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REPORT OF A JOURNEY INTO YEMEN AND WORK AMONG THE JEWS FOR THE MILD MAY MISSION,

FROM JULY 1ST, TO SEPT. 1ST, 1894.

[English and Scotch papers have paid deserved praise to the tact, pluck and persistence of the Rev. S. M. Zwemer, of our Arabian Mission, in his journey into Yemen to further the work of the Mildmay Mission to the Jews. Some of these comments have been reprinted here, and many readers of THE CHRISTIAN INTELLIGENCER will have seen them. They will the more enjoy the extracts from the report he made to the London Mission, and be gratified at the revelation it gives of the kind of men who are establishing our newest mission —EDS. C. I.]

ON June 3d I left Babrein and the work of the Arabian Mission on leave of absence to visit the Jews of Yemen and supply them with New Testaments on behalf of the Mildmay Mission. On the 9th I arrived at Kerachi, and took passage on the 12th in the steamship "La Seyne" for Aden. In spite of heavy monsoon weather we arrived there safely on the morning of the 18th....

On July 2d all arrangements for the inland journey were completed, and we left the same day. I took the overland route to Sanaa for two reasons: first, because I hoped to supply the Jews of Taiz, Ibb, Yerin and Dhamar in this way; and, second, because I had reason to believe it easier to pass the books through the customs there than at Hodeidah. The sequel shows that it was a choice between two evils; even now there are several cases of B. and F. Bible

Society Scriptures retained at Hodeidah for over three years!....

After leaving Sheikh Othman, we reached Wahat at noon, and left again at 7 P.M. to avoid the heat. Noon temperature in the shade at Wahat was 96 degs. F. Our course during the night was through a barren region, and at daylight we entered Wady Mer-gia, with scanty vegetation, resting at a village of the same name, where, under an acacia tree, I soon found an audience. At three o'clock in the afternoon we left, and soon entered the mountains, where rich vegetation showed a cooler climate; we passed several villages, Dar El Kadim, Khoteibah, Sook El Gooma, and as this was said to be a dangerous part of the road, all the caravan (which we joined at Wahat) was on the lookout, with rope-wicks for their fire-locks lighted and swinging from their shoulders in the dark, like so many fire-flies. At three o'clock in the morning we had ascended to the head of the wady, and rested for the day at Mabek.

On the 4th of July we left Mabek. During the night there had been talk among the wild Arabs of the village of forcing me back to Aden or holding me as a hostage to obtain money from the English! But Nasir quieted them with a threefold Bedouin oath that I was not a government agent, and not English but American. The day after leaving Mabek we passed up the valley, through beautiful fields of cultivation and amidst kaat and other shrub trees. At eight A.M. we reached a burj called *Mufallis*. Here, unexpectedly to any of our party, we stumbled upon a Turkish custom house, which I thought was located at Taiz, as the boundary of Turkish Yemen on my maps did not extend further south. An unmannerly negro, calling himself Mudeer of Customs, looked out of a port-hole and demanded my ascent. Over dirt and up darkness I reached his little room and

stated my errand and purpose. No kind words or offered backsheesh would avail; "*all* the baggage must be opened and *all* books were forbidden entrance into Yemen by a recent order," so he affirmed. First, therefore, I unscrewed the covers of the two boxes with an old bowie knife, (screw-driver there was none.) The boxes were critically examined by eyes that could not read and the boxes seized; then my saddle-bags were searched, and every book and map found were also seized.

I was refused even a receipt for the books taken, and to every plea or question the only reply was, to go on to Taiz and appeal to the Governor. Despoiled of our goods, we left the "custom house" at eleven A.M., taking along as guide and defence an old man on a donkey armed with a spear, because Nasir heard there was also disturbance in this quarter. At two o'clock we rested a half an hour under the shade of a huge rock in the bed of the Wady, and, warned by peals of thunder, we hastened on, hoping to reach Hirwa before dark. But in less than an hour the sky was black, rain fell in torrents, and urging the slow camels on through the Wady was hopeless. There was no house or shelter in sight, and so we crouched under a small tree half way up the mud bank. The rain turned to hail—large stones that frightened the camels so that they stampeded—and we became thoroughly chilled.

