

GOSPEL WORK IN PERSIA.

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In considering the condition of Gospel work in Persia, the state of religious liberty and the prospects concerning it come foremost to the mind. Would that there was a more favorable outlook for toleration! Islam is inherently intolerant, and the leaders of Islam in Persia—the mollahs—are gaining a higher position and increased power. The people are willingly submissive to them as interpreters of the law and religious guides. They are an educated and wealthy class. Many of them have large landed property, are the recipients of government grants and large legacies from the people. The settlement of estates and of civil suits is in their hands, and fees and fines, together with the *khums*, or fifth of each inheritance, go to the mollahs. The real allegiance of the people is to their Mujtihad, and not to the Shah. Many events have shown this of late years. It was strikingly illustrated lately in the mourning for the death of the Chief Mujtihad of Tabriz and for Shah Nasr-i-Din. For the former the bazaars were closed three days, and services of mourning, continuing through several weeks, were held in many mosques and houses. Feasts were given in the mosques in his honor. Government officials, through fear of the people and the mollahs, joined in the mourning, and even the Armenians thought it discreet to close their schools and to send a sum of money to one of the mosques for a *tozia* or mourning service. A public crier went through the bazaars and proclaimed that the Armenians were holding service for the rest of the Mujtihad's soul. Whether in sincerity or dissimulation, the whole city joined in revering the dead Mujtihad. When the Shah was assassinated, no signs of mourning were visible, and no memorial services were held in Tabriz. Many Persians expressed their satisfaction. Rejoicings for the accession of the new Shah occupied the attention of all. The city was illuminated in an unprecedented manner. One official, who had invited some guests to celebrate the jubilee of Nasr-i-Din Shah, held the feast on the appointed day, telling his guests to rejoice instead on account of the accession of Muzaffir-i-Din. The Mujtihad was mourned for more than the Shah. It is likely that the power of the mollahs will increase during the present reign, as Muzaffir-i-Din is inclined to consult them and lean upon them for guidance.

Mollahs maintain their influence over the people by instructing them in the schools and mosques, and impressing them with the truth of the Shiah faith. At Friday prayers, in the Fast of Ramazan and the mourning of Muharram the inculcation of religious doctrine is pursued, until the people are well informed regarding the precepts and traditions of Islam and are inspired with its intolerant spirit.

Gospel work among Mohammedans shows little change. The law of