

A CHRISTIAN AT KABUL

It was in the autumn, sometime about the middle of last century, that Lucas Joseph was born in Kabul. The orchards were brilliant in red and gold; all the fruit had long since been gathered and dried. The first snow was coming down soft and white on the lower hills; the days were drawing in, and Kabul was preparing to face the long dreary winter. They called the boy Lucas after Luke, the beloved physician, and they dedicated him to the service of the blessed Lord and Master of whom the Evangelist wrote in his Gospel.

When Lucas was nine years old, his father, who was in the service of the Amir Dost Mohammed, was warned to prepare to accompany his master on a journey. It was a picturesque sight to see the long strings of heavily loaded camels slowly and patiently wending their dignified way along the rough track; after them, straggling along, came flocks and herds, ponies and mules, men, women and children, and now and again a wild wolf-like dog guarding his master's interests. Here was a purdah woman hidden from all prying eyes in her long white burkah, mounted on a small donkey, her baby in her arms; there a panier full of bright-eyed laughing children, packed in with cocks and hens or any lambs or kids too young to journey on foot. The royal retainers were brightly caparisoned with rich saddle cloths, and old fashioned peaked saddles. Strings of beads or silver necklaces and nose pins adorned most of the horses and camels, and the tinkle of many bells helped to give heart to the weary travellers. No man was unarmed, each carried either the heavy old matchlock, a large sword, a double bladed dagger, or a knife of some sort. The road was rough and in many places very bare and dreary until after the two passes, the Shatar-gardan and the Paiwar were crossed, and then following the beautiful Kurrum valley they finally descended into the plain of India and made their way to Peshawar.

On arrival in Peshawar, Andrew Joseph and his little son sought out those of the common Faith. It was in the early days of mission work in Peshawar. With the help and sympathy of Herbert Edwardes a beginning had been made only a few years before. The beautiful little Mission Church had not yet been built, but the Edwardes High School had been started, and it was in the Principal's care that little Lucas was left when his father returned to Kabul. The boy was bright and eager to learn, and made good progress and soon became a favourite with all in the school. Meanwhile Amir Dost Mohammed died and Sher Ali Khan had succeeded. It was in 1869 when returning from a conference with the Viceroy, Lord Mayo, at Ambala, that Sher Ali stopped at Peshawar and visited the Mission School. It amused him to put the boys through an examination of what they had learnt. Question after question was satisfactorily answered till a harder one than usual was put and silence reigned in the school. At last quietly and boldly Lucas stood up and gave the required answer. The Amir was very pleased and calling Lucas to him, he put him through a stiff examination, out of which ordeal he emerged brilliantly. The Amir's interest was aroused and he asked the Principal about the lad. On learning that he belonged to an Armenian family in Kabul he determined to carry off the boy with him and use him in his service. The Amir's slightest wish being law (at least in his own opinion) no arguments or requests that he might stay and finish his education, were of any avail and so Lucas joined the royal caravan en route for Kabul. They halted the first night at Jamrud, and then early next morning started up the long grim Khyber Pass. As they entered the pass each one knew that they held their lives in their hands. Those bare rocky hills, frowning down on either side of them were the allies of the raiders, the caravan robbers, in a word the *yaghis*, viz., those without law. True they were staunch Mohammedans, each one of them a son of Islam, one of the faithful, ready to die for his creed. But as long as they could repeat the *Kalima* and say their prayers with the proper genuflections, why should they

not rob and plunder? Were not travellers, especially those with weak escort, their lawful God-given prey? For without the loot of passing caravans and the raiding of their prosperous Indian neighbors, how were they to live in that dry barren wilderness of no-man's land? But the Amir's large imposing caravan wound its way slowly and safely through the pass, up to Ali Masjid, where all were glad to rest, and refresh themselves under the trees by the little fresh mountain stream, an oasis in the desert; then to the mosque to pray for a blessing on their journey, which no devout traveller would omit to do; further on, to the spot where the faithful would stop and gaze with wonder and awe at the marks of Ali's wonderful horse, which on his magical journey to the Khyber left the print of his hoofs at intervals of many yards on the hard flint rocks. Thus winding through the narrow defile, at last when all were weary with the 20 mile march, the top of the pass was reached at Landi Kotal and the borders of Afghanistan came into view—day after day they journeyed on, and it was only on the twelfth day on gaining the top of a small hill, that Kabul suddenly burst on their sight. Who could ever forget that first vision of her, "veiled like some purdah princess beneath a sari wrought in green and silver and rose, with all the blossoms of all the fruit trees in the world?" Kabul of vineyards and gardens; Kabul of summer places and delights; Kabul of greenness and sweetness, what a contrast to the barren country they had come through. Kabul, the Pathans' Paradise. Kabul with its intrigues, with its crowded bazaars, its dirt, its sin, its darkness, its tortures for the unfortunate, its oppressed and imprisoned women, its neglected children.

