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News and Notes

A Monthly Paper printed for the private use of the
Members of the Missionaries to Muslims League.

Series XIX

No. 3

March, 1931.

1st March = 10th Shawwal (10th mo.), 1349, A.H.

What are the First Elements of Christianity to be Presented to the Muslim Enquirer?

A PAPER BY REV. L. E. BROWNE,
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(continued from February issue.)

QY insistence on the life and character of Christ, which is authoritatively recorded in the Gospels, and on the supreme importance in the history of religion of Isaiah's doctrine of the holiness of God, will have been sufficient to show the value I place on the Bible in the evangelization of Muslims. But this very prominence which we give to the Bible gives manifold opportunities to Muslims to attempt to side-track us from our main task on to minor issues. The attacks made by Mubammad on the Christian interpretation of the Scriptures, and since his time the charge so commonly made that Christians have not only perverted the interpretation, but actually the words, of Scripture, must of course on due occasion be replied to. But sometimes one feels that the appropriate reply to such charges would be, 'My dear Sir, whether this book I have in my hand is the original Gospel or not, and whether we Christians have misunderstood it or not, will you take it and read it, and pray God to help you understand it, and then come and tell me what you think of it, and of Jesus Christ whom it talks about?' We must press people to read the Gospel, remembering that many who wish to argue about the Bible have never read it. The numerous instances in which men have first been brought to Christ by reading the Scriptures are sufficient to show that those who have not the advantage of a teacher, but diligently search the Scrip-

tures, do receive an illumination from God to direct them on the way. Some people think we should insist first on the authority of the Bible. I agree that there is an external authority of the Bible, the persons of its authors, and the witness of the millions who have found in it the way of life, but its main authority as far as I am concerned, and as far as my hearer is concerned, is the answering voice from within our hearts which assents to the teaching of Christ which it contains and admits the excellence of His manner of life.

Particularly dangerous is the attempt to side-track us to compare the Bible with the Quran in regard to its authority. Apart from the words of Jesus we do not claim that the Bible consists of the very words of God Himself, and we put ourselves in a false position if we try to compare it on such grounds with the book which Muslims believe to have been brought direct from God by Gabriel. Again, a Moslem comparing the purity of the text of the Quran with that of the Bible will point to the fact that all copies of the Quran agree even to the vowel points, whereas a copy of the Urdu New Testament, or the English Revised Version, with some verse numbers omitted, is sufficient evidence of a variety of text. Those of us who have studied the difficult and complicated subject of textual criticism are well aware of the answer to that objection. No variation of the text of the MSS. of the Bible affects any doctrine. Christians are not afraid of the variations being known because they do not affect the message. Every known variation has been printed and published for all the world to see. On the other hand, the uniformity of the Quran was attained by the destruction in 'Uthman's reign of all copies that differed from the text he approved. To enter into discussions of textual criticism with anyone unfamiliar with the subject would occupy much time and sidetrack us from our main task. Two other difficulties raised by the Bible may be mentioned: (1) The use by Christians in dealing with Muslims of the argument for Christ from Old Testament prophecies has resulted in Muslims claiming countless prophecies of Muhammad in both the Old and the New Testaments. The fault again lay in arguing from the circumference instead of from the centre; for however much we may feel that the prophets bore witness to Christ, the central witness to Christ is Himself, not His claims but His life and works. 'If I bear witness of myself my witness is not true. It is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which He witnesseth of me is true. Ye have sent unto John, and he has born witness unto the truth. But the witness which I receive is not from man. . . . But the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father hath given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.' (John v. 31-37). (2) Another difficulty arises from our prized liberty of the open Bible. We are so certain that its truth will prevail that we have no authorized expositions of it, and leave all men free to read and understand. The result of this policy is well-known, *viz.*,

that the Bible has become the most widely read book in the world. On the other side, the ignorant often misunderstand it, and fanciful or hypercritical interpretations of it are offered. The common sense of Christian people generally corrects misinterpretations in the course of a generation or so: witness for instance the fate of the theories of Strauss and Renan, of the Tübingen School, or of the extremer contributors to the *Encyclopedia Biblica*, none of which would find support in the West to-day. It is rather disconcerting to find Moslem writers in these days bringing up these discredited theories. In some cases it may be necessary to argue against them, especially if it is felt that these are real difficulties of the Moslem writers. But in most cases these second-hand opinions are only put forward to try and discredit Christianity and to ensnare us away from our real task of presenting the Gospel.

