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News and Notes

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Series XIII

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God-inspired Scripture.

IN our February issue we published a letter containing 'Some suggestions on the training of workers among Muslims,' in the course of which it was urged that those attempting direct evangelisation, 'should get themselves as clear as possible on what the Christian doctrine of inspiration is and how they are to use it in relation to Musalman ideas and arguments with regard to either the Quran and Islamic doctrines, or the Bible and Christian doctrines.'

There can be very few to-day of those who have come to close grips with Muslims who will not have felt, at some time or other, that here is a matter of first-rate importance, and one upon which we as Christian workers need to do some careful and courageous thinking. The orthodox Muslim is found to hold to his view-point quite as tenaciously as any Christian holds to his. And if ever we detect in ourselves a mood in which we are apt to despise the Muslim for holding what we think to be erroneous views, we can never really forget that he makes no secret of his scorn for people who hold views of inspiration of Scripture similar to those still fairly widely held in the Christian Church. He can match argument with argument, pride with pride, and tenacity with tenacity. The result is, often enough, sheer *impasse*. We need to lift this subject into a clearer atmosphere, in which we ourselves become conscious that we are dealing with truer values. That may not be easy, but surely it ought to be easier for us to whom God has entrusted the revelation of Himself in Christ than it can be for the Muslim.

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We publish below a statement by one of our members sent in response to our request and we are hoping that others to whom we have written will contribute to a symposium on the subject for the benefit of our readers.

I.

Our Indian Christian workers are likely to find themselves in difficulties in dealing with educated Muslims on the question of inspiration. We can best meet the attack of the Muslim by putting the Christian and the Muslim view side by side, and seeing how they will bear examination.

The Muslim view is that inspiration is of two kinds:—

- (a) *Wahi*. This is the word used of the Inspiration of the Qur'an and implies that the very words are the words of God.
- (b) *Ilham*. This is the inspiration given to a saint or prophet when he, though rightly guided, delivers the subject-matter out of his own mind.

That there should be a human as well as a divine side to inspiration is absolutely repugnant to Muhammadans. To one who is able to hold the muslim view it is doubtless satisfying. Will it, however, bear critical examination in these days when all things, even the most sacred, are being tested? What does this testing reveal when it is applied to the Qur'an? It shows that the Qur'an, like all other books, is throughout coloured by the medium through which it has come, *i.e.*, by the mind of Muhammad himself and is influenced throughout by the circumstances in which he happened to be.

It is no easy thing to put forward in a few sentences a view of inspiration which may carry conviction to us, but I would suggest the following:—

The revelation of the will of God to men is a historical and progressive one. Ever since He created man God has been inspiring him and leading him ever upward. The revelation of God and His will, however, is far too great a thing to have been communicated to man all at once. There was a childhood of the human race when God gave to man as much of His truth as he could assimilate. Then as man advanced higher and higher more and more was given to man, and all the time God was preparing man for the fullest revelation of Himself that He could possibly reveal, and "When the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son" (Gal. 4 : 4.) The Muslim may retort that Jesus was indeed one of God's messengers, but that the fullest revelation came by Muhammad, who is Khatim-ul-Anbiya, the last and seal of the prophets. Our view, however, is that the revelation did not cease at Christ's death. The revelation that came with Christ is one that needs to be worked out in life, and it is as life expands that we find it coming to be understood. If we can get this view of inspiration, we get something that is infinitely superior to the mechanical view of the Muslim. We cannot picture Islam calling on a past prior to Muhammad for anything, yet it is built on the past from Old Testament sources but corrupted. The New Testament, however, is the stream that has been for ever flowing and broadening since the beginning. The source of inspiration is not dried up but is

still continuing and men are still as truly inspired by God as ever Muhammad believed himself to be. We believe that under the influence of that inspiration, mankind will be led ever onward and upward until he stands perfected in a new Kingdom of God, more glorious than was ever dreamt of by the Prophet of Arabia.

St. Paul says :—“ Prove all things ; hold fast that which is good ” (1 Thess. 5 : 21). Does the Muslim dare to accept this advice ?

Dinapore Cantt., Bihar.

G. N. GIBSON.

Musalmani-Bengali.