The Armenians who had settled in Kabul numbered at that time about 100 persons. Originally they had come from Persia in the service of Nadir Shah when he made his victorious march eastward. But the larger number had either gone on into India or returned to Persia. These few settled down and bought land and worked as tailors and carpenters. They had built themselves a church and quietly and unassumingly they carried on the worship of the Triune God in their own way, unhindered

by their neighbors. Afterwards in the burning of Kabul this Church was unfortunately destroyed.

The house Lucas came home to, was much the same as that of any well to do Afghan. It was built in a square, round a large compound which contained several orange trees and vines and a covered well in the center. Four large rooms about four feet above ground level opened on to the courtyard; these at night could be closed up by means of heavy shutters. The guest-room was on this floor and so also the chief sleeping room. Upstairs smaller rooms were to be found and 20 or 30 ft. below ground was a large cellar-like room almost quite dark, to which the whole family could retire during the day in the great summer heat. The rooms were furnished with Pathan simplicity. Rich Persian carpets adorned the guest room and bright colored pillows and large bolster-like cushions were scattered about on beds, or against the walls for guests to recline upon. In the alcoves of the wall were found bright bits of crockery and the rich red and blue tea sets from Russian Turkestan, or handsome earthenware pottery of all sizes and colors and often bits of looking-glass set into the wall. In winter a large charcoal stove would be placed in the center of the room and covered over with thick rugs, round which all the family and guests crowded and sat on the floor, feet inwards to the stove, tucking themselves in well under the rugs. For guests were always welcomed and no one could be allowed to break the rule of hospitality, and go without the friendly dish of green tea.

The Amir treated Lucas generously and found him plenty of work to do—translating English newspapers into Persian, teaching the royal sons and so on.

Lucas, who was universally popular, also reckoned among his friends Sir Louis Cavagnari the British Ambassador. The intrigues and treachery of the Afghan Government at that time are too well known to need repetition. It was on the evening of Sept. 2, 1879 that Lucas determined to go and warn his friend of his imminent danger. He found his way to the Ambassador's house and was readily granted an interview but in vain he

disclosed the plots thickening all around, He spoke of the treachery, the disloyalty and the danger threatening, but Sir Louis, like most officers of his day, simply refused to believe it. Far into the night they talked, but such black treachery was inconceivable by the noble, true mind of a man like Cavagnari. So thanking his friend for his kindly, well-meant warning he dismissed him. But the unheeded warning was amply justified in the tragedy which followed. The very next day, as Cavagnari returned from his morning ride, and his guard of seventy men of the famous Guides regiment were watering their horses and taking their ease, suddenly a torrent of infuriated half-savage soldiery burst in on them, frenzied with fanaticism, and thirsting deep for Christian blood. The faithful Guides rallied round the four English officers, and again and again charged the maniacal crowd. But one by one the officers were slain, and the faithful guard, scorning all offers of surrender and a free pass, with ample rewards, were slain to a man.

Three weeks later Lord Roberts arrived in Kabul on his punitive expedition and Lucas found many ways in which he could be of use to the great man. But suspicious eyes were watching him and his name began to be whispered as one who would be safer out of the way. Many plots were formed to kill him. One day he was surrounded by a gang of twenty *ghazis*, but finding among them some old friends he at once went up and started chatting to them, till the ominous sound of the cocking of matchlocks round him warned him and he prepared to flee. As they opened fire on him, he put his head low on his horse's neck and galloped away, finally finding refuge in Lord Robert's camp.

