

Continuing "NORTH AFRICA"

The NAM News Letter

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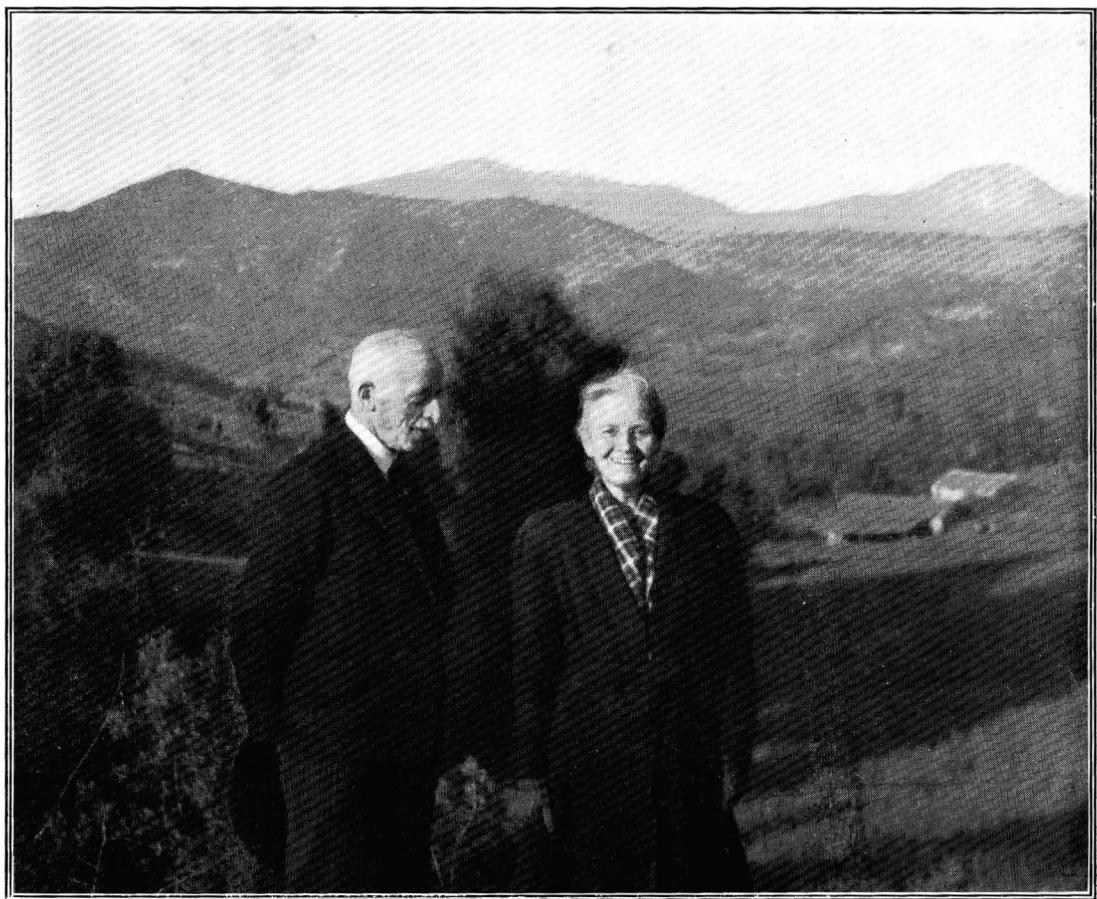


Photo by

[*E. C. Le Grice, F.R.P.S.*]

Near Azazga, Algeria

Our frontispiece depicts Mr. & Mrs. S. Arthur, who are seen against the background of those mountains of Kabylia that they have come to know intimately during their many years of missionary service. Mr. Arthur is the writer of the arresting article entitled "The Problem of North Africans in France", which appears on page two.

