persecution, but perseverance won out, in so much that during this first year of direct colportage work in Persia his sales mounted to two thousand four hundred copies of the Word.

His character always shone forth above what he did or said. Bishop French said of the days that he and Benjamin spent together in Shiraz, "In my whole missionary career I have never spent twelve more interesting and encouraging days." But the work was fraught with greater difficulties as time passed. There were long, dark seasons when the most assiduous labor could accomplish only small sales, and then would break forth again the sunshine of great opportunity; but through light and shadow alike Benjamin worked "as seeing Him who is invisible." Ever before him were the words of the Apostle, "It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." Faithful to self, faithful to Christ, faithful to the Word, faithful to his high calling!

There followed a tour of ten weeks to Yezd—in the midst of the desert—and on as far to the south as the district of Lar. Dr. Bruce wrote of this trip: "Formerly if sales to Persians covered the expenses of the journey I was quite satisfied, this time Benjamin has sold one hundred and two *tomans* worth of books at a cost of seventeen *tomans*. . . . He is a valiant soldier. Oh for more like him!"

In the fall of 1884, Benjamin was making an itinerating trip westward from the base at Julfa-Isfahan. He came to the town of Nahavand, and went to the home of a *Mujtahid* to show his books. This man had violently opposed the work of Bible distribution, and when he saw Benjamin with the Scriptures in his hand, he ordered his servants to knock him down and beat him to death. The

colporteur was thrown face downward, his feet were fastened for bastinado, and after shoes and socks had been removed the servants began to beat the soles of his bare feet with heavy rods. Under this cruel punishment Benjamin three times lost consciousness and each time, as his senses returned, he heard the *Mujtahid* still commanding the servants to beat him until life was gone. But to turn from the terrible torture to the entry in Benjamin's diary is like lifting a fevered face to a breeze from the Spirit of Christ. He writes, "When I think of those who will come after me and be able to sell the Holy Word freely, for I hope there will soon be religious liberty in this country, I feel very glad and comforted in this suffering for Christ's sake. The same day by God's grace and help I was able to sell eight copies in that bigoted town." Helpless, crippled, in agony, still selling the Word and thinking vicariously of those who would follow! When we look upon such a spirit should we not reconsecrate ourselves to the task of distributing God's Word?

After some time Benjamin's feet healed so that he was again able to walk, the fierce suffering had not dampened his ardent spirit and he went on with his work. A well-known missionary from India, the Rev. G. Shirt, wrote home in a letter from Baghdad: "I count it a matter for gratitude to God that the leading colporteur connected with the mission at Julfa, supported by the Bible Society, is a man of no ordinary Christian spirit. He knows nothing of education as it is known in the west, but he has a heart full of love, a faith that God can work great wonders now as in the past, and a zeal which persecution and suffering have only served to increase. I met this man and his helper at Shiraz, and I will not presume to state that I tried to encourage him in his good work, for he is one of those bright spirits who seem to bring sunshine wherever they go, but I must say that I greatly enjoyed my intercourse with him and our mutual commendation of each other to the safe-keeping of our God, when we knelt before the throne of Grace."

While on a tour to the south, Benjamin and his assistant visited the island of Bahrein in the Persian Gulf. It is said that the colporteurs were in some danger, but Benjamin did not notice it; he rather rejoiced at the opportunity to work among these Arabs, and said he would be glad to return to the island again. Dr. Bruce writes in his report to the Bible Society for 1886 concerning the visit to the island of Bahrein, "I feel sure that there, as in other places, his safety was owing, under God, to his spirit of calm trustfulness and entire absence of anything like fear."

The few years following were marked by faithful work, and you might have met Benjamin anywhere along dusty road and desert trail in the heat of summer, or on snowclad mountain and rocky path. He covered most of southern Persia. At times his work went on without molestation from authorities either ecclesiastical or civil, then again persecution and trouble would be encountered. Several visits were made to Kermanshah and the western provinces. In two instances Benjamin was threatened with death, but tact and a willingness to move on to other places when things got too hot, brought him through safely.

The attitude of people and authorities toward the sale of the Scripture was not at all consistent. The Shiah Mohammedans object to anyone of another faith entering their mosques. Benjamin on one occasion nearly got into serious trouble by entering a mosque in Bushire, where he wanted to offer the Gospel to a *mullah* and his pupils of the mosque school. On another occasion in Ardistan he placed his Bibles on the very *minbar* or pulpit from which the *mullah* was speaking, and for six hours sold books from this point of vantage without a word of opposition.

With a companion, a long journey was made into southeastern Persia and into the wild deserts of Baluchistan. There was no way to send word as to where they were or their condition, and at times there was apprehen-

sion as to their safety, but finally they returned after months in the desert, as hard and brown as athletes. Benjamin always rejoiced in the fact that abundant health and physical vigor resulted from the outdoor life of itineration and the great amount of walking, as well as riding horses, donkeys and camels from place to place.

In 1894 Benjamin was promoted to superintendent colporteur. This new responsibility was granted after sixteen years of service, and gave him an opportunity to train and inspire younger men in the work of distributing the Word, that they too might profit by his wisdom and experience.