It was in the reign of Abdul Rahman that Lucas's best energies were spent and a faithful witness given, even before the king. Consistently and boldly he ever upheld the cause of his Lord and Master, and was not ashamed to confess His name; or to give a reason for the Hope that was in him. Daily he proved God's protecting care and mercy and the power of his life was a cause for wonder and admiration, not only in the Court of the

Amir, but in all the country. No Afghan was trusted as the Amir trusted Lucas Joseph. He made him Governor of the gunpowder factory, and gave him the run of the Government treasury with the power to draw what money he needed even without first gaining the Amir's consent. Later on he was made Governor of Jallalabad and, like a second Joseph, such confidence was placed in him that the authorities looked not to anything that was under his hand because "the Lord was with him and that which he did the Lord made it to prosper."

Many are the incidents told of him at the time. One day the Amir accompanied by his Prime Minister and Commander in Chief came to visit Jallalabad. It was a black day for the poor. All who wished to stand well in the eyes of their king made it their business to collect as large a sum of money as possible to offer to his Majesty; so by threats, by beatings, by tortures and even by fouler means their offerings were collected.

The great day dawned and all gathered to the Durbar, the nobles and officials vying with each other in pomp and outward loyalty. They presented their thousands of rupees. The Amir himself well knew the means by which they had collected so much—but was it not the custom in that country where only might is right? Then in a dignified simplicity the Governor Lucas Joseph came up to make his offering, and presented to the Amir the small sum of Rs. 30/. An astonished silence fell on the company, and the wonder increased as the Amir quietly put the Rs. 30/—into his pocket, and with a sweep of his hand ordered that all the rest of the money should be sent to the treasury, adding, "This small sum, I know, has not been extorted by unfair means, this alone is a gift of loyalty and friendship." Then turning to Lucas he questioned him as to the reason of this amazing honesty, more surprising still, because shown by one who was not of the faithful. Simply the answer came—"I am a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, who is Himself the Truth."

Another time after Lucas had returned to his Kabul house, Nasir Ullah, brother of the Amir, one evening came in to pay him a friendly visit. He was a bitter

enemy of Christianity and many and heated were the discussions he had had over religion. In the course of conversation Nasir Ullah said, "I have a question to put, to which I wish a true and honest answer." Lucas was ready to answer anything. "Well," continued the Prince, "you know we call you Christians blasphemers, what do you call us Mohammadans?" Lucas was silent a moment and then said, "I am a poor man, how can I answer your Royal Highness such a question?" The Prince laid aside his stick of office, and sitting down beside Lucas said, "Now I am not a Royal Prince but a man like yourself, answer me as brother to brother." So Lucas answered, "You call us blasphemers, (kafirs), but we think you the most blasphemous of plasphe-mers—(Kafir-i-matlaq), because you deny our Lord Jesus Christ."

It is surprising that Lucas in spite of his bold words and uncompromising witness should have been allowed to continue at the court of the Amir. Many religious discussions were held in Durbar and in private, many bitter enemies made, and angry passions aroused, yet Lucas never swerved from his bold stand. To his own Master he stood or fell, and he knew he was immortal till God's curfew tolled for him. And so we have the amazing fact of a follower of Christ, witnessing a good confession at the court of the Amir, in the most treacherous and bigoted country in the world.

The Amir had a very real and lifelong affection for Lucas. Some years later Lucas' first wife died and he purposed to go to Calcutta¹ to marry again. The Amir on hearing of this presented him with Rs. 10,000—as a wedding gift, and told him if he needed any more to get what he wished from the Ambassador in Calcutta.

Except when the Amir called for Lucas for discussion, no open aggressive witness could be given in the city, but many were the quiet talks with friends and neighbors, some like Nicodemus stealing to his house in the dusk of the evening, or at the dead of night for fear. Two or three of these enquirers were won to Christ and were

¹ See the Amir's firman and the Armenian's reply printed on pages 10, 11, and 12.

baptized in Peshawar, and then returned to Kabul witnessing quietly by their lives, though not daring openly to confess the Blessed Name. In that bigoted city, how hard to stand alone. So Hanif Ullah found it, when he came from Peshawar and for fear of losing his life, denied his Lord and pretended to be a good Mohammedan; for though the Armenians were tolerated by reason of the Amir's favor, no one who had left the faith and become a Christian could be allowed to live. But through Lucas' sympathy and faithful words this brother found his way back to the Saviour's feet, and by Lucas' help returned to Peshawar and confessed his backsliding, and again professed in the Christian Church.