DR. Zwemer has done an immense service to the cause of Christian work by his recent tour throughout India. Wherever he has gone he has inspired missionaries with zeal and has enthused them with a new desire to convey the Christian message to Muslims. Bengal, with the majority of its population Muslim and most of them accessible and responsive, has hitherto been practically neglected. But signs are not wanting that she will receive her due share of attention before long. Ways and means are being devised for the evangelisation of Bengal Muslims, among which we may notice that attempts are being made to “rigidly scrutinize, revise and re-issue tracts” for them which have long been out of print. I understand there is a section of missionary opinion in Bengal favouring the preparation of these tracts in a style called the Musalmani-Bengali.

To me this term—Musalmani-Bengali—seems incomprehensible and a misnomer. If the term is meant to indicate the provincial dialect used by Muslims in Bengal, then I am afraid we shall not find any standard for it. The language spoken by the people of Bengal is so vitiated by provincialisms that it varies from sub-division to sub-division, not to speak of districts. It is clear from this that books or tracts written in Musalmani-Bengali will not be equally intelligible to Muslims in all parts of the province.

Bengali is the language of all the sects and communities inhabiting the country. It is the common treasure of all who give expression to their ideas, feelings and emotions. The growth to which it has attained to-day is due to the joint efforts of all the worthy sons and daughters of Bengal, irrespective of their caste or religion. It may be that the Muslim community of Bengal has not produced a ‘Bankim Chandra’ or a ‘Rabindra Nath’ but still the contributions made by Shiraji, Mazammal Haque, Kazi Najrul, Golam Mustafa, (to mention only a few out of many), to Bengali literature are not insignificant and their names will go down to posterity as writers and poets. The fame they have achieved is not due to the style called Musalmani-Bengali but to the use of chaste and elegant Bengali. We should carefully note that they have definitely discarded the so-called

Musalmani-Bengali and are producing books, periodicals and newspapers in chaste and simple Bengali for the general Muslim public, and the latter also are regularly reading and assimilating them. Now, should we not follow in their footsteps and discard the inelegant style once for all from our books and tracts? I am sure such a departure will not involve us in any loss but will rather further our cause.

Again, the Muslim boys in schools and colleges take up Bengali as their vernacular where the ordinary Bengali language is taught, and not this dialect called Musalmani-Bengali. Further, Muslims who can read the Bengali character will understand books written in simple Bengali quite as intelligently as any Hindu. Indeed it is my belief that many Islamic terms in these tracts of ours are not understood by ordinary Muslims. The pronunciation of Islamic terms is peculiar and Christian workers who borrow such terms from these tracts without knowing their correct pronunciation not only repel a Muslim audience but create in their hearts a sense of contempt for those who use them.

I would suggest another reason for discontinuing the practice. Use of special literature for a section will be apt to create schism in the church which is already overridden with sects and denominations, and experience points to the fact that the Musalmani-Bengali has contributed something at least to foster a spirit of superiority in the minds of many Hindu converts, and it is not quite uncommon to meet with Christians of Hindu descent who have scant regard for their brethren in the faith who have come from Islam.

Most of the present Muslims in Bengal have originally descended from a Hindu stock and for this reason it should not be difficult for them to be able to enter into the spirit of pure Bengali terms rather than the Islamic ones.

The above reasons lead me to conclude that Musalmani-Bengali is not needed for tracts for Muslims. I feel the purpose will be better served by the use of ordinary chaste but simple Bengali; but in every case the writer must possess a thorough knowledge of the language and the religion. Only the most outstanding Islamic terms should be used in tracts, and in every case they should be invariably followed by their Bengali equivalents. If a special literature is at all necessary for Bengali Muslims let Urdu be used for the purpose; but I myself do not see any urgent need of it.

*Scottish Mission School,
Budge Budge, Bengal.*

D. A. CHOWDHURY.

[We invite the opinions of members of the League in Bengal on this subject. Ed. N. & N.]

Food for Reflection.

THE editor of 'The Musalman,' Calcutta (an English weekly), has recently caused considerable commotion within the Moslem camp by an article entitled "Malicious attack on the Holy Prophet." It appears that the editor had heard of a tract entitled "Satya Dharmma Nirupan" ('an investigation of true religion') published by some Christian missionaries in Bengal (he hadn't actually 'seen' a copy!) in which improper language had been used respecting Muhammad. He forthwith launched out into a tirade against the missionary and all his works. The vernacular papers took the matter up on the strength of the lead given by "The Musalman." An idea of the contents of these articles will be gained from a perusal of the following extracts from "The Muhammadi" (Bengali). "These 'eminent' missionaries are at great pains to prove that he (Md.) was voluptuous and a cheat. Sad indeed that the magnanimous soul who shed tears in continuous stream over the trials of women, who for the first time in history, by demonstrating their equality with men, secured the rights of women from men even to the most minute details, who fed others himself going without food, repressing the pangs of hunger week after week by binding a stone over his stomach, who never once in all his life took refuge in deceit, that he, according [to whose religion it is half way to committing adultery itself if a man look with lust upon a woman, that he should be styled 'voluptuous'! he a 'cheat'!!"

