



NEGLECTED ARABIA.

October - December, 1911.

The Bible in Oman.

To the man that has faith in the word of God, the province of Oman presents a unique and urgent opportunity. In the first place, it is a Mohammedan land. The work among Mohammedans has been, in time past, largely the work of Bible Societies, and the same is still true. But Oman is more than one among many Mohammedan provinces. Probably nowhere in Arabia are the people as faithful in their observance of prayers, and the other ordinances and rules of Islam. But these same Moslems are friendly to the "Injeel," as they call the Gospel, and many of them willing to buy and read it. They are able to read it, too. As an estimate, probably one-half of the people can read and write, and in some of the places actually more of the women than the men. Such a condition constitutes a very rare opportunity among Moslems. I doubt if it can be duplicated in all Islam.

The land is still virgin soil. The infidelity of the West has not reached it. It knows nothing of the false Christianity of Rome, and little of the scandals of European society in the East. This condition will not last, and that very fact adds to the urgency of our present opportunity.

The people live in villages. Naturally they will not come to us, so we must go to them. Any single distributing point must of necessity be most inadequate, but the tactful colporteur, inland, is able to sow the Word widely.

This year it was my privilege to go on a three months' tour. Thanks to the many years of preparatory work there was almost no hostility, no shut doors. We met uniform cordiality, and that for Doctor and colporteur as well. Some 1,200 copies, or portions, of Scripture were sold (some few of these presented as gifts to Sheikhs, etc.). The tour was much of it in untouched places and revealed great opportunities. In one such city we sold 200 copies and portions. A judge came and bought a copy of each of the Gospels. He bought



AMARA BIBLE SHOP—COLPORTEUR IN DOORWAY.

some of the books of the Old Testament, as well, The people as a whole are very fond of Genesis, Job, The Psalms and Proverbs. They will often buy these when they refuse the Gospels. One woman asked for a copy of Ruth, which led the colporteur to remark that if Ruth and Esther were available as one portion, they would meet with quite a demand in Oman.

Sometimes there are difficulties. One teacher objected that the books lacked the orthodox Moslem introduction, "In the Name of God The Compassionate, The Merciful." Another teacher came in from a neighboring village, and insisting that the Koran had abrogated all previous Sacred books, he kept our sales in that village down to seven copies. But the colporteur argued him well off his feet, and then covered up his defeat for him by presenting him with a volume of poetry, and asking him to read to the people. Later in the day we went to that teacher's village, with him, and sold fifty portions in perhaps three hours. He stood by approvingly.

There is "much land to be possessed in Oman, still. A large part

of that country has never seen missionary or colporteur, or even a Christian of any sort. While the doors are open and the field clear, it behooves us to make haste that no part of the field be left unsown. Islam may be like a rock," but "Is not my Word like as a fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer, that breaketh the rock in pieces?"

P. W. HARRISON.



Present Conditions in Busrah.

Much has been said about the New Turkey, and about the regeneration effected by the present régime of constitutional liberty. None is more anxious to see all hopes realized and claims substantiated than the missionary, and in returning to Busrah after an absence of several years I have been vitally interested in noting the changes that have taken place in that time.

There is no question but that recent years have been a period of material progress in this corner of the Ottoman Empire. One only needs to see the long line of ocean steamers at anchor in the river to be sure of this. The new Government buildings would indicate the same; and more than this, that the increased income from taxes and customs did not, as formerly, mostly remain in the pockets of the gatherer. An extensive condemning of property for the widening and straightening of streets may seem drastic to the Arab, but it speaks of civic pride and ambition in some one. That a few of these ambitious have seemingly gone beyond the bounds of wisdom, does not prevent us from applauding the evidences of a developing and not decadent civilization.

Has there been a growth in morals as well? Yes, in some directions. Bribery, for example, is not as universally recognized as a necessary factor in business as formerly. The prohibition of it among Government servants is well enforced, and has made life for us foreigners much easier in several directions. On the other hand these evils which make Christian cities a reproach not only to ourselves but to all the world are growing far faster than any influence for good, and the open evidences of the existence of drinking and social evil should compel the Moslem apologist to qualify these arguments for the superiority of Islam.

To the credit of the present régime it should be said that the value of learning as well to the state as the individual, is recognized as never before. I vividly remember in the olden days our futile efforts to open a school, and how even the most unpretentious of efforts—the