When the storm ceased, our donkey man came to tell us with looks of horror that his poor beast had fallen down the slope and was being swept away by the torrent! What half an hour before was a dry river bed now was a rushing rapids. We decided to climb up the terraces of the mountain-side to a house in sight. The camels had preceded us, and after a vigorous climb over mud-fields and up the rocks we reached the house and hospitality of Sheikh Ali. Over

the charcoal fire, after drinking plenty of *kishr*, (made from the *shell* of the coffee bean,) we had to listen to a long discussion on the lost donkey. Finally, matters were smoothed over when I offered to pay one-half the price of the animal on condition that our guide proceed with us to *Hirwa*

We were off the next day early, and because of the steep ascents I was obliged to walk most of the way. I sprained my ankle severely, but did not feel the pain until night, when it was swollen and kept me "on crutches" for several days. *Hirwa* is a small Arab village with a weekly market, and we found shelter in the usual coffee-shop of Yemen. The following day we reached *Sept Ez zeilah*, where we found cleaner quarters than the night before. At about midnight a war party of Bedouins came and frightened the peaceful villagers with demands for food, etc. They had just returned from setting fire to a small castle, and, numbering sixty hungry men, were not to be intimidated. It is an old quarrel between the Heza and Rajih tribes, and yesterday there was battle in which six were killed. They were about to force their way into our quarters when Nasir and the women promised to give them food. Within, I kept quiet and listened to the noise of grinding and baking and coffee-pounding; without, some of the Arabs seized a cow belonging to a poor woman and butchered it for their feast. At which there was a crying of women and barking of dogs and swearing of oaths by the Great Allah, such as I hope never to hear again. Finally, the Arabs went away with full stomachs, and we slept a broken sleep for fear they might return. The next day we proceeded to Taiz, and arrived at noon, just one week after leaving Aden.

The Muttaserif Pasha, or Governor, was satisfied with my passports, and expressed his regrets that the

books had been seized at Mufallis, but such was the law. He would, however, allow me to send for them for inspection. *What is written here in four lines was the work and patience of four weary days!* A soldier was sent to Mufallis; I must entrust him money to pay the custom dues; must hire a camel to carry the books; must finally pay for two sticks of sealing wax (price in Taiz one rupee) with which to seal the books and maps lest they be tampered with—and all this at the order of an enlightened government of the Sublime Porte! The first messenger never reached Mufallis; on the road he was attacked by Arabs, stabbed in the neck, robbed of his rifle, and carried back to the military hospital at Taiz. And then there was more delay to find and send a second soldier with the same camel and money and sealing wax, but with a new rifle. He returned with the books safely after five days! No Turk could set a value on a book, and so the law is that books are taxed by weight, boxes included. The customs receipt is here (in the original) attached as for “200 kilograms Jewish books (at 20 piastres a kilo.), value, 4,000 piastres, and custom dues amount to 288 piastres;” in the same document I am spoken of as “the Jew, Ishmail, Dhaif Ullah,”—a rather curious combination of names.

While waiting for the books to reach Taiz, I had opportunity to meet the Jews of Taiz, as well as those in the Jewish village of Magrebeh, south of the town. The population of the latter is about 200; their synagogue is a low, stone building 25x15 feet, has a few curtains of silk with embroidered texts, a printed diagram of the ancient candlestick with the names of the tribes, a high reading desk—for the rest, no furniture. Such are all the synagogues of Yemen. Here I disposed of a few copies of the New Testament and Torah, and spoke and prayed in their synagogue. At Taiz, as everywhere in Yemen, the Jews

have been so long oppressed and taxed, that they seem to have grown content under great injustice. Many of the old Moslem laws against infidels, as regards their being forbidden to *ride* or carry arms or wear fine clothes in public, are still rigorously enforced by custom if not by the government. The Jew is universall; despised, yet he cannot be spared, for nearly all artisan work is in Jewish hands. The Moslem Arab has learned nothing from the Jew outside of the Koran; but, alas! the Jew has imbibed many foolish customs and superstitions foreign to his creed from Islam. As a class they are moral, with the two great exceptions of drunkenness and adultery.