There followed a very interesting trip to the nomad tribes of Luristan. Those who have seen the motion picture "Grass" or have read the book with that title will know something of the wild, primeval life of these people. The trip may best be described in the words of Benjamin from the report of the British and Foreign Bible Society for 1894:

"Luristan *via* Kal-hor and Pusht-i-kuh; this part of the country has never been visited by colporteurs, and therefore it seemed necessary to go there in obedience to our Lord's Command. 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations—and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world!' We had little hope of being successful among these wild Lurs. But our surprise and joy was great when on our arrival at Khurramabad we found we had only two copies left out of eighty which we had brought from Kermanshah.

"At Kal-hor the head-man, though not able to read, yet purchased seven copies which he distributed among his followers. We had loaded our horses and were on the point of starting when several people came to buy books and compelled us to unload. We sold them some thirty copies and they tried to persuade us to stay a few days longer, but we told them we wished to keep some of our Scriptures for Pusht-i-kuh also.

"At Pusht-i-kuh the chief is surnamed 'Father of the Sword,' and is guardian of the frontier of that part of Persia bordering on the Turkish province of Iraq-Araby. His summer residence is at Amleh, where he has a castle; in winter he and his people live in tents and migrate to the borders of Turkish Arabia. The valley of Amleh was black with tents, and we were told that fifty thousand people occupied them. We went to see Hussein Guli Khan, who received us with great hospitality and ordered one of his chiefs to act as our host, and he gave us a tent and other necessaries. All our wants were well supplied during our stay of three days, and we sold the greater part of our remaining

stock of Scriptures. The reason of our success was that this was the first visit of the kind. When we went to take leave of the Chief he again spoke kindly to us and gave us guards to bring us safely to Khurramabad. Thus we had good protection through that dangerous country. On the way a man came up to us who expressed a great desire to have a Bible. When he found he had not sufficient money to pay for it he brought us, in addition to his money (which was two *krans*) a copper vessel, and I very gladly let him have the Bible. Khurramabad is the capital of Persian Luristan, and although the inhabitants have the reputation of being rude and barbarous, yet we have always been able to work freely among them without hindrance or opposition. We returned to Julfa *via* Sultanabad, rejoicing that this year again the Lord had guided and protected us and had enabled us to take His Holy Word to the dark places of this country."

In April, 1896, Benjamin left with another colporteur intending systematically to work the city of Shiraz and the whole Province of Fars. The Shah had been assassinated, and the whole country was in a state of uproar and violence. The travellers with several other caravans were held at the village of Deh-bid for eleven days. They were hemmed in by nomad Arabs who kept up constant rifle fire for days at a time. At last, accompanied by government horsemen, the caravans were able to proceed to Shiraz. Here they had good work for some three months and then went out to tour a number of towns.

At Firuzabad sales were good, and the governor gave the colporteurs a place to stay in his own house. *Mullahs*, however, ordered the people not to read the books, and a number had to be taken back and the purchase price refunded. Word against the workers was sent ahead to Mehman, and they were not able to sell a single volume there. In Jahrum they worked for about a week among Jews and Mohammedans, and then went on to Lar. The day after their arrival there the *Mujtahid* of the place called the colporteurs to him and sent men to bring their stock of books. He began to tear the Scriptures to pieces and ordered the Bible workers and the people to do the same. The *Mujtahid* tore the cover from a Bible and pretending to throw it away put it in a place where he could later get it. Benjamin saw that the two sons of the ecclesiastic each concealed a New Testament, and many

in the crowd were hiding books in their clothing. The *Mujtahid* then ordered the fragments of the Scriptures thrown into a well. As the two workers left to return to their room in the caravanserai stones were thrown at them and several blows from behind struck Benjamin on the head. The *Mujtahid* was still not satisfied, and gathered another crowd and was on the way to the caravanserai to renew the attack on the workers. A young man came to warn them, as Paul the apostle was warned of the plot against his life; they made haste to the house of the governor, and he kindly took them in and kept them for four days. He inquired into the matter of their treatment, and gave them a present of ten *tomans* and some tea and sugar when they left, in addition to an escort to see them safely on their way.

The *Mujtahid* of Lar sent word to religious authorities in Jahrum to destroy the Scriptures if any were offered for sale there. A crowd came to the caravanserai, broke open the boxes and carried off or destroyed the whole stock of books. The colporteurs returned to Shiraz. The newly appointed governor there heard of the disturbances and forbade the sale of Scriptures in the province, so Benjamin and his associate returned to their base at Julfa-Isfahan.

From this time troubles seemed to multiply. They culminated when, on January 29th, 1897, a Moslem mob came to Julfa aroused by the fact that a C. M. S. teacher had taken some Mohammedan boys to an Armenian bath. Benjamin was endeavoring to quiet the disturbance, when a stone aimed at him by a Mohammedan missed its intended mark and struck another Moslem on the head. The wound was not severe and was practically healed, when it happened some sixteen days later that the man died. Doctors attributed the death to natural causes, but feeling was running high, and Benjamin was accused of having thrown the stone, and word was passed about among those on the street that the man had died as a result of the wound. A mob having gathered, they deter-