

THE JEWS IN PERSIA.—I.

BY REV. S. G. WILSON, TABRIZ, PERSIA.

The Jews in Persia call themselves Beni-Israel, which accords with the Bible account of the captivity of the Israelites in "the cities of the Medes," "by the river Gozan," which may be the Guzul-Uzun, the longest river of Media. Shahpoor II. transported Jews from Armenia to Persia.

The Jews now found in the limits of ancient Media are in the western part, having been driven there by Tamerlane. Starting at the northwestern border, we find them in Salmas, Oroomiah, Suldooz, Sonjbulak, Miandnab, Sakkus, Senna, Kermanshah, Hamadan, and other places. In Azerbaijan there are twelve hundred and thirty houses of Jews. They are found also in Teheran, Kashan, Khorasan, and Ispahan.

These remnants have survived the persecutions of centuries. Tabriz has none except a few strangers. The cause is that old slander which is constantly renewed even in the present day and in Europe. It was reported by some renegade Jews that the Jews had killed a missing Mohammedan child and drunk his blood. The late Kala-Begi narrated how the police snatched a Jew, thus accused, from the hands of an infuriated mob, which followed him into the courtyard yelling for his blood. The Kala-Begi bastinadoed him to appease the mob, and afterward told the English consul, who remonstrated with him for beating an innocent man, that it was the only way to save him alive from the mob. At that time the Jews fled from Tabriz.

A somewhat similar affair occurred in Oroomiah in Dr. Perkins's time. A Mohammedan infant was found dead before a Jew's door. The latter was accused of murder and arrested. The Mohammedans collected in an angry mob, and for several days surrounded the governor's palace, demanding that all the Jews should be put to death. To appease the mob, the Jew was delivered to them, beheaded, and burned.

In Meshed, the ancient Tus, the Jews have resided for centuries. It was one of their rabbis who made the first Persian version of any part of the Bible in the eighth or tenth century. They continued there near the sacred shrine of the Emaum Reza, until several decades ago a report was spread that the Jews had killed a dog in ridicule of the ceremonies of the Festival of Sacrifice. A mob rose, killed a Jew, tore down some of their dwellings, and finally gave the Jews the alternative of Islam or the sword. In fear of death they accepted an outward profession of Islam.

At Balfurush, in Mezanderan, in 1866, a massacre of Jews occurred.* The cause was perhaps, a lack of rain. For this an efficacious remedy was supposed to be the disinterment and scattering broadcast of the dust

* See Mormsey's "Through the Caucasus and Persia."