The Problem of North Africans in France

'Problem' is the word which is being used throughout France—by the Government, by social workers, and now by the Churches, who at last are awaking to the fact that the presence in their midst of at least 200,000 Moslem workers from North Africa constitutes a challenge: are these Moslems 'evangelisable,' or are they to be ignored?

Because it is not possible to ignore the challenge, I have been invited to give the equivalent of six months' work to the task of setting before the Churches the 'problem,' the challenge, and of getting them to work—my special rôle being (according to my instructions) that of a 'technical advisor.'

After trips to two industrial areas we are beginning to see daylight. Some Churches are already at work, joyfully and not without some encouragement, whilst others are convinced that the work must be done by 'specialists,' who can give their whole time to the job.

In one centre, taking advantage of the passage of a missionary from Kabylia, 1,000 invitations to special meetings were distributed. The first evening less than a score turned up. The next evening the crowd was bigger, for they were escorting one of their own number who had carefully prepared a reply, from a Moslem standpoint, to what had been said the previous evening. And the third night was a blank—a total boycott of the meeting!

A question often asked in France is this: Are these North Africans here easier to reach with the Gospel than those in Algeria? My reply is a definite "No"! There are no mosques in France (one or two exceptions admitted), and one hardly ever sees, as in North Africa, a Moslem at prayer. The great counter-attractions of life at its lowest in the slums of Marseilles, Lyons and other large industrial cities have a numbing effect upon their religious expression.

It was at Lille, only a few weeks ago, that a drunken man flung his empty glass at my head. It was perhaps fortunate that he was drunk, and could not aim straight.

At Marseilles, about the same time, I was warned that although preaching by a Christian might be submitted to, it would be a bad job for any ex-Moslem attempting to do the same! That has been said more than once, and it helps one to understand the common desire to be certain that I am not, myself, an ex-Moslem!

Hustled and interrupted at D—, I could

do nothing in the way of colportage, and yet one man followed me to the bus to say that he disagreed with the attitude of his fellows, and was on my side!

There were bright spots here and there, but on the whole the resistance to the Word was quite as stiff as in Algeria.

The friends in France are going to have a rough time. Without the help of the language they will find it hard to obtain a hearing, hard to make vital contacts, hard to reach the hearts of those they fain would win. And yet it is being done. At A— there is a group of young fellows gathering in a Rovers' Den brought together by a group of Rovers who visited Algeria last summer. Elsewhere, units are being detached from the mass and are attending meetings in the Church. Colportage will always be a powerful approach, and we have already arranged for at least thirty groups to carry Scriptures in Kabyle and Arabic, as well as in French, to the cafés and canteens in each section. Churches with show-cases will be exhibiting the literature and Scriptures of the Bible Society, of the Scripture Gift Mission, and of other Societies. We are hoping to be able to launch a tri-lingual paper which will be a powerful instrument amongst the literate or semi-literate workmen in France, or even in Algeria.

Other plans lie further ahead, and need to be carefully considered—a caravan equipped with a loudspeaker, in charge of a couple of evangelists (one of them a North African), making use of specially-prepared records. A show-case displaying Scriptures and other literature in French, Arabic and perhaps Kabyle could also be installed. In this way visits to Churches interested and desirous of co-operating could be planned.

The presence of 200,000 North Africans in France certainly *does* create a problem, and one that is decidedly challenging! Praise God the challenge has been accepted and the Churches are prepared in many cases to evangelise the Moslems in their midst. In their need these Churches have asked our help, and are anxious for that help to be real and full. Their contribution has meant that travelling, both to and from North Africa, as well as locally, has cost the Mission nothing. There is a deep longing that the best possible provision may be made for our North Africans, and already here and there both pastors and lay workers have discovered that 'Love' is the key to the problem, and that it is opening doors and hearts. We shall have more to say about this another day. There is still much to be done before the whole of the

Churches understand and get into the swing of things.