When the Hebrew Scriptures reached Taiz I was again disappointed, for the Governor would not permit the boxes to be opened, but they were to be sent sealed and under guard to Sanaa. I afterwards learned that the "guard" was for me as well as the books, and that the soldier carried a letter with this accusation written: "This is a converted Jew, who is corrupting the religion of Islam, and sells books to Moslems and Jews." I had no alternative but to proceed to Sanaa; taking a Dhamar Arab as servant, having dismissed the Aden camels. I left Taiz on a mule July 26th, and arrived at Seyanee the same day. The following night we seached Ibb. Here I was forced to lodge outside of the town, as the guard had instructions not to let me "see things." I endured this impatiently, until I learned that our servant had been imprisoned on our arrival because he told me the names of the villages on the route! I then appealed to the Mayor, and on virtue of my passports demanded the right of going about the town and the release of my servant. After some delay, both requests were granted. The incident is one of many to show the suspicion with which a stranger

is regarded by the authorities in Yemen. On Saturday the soldier and I hastened on to reach the large town of Yerim before Sunday, and rest there, waiting for the baggage camel. It was a long ride of twelve hours, but through a delightful country everywhere fertile and terraced with coffee plantations and groves of kaat. The latter plant is universally used in Yemen as a stimulant.

Yerim is a dirty, ill built town, on a plateau, marshy, with frequent rains, and has about fifty Jews among its population of Arabs and Turks. A Jewish family were stopping with us at the caravansari, en route for Taiz, and at night I spoke for over two hours with them and the Arabs about Christ. There was no interruption, and I was impressed to see the interest of Jew and Arab alike in what I told them from Isaiah 53d, reading it in Arabic by the dim candle light amidst all the baggage and beasts of an Oriental inn....

At the little village of Kha ler, eight miles from Waalan, there was trouble, and angry words arose from the "guard" against me because I tried to speak to a Jew. When I spoke in protest they began to strike the Jew with the butt end of their rifles, and when the poor fellow fled, my best defence was silence. On my return journey, I inadvertently raised trouble again, by mentioning that Jesus Christ and Moses were *Jews*—which was an insult to them as God's prophets, the Arabs said.

On Thursday, Aug. 2d, we entered Sanaa by the Yemen gate—a little over three years ago I entered it from the other side; then in time of the Arab rebellion, and now myself a prisoner. I was taken to the Dowla and handed over to the care of a policeman, until the Wali heard my case. After finding an old Greek friend from Aden who offered to go bail for me, I was allowed liberty, and then for ten

long days I went from official to official and office to office to get the books inspected and approved. The whole official system of Turkey is carefully arranged for the purpose of collecting backsheesh. I was unable to offer *that*, and so, by continual coming, I at last wearied them, and on Monday, August 12th, obtained my books. I received notice, however, from the Wali that I must not delay at Sanaa beyond seven days.

As soon as the books were in my possession I took one half of them to the Jews' quarter and began distribution. Some refused the book when they saw its title, others took it eagerly. I made a point never to give away a copy until the person receiving it had read a page for me out loud to prove his ability to read, and I also took a promise from them that they would read the book daily. In this way distribution was a slow process, but it afforded many opportunities for witness. The chief Jews told me my errand was in vain, as no Jew ever turned Christian, and their rabbi sent around a notice forbidding the Jews to take the book from me.

My stay in Sanaa was twenty days, three days of grace being added to the number allowed me by the government. . . .

The New Testaments distributed were as follows: At Aden, 40; Sheikh Ottoman, 20; on the road to and at Taiz, 17; at Sanaa, 327; at Sawan, 2; at Rhodah, 12; at Habban (sent), 6; at Menakhah, 18; at Hashid (sent), 12; at Dhamar, 10; and at Beit Mazid, to the only Jew there, 1—a total of 485 copies. We arrived at Hodeidah on Aug. 26th, and I was most kindly received and entertained by the American Consular Agent, Mr. Muller. To-morrow I leave by the Egyptian steamer for Aden.

S. M. ZWEMER, of the Arabian Mission.

HODEIDAH, Aug. 28, 1894.