

NORTHERN MESSENGER

DEVOTED TO TEMPERANCE, SCIENCE, EDUCATION, AND LITERATURE.

VOLUME XXVIII., No. 20.

MONTREAL & NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 29, 1893.

30 Cts. Per An. Post-Paid.

THE NEW SYRIAC BIBLE.

A WORK OF YEARS JUST COMPLETED BY AMERICAN MISSIONARIES AND NATIVE HELPERS.

After years of labor in the work of translation and revision, the new Syriac



REV. BENJAMIN LABAREE, D.D.
Missionary to Persia, in Charge of the Work.

Bible has at last been completed and the book, printed and bound by the American Bible Society in New York, is now ready for distribution. The history of this long and arduous task, but lately finished, is a most interesting one. From first to last it has been accomplished under the skilled supervision of the Rev. Benjamin Labaree, D.D., an American missionary long resident in Persia and a master of the Syriac and other Oriental languages.

Rev. Dr. Perkins and his missionary colleagues were the pioneer translators of the Scriptures into the Modern Syriac. They began with the New Testament in 1846, which was made from the Syriac version known as Peshitto, a version esteemed by all Biblical scholars and almost venerated by the Nestorians. It was printed on the American mission press at Oroomiah, the Peshitto being placed side by side in parallel columns with the Syriac. Six years later, in 1852, was issued the first translation of the Old Testament from the Hebrew into the spoken Syriac, the Peshitto version being in many respects defective and inaccurate, since it had been made to harmonize more with the original Greek than the Hebrew. Still later, the necessity was felt for a volume less bulky than those in use, the Syriac characters being large and the complete Scriptures weighing between five and six pounds. Accordingly, type of a smaller size was prepared by the American Bible Society at a great expense; but, as the Bible Society has already printed, from its own types, the Bible either in whole or in part, in nearly 350 languages, it did not hesitate, and a new and convenient pocket edition of the New Testament was issued in 1863.

Other editions followed, but in no case were the Old and New Testaments issued in one volume. These editions were ultimately exhausted and it was decided to undertake a thorough revision of all the translations before issuing another. A close comparison of the language and dialects, in the light of the fuller knowledge acquired during a lapse of twenty years, convincingly showed the great need of such a revision. In the early editions, the translators had conformed to the Oroomiah dialect, but it had never come into the general use expected, and it was therefore decided after full consideration, to make the Syriac style available for a much wider constituency. Defective translations in the earlier editions have been amended in the new, and the meaning of the original



JOEL W. ABRAHAM.
Assistant and Proof-reader—A Native Nestorian.

has been made clearer, while at the same time the translation itself is simple and idiomatic, and the dialect which is spoken on the western mountain slopes of Koor-distan (embracing nearly one-half of the Nestorian people), is accorded prominent recognition. In addition to these advantages, the entire Bible—both Old and New Testaments—is in one compact convenient volume, and contains the references.

There are also copious foot notes, giving either the Greek or Peshitto reading, when there is a material difference in the sense. Many redundancies and other peculiarities of the ancient Syriac are eliminated in the new version, and as a whole, as regards literary form and accuracy in translation, it is by far the most valuable version of the Syrian Scriptures yet published. It is hardly necessary to add that the new Syriac Bible will receive a warm welcome from the Nestorians, who have always evinced a beautiful reverence for the Word; and whose whole history, through the ages, is that of a people holding to a pure, simple faith, while many ancient churches have been whelmed in corruption and superstition.

The Syrian language is the language of the Nestorians, who, ages ago, removed from Syria into Persia to escape persecution. Every nationality in Persia, whether Turkish, Armenian, Syrian or Jewish, uses its own dialect and hence the Nestorians use the Syriac. It should be explained that among themselves they do not use or recognize the appellation Nestorian, preferring to call themselves 'Surayi.' Their spiritual leader bears the title of 'Patriarch of the East.'

This modern Syriac is not now regarded by Semitic scholars as a descendant of the classic tongue of the Peshitto, known as the ancient Syriac, but rather as a representative of some sister branch of the Aramaic family of languages now otherwise lost sight of. There are two somewhat different alphabets in which the Syrian is written: the Jacobite and the Nestorian. This modern Syriac Bible uses the beautiful Nestorian square character. Nine years ago the revision was undertaken by the Rev. Dr. Labaree and his corps of assistants, and the printing of portions of it began six years ago. It was temporarily suspended, and was resumed in the fall of 1891 and continued until complete. The Rev. Benjamin Labaree, D.D., the trans-



DAVID ISMAIL.
A Native Nestorian Typesetter who helped the Work.

lator, who successfully accomplished this great and important work, is the son of the late President Labaree of Middlebury College, Vt. He received his earlier college training at that institution and was graduated from Andover Theological Seminary in 1859. In the following year he went out to Persia, and entered on missionary work under the auspices of the American Board. He was stationed at Oroomiah, and remained connected with that mission after its transfer to the Presbyterian Board, until the summer of 1891, with the exception of two vacation visits to the United States. He came to the United States two

years ago, for the purpose of personally supervising the printing of the Syriac Bible. He is still in that country, and his return is rendered uncertain by the condition of his family's health. A son, Rev. Benjamin W. Labaree, has recently been ordained to the ministry and will go to Oroomiah as a missionary this fall.

Associated in the work of producing the new Syriac Bible were, Mr. Joel W. Abraham, Mr. Paul Behman and Mr. David Ismail, whose portraits are given with this article. The first acted as assistant revisor and proof-reader, and the others as typesetters, having been trained to the business at the Mission Printing House at Oroomiah. Valuable assistance was also rendered by Mr. McLean, who for years has been employed by the American Bible Society, and who is able to read with equal facility manuscripts in a number of Oriental languages. Mr. Abraham is the son of the oldest Nestorian pastor among the Evangelical Nestorian churches in Oroomiah. He himself is a graduate of the Mission College where he took a high rank as a scholar. He was later, for two or three years, translator and general assistant on the mission press at Oroomiah, under the care of Dr. Labaree. In the fall or winter of 1891, he came to the United States, to assist in completing the revision of the Bible and acted as native proof-reader. He is now contemplating taking a course of theological study in the hope of going back to Persia as a preacher of the Gospel.

Mr. Behman is a convert from Mohammedanism to Christianity, through the influence of missionary teaching at Oroomiah. He was educated as a Mohammedan priest, but became dissatisfied with his religion, not finding in it that rest for his soul for which he greatly yearned.

He longed to use the Christian Scriptures. He had been told that they contained test proofs of the truth of Mohammedanism, but that the Christians would not let him



PAUL BEHMAN.
A Native Nestorian who set the Syriac Type.

use their sacred book. Then with grim determination he began to study English in the hope of finding a copy of the Scrip-

W. M. P. 231893
GALTON QUE
ROBERT