"If the missionaries would but read the writings of some of their own co-religionists like Carlyle, Bosworth Smith, Davenport, etc., instead of inventing untrue and baseless calumnies against the prophet of God, they would gain a true idea of that great soul's entire freedom from lust, his self-control, and the sincerity and sheer purity of his character. A religion is not propagated by falsehood and the adoption of this method is in every way reprehensible."

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The paper continues: "We give below for the benefit of our readers a few samples of the kind of language used by these 'eminent' missionaries in the aforementioned tract about Muhammad ("Peace &c.") "Muhammad when he became powerful used to put people to death and loot their property; further, on many occasions he gave evidence of his lustful nature ('Refuge in God!')."..."He married a mere girl, named Ayesha."..."He was, at one time, the husband of nine wives and two concubines. ("God have mercy!")."..."He had these three faults—sexual passion, anger and avarice."..."Since he himself was a sinner like other men and deserving of hell, ("Refuge in God!") he cannot deliver us from sin and hell."

"Would even a half-educated, low-bred person use language of this kind?"....."Would any intelligent person ever depreciate another's religion in this manner? And yet these missionaries declare, do they not, that envy and jealousy are foreign to their natures! Oh, you missionaries, we would ask you, is it not a sin to slander another and to tell lies of another? And have you got rid of that sin-stained Christ of yours?"

(Here follows a rousing challenge to Muslims.)

'Musulmans, are you alive or dead? Are you going to suffer in silence this insult to our holy Islam, such vilification of the beloved prophet of God, and this shameful declaration about the world's last master? Musalmans! Are you not prepared, for the sake of your faith and on

behalf of your prophet, to bare your stout breasts to the naked sword? If you are, then why keep silent now? Up! and refute (these lies) with the deep roar of a hundred thousand voices. With the help of the press inaugurate a strong movement in opposition to all this. In every district, in every tiny village, organize meetings and pray for deliverance from this. Utilize every kind of lawful means and pray that justice may attend our cause!.. 'Pirs and doctors of the law! drop the habit of talking big when all the time you are filling your own pockets, and instead start raising funds for the purpose of giving instruction; to poor Muslims, that is to say deny yourselves, and you will have reward in this life and in the life to come

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'The Muhammadi' (just quoted) referred especially to a tract (now out of print) 'The story of Muhammad' by the late Dr. Rouse of Calcutta. As has been pointed out before this does contain statements liking to cause resentment on the part of Muslims.

The whole agitation however seemed to us to be so wilful and unnecessary that we ourselves wrote to the editor of "The Muhammadi" and called his attention to the following points :—

(1) The tract complained of shows on its last page that it was last printed in 1914, having been first published about 20 years ago. You should have pointed this out to your readers.

(2) A few years ago a committee of missionaries themselves came to the conclusion that this tract contained objectionable matter and decided that it should not be reprinted. As a matter of fact it is out of print.

(3) That while agreeing with you that the interests of true religion are not likely to be advanced by adopting unworthy methods, it seems to us that in going out of your way to speak disparagingly of Jesus Christ, whom even Muslims revere you are laying yourself open to the very charge you have brought against Christian missionaries!

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We are glad to say that our letter was published in full and that its presence side by side with reports of hurriedly-called protest meetings, in which Government was urged to deal suitably with the author, the publisher and the press concerned, rather made those resolutions look ridiculous.

But in the meantime the Government of Bengal had investigated the matter for themselves, and stated in a *communiqué* that it had been found almost impossible to get a copy of one of the tracts complained of; that they had learned that the editors who had raised the hue and cry had themselves not seen the tract; that the latter had been out of print 15 years and that the author of it had died 23 years ago! The *communiqué* very properly went on to say:

"It is true that this book contains attacks on the Prophet which must be very distressing to the Mohammedan community, and which are very improper. The Government are unable to understand what public purpose is served by reproducing such remarks from a book published 26 years ago, and they are surprised that the editors of two Mohammedan newspapers should so lightly have given publicity to such writing and thereby have caused distress to hundreds of their co-religionists. These passages in the book would certainly not have come to the notice of the public but for their reproduction in two Mohammedan newspapers."