In the year 1897 the Armenians' sojourn in Kabul was brought to a sudden and disappointing end. It was the time of the great massacre of Armenians in Turkey and feeling was running high. The Amir doubted his power to protect his friends. Just then Lucas, having procured permission, had invited from India two friends to stay with him and minister to the little community which for some years had had no priest to administer baptism or confirmation, and the children were getting older. But as was usual in a country where spies and informers abound, tales were brought to the Amir's ears that these two strangers had really come with the intention of forming a plot to murder him. No doubt the necessary witnesses were procured—an easy and not expensive matter—and proofs brought forward; with the result that the Amir, using this as a pretext, ordered all Armenians to clear out of his dominions. The old affection was brushed aside, the confidence and trust they had enjoyed so many years as if it had never been, and bitterly disappointed and disgusted at Afghan fickleness and injustice, they prepared for the journey, knowing appeal to be useless.

It was winter time and difficult and arduous travelling for women and children. They numbered twenty-one altogether. Little Faruq and Paul, now spending their lives in service for these very ones who so ungenerously turned them out of their country, were among the

youngest travellers, but safely packed into paniers on camels' backs, they journeyed happily, without fear or care, while alongside of them rode the men on horses keeping a sharp lookout for raiders. They arrived at Jallalabad on the fourth day, but that night a heavy snow storm came down, which blocked the road and kept them prisoner for a fortnight. However, in spite of hardships and dangers they reached Peshawar all safe and sound, and were welcomed by the Christians, English and Indian, and soon settled down.

The last twenty years of Lucas Joseph's life were quietly spent in Peshawar. He carried on business in the city, as much as failing health would allow, and was universally respected by the city people, and beloved by the Christian community. He entered into rest in the summer of 1918.

Afghanistan still stands a challenge to Faith—its Amir the last independent Mohammedan ruler,—almost the only unopened country in the world; waiting, aye longing, we believe, though they know it not, for one with love and courage enough to turn the key of faith and open that fast shut door, so that the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine in. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God."

FLORA M. DAVIDSON.

Peshawar, N. W. P., India.

The following is a translation of a letter from H. H. the Amir of Kabul addressed to the Armenian Community of Calcutta handed to us and now published for the information of the Community. The bearer of the original letter is Mr. Lucas A. Joseph, an Armenian of Afghanistan, high in the service of the Ameer. This gentleman is for the present putting up at No. 6 Old China Bazar Street where he will be glad to see anyone interested in the invitation held out by His Highness.

H. J. SHIRCORE,
C. M. ARATHEEN,
Wardens of the Armenian Church
Calcutta and Chinsurah.

TO THE ARMENIANS IN CALCUTTA

After many favours and kindness,—Be it known to the Armenian Community in Calcutta that in the time of the late king, Nadir Shah, whom God rest in peace, a few families comprising nearly five hundred persons of the Armenian nationality came to this country and passed their days in comfort. At present only one family, consisting of 21 souls, young and old, male and female survives. They feel very unhappy for want of the society of their own nationality, although during the

rule of our predecessors, and, at present, under our rule they neither have experienced, nor will experience any harm or trouble; on the contrary, all of them, young and old, have held, and are still holding, posts and stipends under the Government of Afghanistan, so that they are well off in their living.

It is desirable that, from your national and religious feeling and sympathies, you should send ten or twelve families, men of education and of some profession, to live in the dominions of Afghanistan, and so relieve their loneliness, and they themselves pass their days in comfort.

At this present one of them, our esteemed Serurdin Khan, who is Manager of our Gunpowder Factories at Jallalabad, is starting for your parts for his marriage; and ten thousand rupees (British money) has been paid him from this illustrious court as a wedding present.