To return to the person of Christ. I can imagine many a reader putting the Gospel down and saying, 'These are beautiful words. It is the story of a beautiful life, a beautiful dream. Would that it were true!' What then? Shall we convince him of its truth by appeal to the authority of the Church that has canonized Holy Scripture, by the historical evidence for the early date of the Gospels, by the evidence of prophecy and miracles? I think not. But bring him into a company of Christian people, whose lives are being moulded after the pattern of Christ, among whom Christ is working powerfully for the overcoming of sin; then he will have a demonstration before his eyes of the truth of what he has read. The Holy Spirit within him has already told him in his heart that it is a beautiful life, and now that he sees it in its working he will know that it is true. Christ who up till then had been a shadowy figure, perhaps only the creation of a novelist, becomes for him now a present reality.

I think it is probably at this stage that he will get a clear idea of his own sinfulness. It is true that some converts have passed through a stage of deep despondency earlier on, before they had come into real touch with Christ. But even though this despondency may have been so deep that they contemplated suicide, it is probably generally an undefined feeling of failure, a sense of unexpressed need, a longing for certainty of the unknown world. It is only when a man finds himself face to face with the utter holiness of Christ that he realises his own lack and begins to long for deliverance from the sin which separates him from the Beloved. It may of course be that he will come to this stage by contact with a friend of good Christian life and recognise in him something of the character of Christ. It is then that he will be ready to receive the message of salvation through Christ, of the atoning and redemptive work of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. It will probably be only after that, when he has found salvation in Christ that he will begin to realise the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling within him, even though that guidance has been leading him on all the time.

Until these stages are reached it is not profitable to discuss the question of the Trinity, for there can be no doubt that the only safe approach to the doctrine is through the experience of God in His threefold manifestations. To try to discuss the Trinity without this experience is rather like trying to learn a proposition of Euclid without drawing the diagram. It is not however at all likely that a Moslem enquirer will wait till this stage before demanding an explanation of the Trinity. For it is one of the things that definitely repels him from Christianity. When he raises the question it is not with the intention of side-tracking us, but because it is a real difficulty, and it must be treated as such. He cannot be expected to understand much at an early stage, but he must at least be assured that all Christians believe in One God, and that equally with Moslems they repudiate the idea of three Gods. At a later stage, and particularly with men of education, it may be necessary to attempt a philosophic statement of the Trinity.

While such discussions are only fitted for the few, the fellowship of the brethren is essential for all. I have already spoken of the part played by observation of Christian lives in bringing a man to Christ. But the Christian fellowship is even more than that. It is essential for the full Christian life. Where Christian fellowship is absent, there is an almost insuperable obstacle to the Moslem, who comes from a staunch brotherhood. Though we are so often lacking in fellowship, we must recognise that lack as our failure as Christians. It is striking to find the Church mentioned in the creed as one of the objects of our belief. As a matter of fact, if only we practised the Christian fellowship more, we should see at once that it is wider and deeper than Moslem brotherhood. You can see what the latter is by the way it arose. Muhammad transferred to Islam the brotherhood of the Arab tribes. Members of each tribe had formerly held together by well-defined rules of honour and loyalty towards one another, to defend each other, and to exact vengeance on any other tribe for wrong done to a fellow-tribesman. Muhammad substituted Islam for the old tribal bond, but otherwise the principle remained much the same. It is a brotherhood of honour and loyalty to fellow-Moslems, strictly confined to the limits of Islam. The Christian fellowship on the other hand, though implying loyalty within the Christian circle, sets no limits to the duty of love towards all men. In depth or intensity it is also a fellowship of a different kind owing to the abiding presence of Christ, and in particular the fellowship with Him and with one another in the Holy Communion. It is hardly necessary to remark that there is nothing in Islam even remotely resembling this divine and human fellowship. What an overwhelming testimony the Christian fellowship would be if we really practised it! Strifes and persecutions and wars contradict it. But it is there in the Gospel as an essential part of Christianity, and will one day come to fruition.