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And we? Do we agree that such tracts contain matter that is

“improper” and calculated to distress the Muhammadan community? Do we endorse the statement of the Muhammadan editor that such methods do not tend to the advancement of true religion? It behoves us to reflect. In any case ours is the task of revealing to them the matchless character of Jesus Christ. “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.”

Notes

Dr. Zwemer at the May Meetings. One of the results of the Conference at C.M.S. House in London last November is to be seen in the fact that the various Mission Boards have secured Dr. Zwemer as special speaker at their annual spring meetings this year. He has a very heavy programme before him and writes to say that he will greatly value the prayers of the members of the League on his behalf during his travels this year. The following note tells us of the tasks he has undertaken:

‘According to arrangements made by the Committee of the American C.L.S. for Moslems, and in response to invitations received from the International Missionary Council (London), the Executive Committee of the General Missionary Conference of South Africa and the United Missionary Council for Scandinavia, I am to speak at the May Meetings of a number of British Societies, afterwards visit South Africa to attend their General Conference and study the Moslem problem, visit the Scandinavian Universities and attend their triennial convention at Stockholm. There Mrs. Zwemer hopes to join me and we return to Cairo about October 1st 1925. Mailing addresses are as follows:

April 20—May 15: London, care of Edinburgh House, 2 Eaton Gate, Sloane Square, (sailing on S. S. Saxon.)

May 15—July 25: Capetown, care of Rev. W. L. Hofmeyr, Southern Life Buildings, St. George’s Street.

July 25—Sept. 10: London, (forwarding address as above.)

September 11—23: Stockholm, care of Rev. Jacob Landahl 10 Barnhusgatan, Stockholm.

We ask an interest in your prayers as we undertake this long journey, especially for the meetings in Great Britain and in South Africa that they may result in deeper interest in Moslem evangelization.’

S. M. ZWEMER.

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We have received a request for prayer (from the Panjab) on behalf of “a Mohammedan woman and her son who have openly confessed their faith in Christ, but who have not yet been baptized.

Also for five Mohammedan men and their families in another village. Three of these men are reading their Bibles and have a spiritual understanding of the truth. May we not ask that the hindrances for their openly confessing Christ in baptism be removed.”

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News has come to hand of the conversion and baptism of a young Moslem man who was trained at the Moslem theological school of North India. He is “a staunch Christian.” His son’s conversion has profoundly affected the father, also well-read in Arabic and Persian, and now the latter has become anxious to drink at the same fountain! Your special prayers are asked for him.

Do you remember the pathetic story of an aged convert of 75 years, who after his baptism was forced to recant by his only son, and who has since been kept a prisoner in his home? (see N. & N, Dec. 1923 p. 94) While on furlough we told his story to the churches and asked for prayer on his behalf. We have reason to believe that he is now secretly planning to break through his bonds and escape and take his stand for Christ again! Remember him in your prayers, please.

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From the letter of a Indian student to Dr. Zwemer: "I am a young Moslem interested in Christianity, not necessarily with a view to conversion. But if the "light" comes it shall be nothing short of perdition and damnation to remain in the dark" (!)

FOR PRAISE AND PRAYER.

PRAISE—for the conversion of the theological student in North India and prayer that his father too may be led to find salvation through Christ.

PRAY—for Dr. Zwemer, that God will use him greatly at the May meetings in England and in Scandinavia and South Africa.

PRAY—for the woman and her son who believe in Christ and for the five enquirers (Panjab) that all hindrances to their baptism may be removed.

PRAY—for the old man of 75 years (Bengal) that he may be protected and provided for by the Love of God.

New Members.

524.	Rev. D. S. Harper.	C. M. S.	Harperabad, Sind.
525.	Miss E. M. Morgan.	B. M. S.	Delhi.

The annual subscription to the League is only Rs. 2-0-0 (English 3s.). The Secretary will be glad to send spare copies of this issue to addresses mentioned by members with a view to securing new subscribers. News and requests for prayer will always be welcome and should be sent early in the month to the Hon. Secretary :—

Rev. L. Bevan Jones,
Baptist Mission,
Dacca, Bengal, India