With reference to your coming to these dominions we have given him our assurance, in all respects that rank, allowances, and places to dwell in shall be given to every one according to his position and qualifications and that you shall live in peace and security; the above named will give (the) assurance to you. And the said Serurdin Khan will describe to you our kindness and the style of his living.

Given on Monday the 13th of the month of Rajab 1313.

Written by,
MIRZA ABDULLA.

Seal on the back of the original.

Ameer Abdur Rahman Khan &c., &c.

To His Highness

AMEER ABDUR RAHMAN KHAN

The Sole Ameer of Afghanistan

Your Highness,

It is with due appreciation of the high honour conferred on us, the Armenians of Calcutta, that we acknowledge the receipt of your gracious firman by the hand of the respected Serurdin Kahn (Mr. Lucas A. Joseph) your highness servant, whom we are most happy to welcome among us. Of your highness' kindness to our countrymen settled in your dominions we had some report; to have it now confirmed to us by such August Authority affords us much gratification, especially to be assured of the continued well-being of, and your highness' interest in, those few who are still enjoying your highness' beneficence, and the more so that your highness in your benevolence extends your kindness and generosity to embrace us, the Armenians of Calcutta, within the scope of your highness' feelings. We duly realize the isolated conditions of our brethren and sincerely sympathise with them in their loneliness. The presence of their countrymen would indeed relieve this loneliness and afford them increased social happiness and contentment. It shall be our best endeavour to encourage Armenians to go into your highness' dominions and settle down as loyal and worthy subjects, who will be of service to your highness and whose well-being will draw, we hope, not only from Calcutta, but from every part where their countrymen may be living and where the fame of your generosity and kindness towards the race shall reach, from far Armenia, Turkey or Persia, large numbers of hard working, industrious and staunch servants round your highness' throne which may God ever preserve. We regret much, however, that immediately no families are likely to remove from here, for the reason that they are established in business and in the practice of their several professions, having also all their connection of kinship with one another which they would be very

loth to sever. After some intercourse, however, we are very hopeful that these difficulties will be got over and free communication established with your highness' dominion to offer to the Armenians in all Afghanistan the opportunity for receiving for themselves the privileges of our church and religion, which owing to their peculiar circumstances they do not possess. We propose for the present, with your highness' permission, to supply their urgent needs in this respect by sending one of our priests to meet them in Peshawar and administer to them baptism and the sacraments, and supply any religious instruction that may be found essential for their spiritual well-being. For this purpose your highness may command them to come into Peshawar. We might mention that our priests here cannot leave their jurisdiction, that is, go out of India, without a reference to and the express sanction of our Bishop at Julfa in Persia.

We would also crave permission to suggest for your highness' consideration that the children of the Armenians of Afghanistan be sent by your highness into India—to Calcutta it may be—for their general education and a professional training. On completing their terms they would return to their homes to render their true and loyal services to their Sovereign.

As to our esteemed and honourable friend, your servant Serurdin Khan (Mr. Lucas A. Joseph), we will do our best to help him towards realising his hopes. Your highness will no doubt allow that the reluctance on the part of our maidens to sever themselves from their families by so great a distance is very natural and very difficult to overcome. It is also somewhat unfortunate that he arrived at the beginning of our season of Lent during which and for nearly two months after the festival of Easter (April 5th) no marriage can be solemnised in our Church.

We have to express our very great regret at the delay that has occurred in replying to your Highness' gracious firman to us. We have endeavoured to acquaint the members of our community individually, as far as possible, with your highness' good will towards us. We have also had to hold several meetings for the exchange of views which has necessarily taken up much time.

In conclusion we have to express our heart-felt gratitude to a sovereign of your highness' might and enlightenment for the kindness shown to us all as a nation and especially to those who are still living secure under the shadow of your fatherly arm, and our confidence in your highness' liberal and protective sentiments towards a people that have been true to their faith and their honour, ever peaceful and loyal to the governments under which they live. May God in His Universal Goodness give you peace and happiness, contentment and health all the days that it may be His will to spare your highness to your people, and may the time be long is the prayer of your Highness' most humble and grateful servants the Armenians of Calcutta on whose behalf we beg to subscribe.

Calcutta, This day of May, 1896, A. D.