



DONALDSON, BESS ALLEN

DONALDSON, BESS ALLEN (b. Galesburg, Ill., 7 December 1879, d. Lakeland, Fla., 20 December 1974) and **DWIGHT MARTIN** (b. Washington, O., 16 December 1884, d. Lakeland, Fla., 11 May 1976), American Presbyterian missionaries and writers about Persia. Bess Allen went to Tehran in 1910 as a teacher at the Iran Bethel Girl's School (renamed Nūrbakš School in 1940), a Presbyterian mission school; she subsequently became principal. Dwight Donaldson was a missionary of the American Presbyterian Church in Mašhad from 1915. They were married in Tehran on 28 June 1916 and undertook evangelical work in Mašhad until 1940, when foreign missionary teachers were expelled from Persia and their schools nationalized. Dwight Donaldson then became principal of the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies at Aligarh in India, where the couple remained until his retirement in 1951.

Dwight Donaldson's major scholarly contributions were *The Shi'ite Religion. A History of Islam in Persia and Irak* (London, 1933) and *Studies in Muslim Ethics* (London, 1953). For the latter he drew on many lectures delivered in Persia, India, and the United States, as well as on his Persian experiences. He was for several years a member of the editorial board of *The Muslim World*, in which he published "Modern Persian Law" (October 1934, pp. 341-49). In *International Review of Missions* he published "The First Missionaries to the Parthians" (18, 1929, pp. 481-94), "What to Conserve, and What to Abandon" (20, 1931, pp. 422-28), and "Intellectual Awakening in Modern Iran" (25, 1936, pp. 172-83). Donaldson's scholarly credentials and the legacy of his work are incontrovertible.



During thirty years of sharing her husband's missionary work, giving Bible instruction, and teaching English, particularly to women, Bess Donaldson gathered material for *The Wild Rue* (London, 1938), a unique study of Persian folklore and myths, ranking with but based on more direct personal experience than Henri Massé's *Croyances et coutumes persanes*. . . . In her book she treated such topics as the evil eye, childbirth practices, love and marriage, pilgrimage, burial practices, angels, cosmology and astronomy, names and numbers, the calendar, the Qur'ān, the significance of flora and fauna, personal hygiene, and talismans and signs. It is indispensable to any serious student of Persia and popular Islam. She also published *Prairie Girl* and *Prairie Girl in Iran and India* (Galesburg, Ill., 1971 and 1972, respectively).

Biographical details on the couple and Bess Donaldson's correspondence are held at the Department of History, Presbyterian Church (USA), Philadelphia.

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