

Mohammedans. The principles of religious liberty, which prevail in the Chinese Empire, will be a shield for their work. The language of the people is very similar to the Tartar or Turki used by us in Persia. Mr. Hogberg, formerly of Tabriz, is the pioneer of the mission. The plan of the mission is evangelistic, and in close contact with the natives. Indeed, two of the ladies of the mission have, I believe, married Asiatic converts. It will be interesting to see the development of this experiment. The British and Foreign Bible Society is also trying to open up a work for Bible distribution in those provinces. Thus the Trans-Siberian Railway is already being made a highway for the advance of Christ's kingdom.

By the autumn of 1897 it is expected that a branch of the Transcaucasian Railway will be extended to Erivan, thus bringing Persia two days nearer to America.

THE STAR-WORSHIPERS OF MESOPOTAMIA.*

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In the towns along the lower Euphrates and Tigris, especially at Amara, Sook es Shiookh, Busrah, and Mohammerah, there dwell an interesting people variously known as Sabeans, Nasoreans, or St. John Christians. They call themselves Mandäee (Mandaeans), and altho only numbering four or five thousand, they yet have always been and remain entirely distinct from the Jews, Moslems, and Christians among whom they have dwelt for centuries. Their origin is lost in obscurity, altho it is traced in a measure through the maze of their religion to ancient Chaldea.

Certain it is that at the time when Islam arose the Sabeans were a strong sect. The Koran recognizes them as distinct from idolaters, and places them with Jews and Christians as "people of the book" (Surahs 22 : 17 ; 2 : 59 ; 5 : 73) : "Verily, those who believe and those who are Jews, and the Sabeans and the Christians, whosoever believes in God and the last day, and does what is right, there is no fear for them nor shall they grieve." In the English Bible the name Sabeans is perplexing, and, altho applied to three different tribes or peoples, none of these are any way related to the present sect in Mesopotamia. Sabeans, according to Gesenius, should be *Tsabians*, from *tsaboth*, the host of heaven—i.e., the supposed objects of their worship. Nöldeke and others say it comes from a root, *subba*, to wash, baptize, and refers to the manner of their worship. Gibbon is perhaps correct when he states the origin of their other name thus : "A slight infusion of the Gospel had transformed the

* Bibliography : Nöldeke's "Mandaäische Grammatik," Halle, 1875; Captain Prideaux's "Sketch of a Sabæan Grammar," Trans. Bib. Arch. Soc., vol. v.; Ainsworth's "Euphrates Expedition," 2 vols., 1888; Encyclopædia Britannica, vol. xv., pp. 470; Dr. W. Brandt's "Mandaäische Schriften," 1885; "A Prayer-Meeting of the Star-Worshippers" (London Standard, October 12th, 1894); V. Cuinet's "La Turquie d'Asie," 1894.