Your share? Why, prayer, of course! But prayer which may be costly, keeping you from sleep, for prayer is better than sleep—prayer for the mass of North Africans in each industrial section, for the Churches as they face up to their responsibility, for us as we return for further series of meetings, for yourselves as you ease off and feel like sleep!

—*From Mr. S. Arthur, Azazga, Algeria.*

Our Djemaa Recruits get into Harness

Since the Christmas treat numbers have diminished at the classes for boys on Friday and Sunday. Now, with the coming of better weather, fewer still come on Sunday afternoon, and we are therefore having their class on Sunday evening—often in the form of a lantern service, which has a special appeal for them. Pray that we may be enabled to retain their interest and that the good Seed may fall into prepared ground. Djemaa is fast becoming cinema-conscious; a mobile unit visits the Café two or three times a week. This attraction has reduced the numbers at the Monday night meeting for men. There are, however, eight who attend regularly, and at their request a class has recently been commenced on Friday evenings. Will you pray with us that the interest shown may develop into living faith in the Lord Jesus?

We shall value your prayers as we seek to re-establish friendly contact with some men and women here in Djemaa who have for some time been out of touch with the Mission. Last week, in an unexpected way, God answered prayer. One for whom we had prayed brought a sick woman to the dispensary. May all our contacts with her unite to bring her back into fellowship with us, and may the Lord use us in blessing to her soul!

Now that the Spring has arrived we hope to visit the out-stations more frequently. All three of these are at some distance from Djemaa and each visit entails a journey of some hours. By classes for men and boys and by colportage the Seed is sown. It is always a joy to go to El Klaa, where there is but one baptised believer. He is not ashamed to own his Lord, as persecution has revealed. Pray for him, asking God to use him to the salvation of others.

A recent visit to a village high above us was typical of many. For about an hour portions of Scripture were being sold. Extracts from the

booklets were read and explained. When the medicine box was produced requests for treatment were numerous. How long had that little girl been suffering from that ulcer? For a month! Why hadn't she been taken to a doctor? No transport and no money! Oh, the suffering that one finds on every hand. We returned to Djemaa by moonlight, conscious of the presence of Him who "went about doing good."

The Conference for native Christians is to be held this year, as usual, at Tizi-Ouzou (the chief town of Kabylia) from May 14-16. Christians from all parts of Algeria participate in the gatherings. We know you will remember this occasion in your intercessions, praying that these believers will be strengthened and encouraged before returning to their respective villages, where life so often is difficult for them.

We want you to praise God with us that He has answered prayer in respect of a language teacher. Three times weekly we go to the home of a native Christian who has had the advantage of a French education. Continue to pray for us as ear and tongue adapt themselves to the intricacies of an oriental language.

—*From Rev. and Mrs. Bernard Collinson.*

Tunis Bible Depot— Forty Years of Witness

"The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple" (Psalm 119, 130).

It is almost twenty years since I last wrote in "North Africa" about our Tunis Bible Depot. From 1911 onwards it has been a veritable spiritual beacon, shining brightly and steadily in the hot, dusty, swirling, noisy thoroughfare of this great city. It has been, through the years, a port of call, a rendezvous, a hallowed spot of blessing to thousands of different types and classes coming to it from all parts of North Africa, and even from the Sahara and the Soudan. It has been, and still is, one of the very few Gospel testimonies along the entire coast-line of the Barbary States. Like a fortress, also, it has withstood many an enemy attack—thanks to the continual prayers of God's interested people. It can well be regarded as one of the valiant veterans of the North Africa Mission. Can it, in these rapidly-changing times, hold out another ten years and celebrate its jubilee? That, I think, depends upon a united effort—and a more regular and practical one than in the past.

Early this year the entire front of the shop had a new coat of paint, whilst the window was

slightly enlarged to enable a better display to be made of our scriptures and literature. The furniture, too, received necessary attention, and an attractive colour-scheme, with new curtains, caused quite a minor sensation of admiration, and helped to increase interest in the work we do.

Here, as everywhere else, prices have soared. One moves in an atmosphere that is steeped in a feverish craze to get-rich-quick. Money is too often in the wrong hands—or perhaps I should say in the possession of those who never use it to the best advantage. One of life's little ironies for me is to sometimes suffer from an acute feeling of inferiority complex when obsequiously saluted by one of my regular beggars, who receives nothing in return save salutations, as I am sure he is more increased in this world's goods than I myself. By the way, yesterday, in a village, I asked a shrivelled-up scarecrow of a native, who must have been the oldest inhabitant, how he had spent his past life. He replied that he started to beg when he was a small boy and he had never done anything else. "Surely, O father," I said, "you have not much longer to beg on this earth. What about the world to come—will you accept a place in Heaven as God's free gift? I am here today to tell you how and why God offers just that to all who will believe." "Oh," said the old beggar, "I am a believer; I am in the right way, the way that leads to Heaven." "And what will you do there?" I asked. "I shall continue to beg," was the amazing and final answer.

Please, dear friends, do not conclude that I approach you in connection with the needs of our Bible Shop as did the venerable one with me yesterday, but when last year I was on deputation work in different home centres several Christian folk asked me how they could really help in our work. Here, then, is one definite way. Help us by regular times of prayer for all that has to do with the far-flung witness of the printed page, so may you all have a joyful part and lot in keeping the blessed Gospel light shining in and out of the Tunis Bible Depot.

In these last days, more than ever before, time waits for no man and the tide of events carries us forward, not only in faith but in a practical understanding of urgent present requirements concerning the Lord's work. We likewise, as never before, value your prayerful co-operation. With other helpers in this Bible Depot, I am in constant contact with men and women of cosmopolitan Tunis, who, in the majority of cases, as they are lovingly faced with the challenge of the written Word, manifest an enquiring spirit into eternal realities.

"Ye shall be witnesses unto Me"—not only here in Tunis, but in other towns, villages and markets of Tunisia. "Is this the shop where I can buy this book?" cried a young swarthy Arab not long ago, as he entered the Depot and showed me one of the British and Foreign Bible Society's Gospels of St. Luke in Tunisian Arabic. It had been lent to him by a student friend who had come up to visit him from the South. Only lent! Such is one instance, and one reason why I appeal to you for your prayer-help—you who read our "News Letter" and who "pass it on," that you may help us to hold the fort and keep the lamp trimmed and burning.

—*From Mr. R. Stanley Miles.*

"First the Blade"

People sometimes ask about results. As we have remarked in other letters, it is difficult to be specific at this stage. There has been a decided advance with some. About 25% read the Gospels with understanding, another 25% are beginning to take it in. The rest are tinies or girls who are backward or new. There are a few who are really keen, especially two who seem as if they must have all we can give them. One girl took St. John's Gospel home and read it through in a night. Some say they believe, and we believe they do—in their heads. They are convinced we have the Truth, and they have openly said so—at school. But we do not count them as converts, for were they to confess at home that they are Christians—as they must do eventually—they would be taken away from our influence. We must give them time. In God's order there is the preparation of the soil, the sowing of the seed, the rain, the growing time. We can't dig up the seed to see if it is growing, but must wait until the time of harvest. It is not always easy to be patient, but it is best. Our children need to be rooted and grounded, for great will be their temptations and persecution if they are truly converted.

We ourselves are horrified sometimes at the depth of sin which surrounds them. Many live in horrid insanitary conditions, some in wee rooms which are worse than our cattle sheds; but that is nothing to the foulness of the moral atmosphere which surrounds almost every one of them.

Some seem to find this home a place where they can come and be happy, and they know it is God's house. They know we try to do away with lying, deceit, swearing, cursing, quarrelling, dirt and disease; and, on the whole, we are a happy crowd.

—*From the Misses M. E. Chipperfield and G. W. Theakson, Alcazar, Spanish Morocco.*