Although in this paper I have spoken of various stages in the life of a convert, I am under no delusion that life and its stages can be

reduced to schedule. But I have tried to show that what is really central in our message is the person of Christ, and that the starting point in coming to know Him is to know His character. If this conclusion is correct, it should be of importance in our dealings with Muslims for while the character of Christ is new to them, it is not one of the things which naturally repels them; and if they can be led to accept the fact of Christ's character the other more difficult things will follow more easily.

The Christian Message and Islam.

IV.

WE give this month a summary of the discussion by the Cairo group on the subject of "How to present Christianity to the uneducated masses."

1. The importance of work amongst the *fellaheen* and artisans was emphasized, because they form the majority of the population. Our duty, as Christians, is to preach to them all. Their attitude towards our message is much less hostile to-day than it has ever been. They are prepared to listen. Moreover, literacy is probably more prevalent than the census would indicate. Everyone has friends or relations who can read, and education is spreading. This opens the door for the wise use of the printed page.

2. The influence of the Sheikh and the dervish leader is, however, very strong in the village. As soon as the evangelist begins to preach, the Sheikh is sent for. Furthermore, in many villages parts of the Quran have been memorized by children in the local school, and sections of the Hadith are well-known. We must, therefore, in village work, know how to deal with the Sheikh, and how to answer arguments taken from the Quran, or the Traditions.

3. In regard to our message, we already have certain common beliefs which enable us to establish points of contact with the Moslem. Such are beliefs in the existence and unity of God, in the fact of sin and the need for repentance, in human responsibility, and in the fact of revelation and the value of prayer. We must, however, present our Christian message in all the fulness of its teaching on these subjects.

4. In presenting the message, we should

(a) bear in mind the customs, beliefs and modes of thought of our listeners;

(b) begin tactfully, speaking first of all, maybe, about the state of trade, or the health of the people;

(c) use language, thoughts and illustrations which are intelligible to our audience, varying our message and its mode of presentation according to the group before us;

(d) be extremely simple in our thoughts and in our language and should use the best poedogic methods we know;

(e) be courteous, hospitable and patient.

5. Of the methods which have been tried, the following have proved successful:—

(a) open-air preaching, though this is now forbidden, perhaps wisely, as dangerous to public order;

(b) the "palm-tree" method, which Christ Himself used;

(c) regular meetings, preferably as part of the regular activities of the Christian Church;

(d) personal work;

(e) the social method, through hospitals, dispensaries, baby-welfare centres and clubs;

(f) Sunday Schools, especially those for ragged children;

(g) preaching on market-days and festivals.

6. Our teaching should be consecutive, and should have as its aim the conversion of the listeners and their incorporation by baptism into the Christian Church. To this end, regular instruction in Bible study, preferably for each individual by himself, has been found invaluable.

7. Above all, the *fellaheen* want to see Christianity in practice. This lends special value to the method of approach by social service. Also, our message, to be effective, must be living and real, and this is only possible if the evangelist speaks from his own personal experience and with the joyousness that springs from earnest conviction. We cannot over-emphasise the importance of the spiritual life of the worker, his reliance on prayer, his being filled with the Holy Spirit, his need for faith and hope and love. Also, his teaching, however simple, should be clear and certain, free from doubts and speculation. Preaching alone is not enough.

8. The numbers of the *fellaheen* are so large that they will never be reached properly until the whole Christian Church embarks on a campaign of living evangelism, and this can only be when the Church itself realizes its responsibility and receives a new baptism of the Spirit.

Where is your Qibla?

"**W**HERE is your qibla? In what direction do you pray?" asked a Muslim woman as we sat under a shady tree in her little courtyard. "We pray towards Mecca you know; do you pray towards Jerusalem?"

Our friend had been reading aloud from her Qu'ran which she had propped up in front of her as she sat on a *takhtaposh*. Our entrance did not disturb her in the least, she continued reading and bending her body backwards and forwards as she read, without looking up to see who had entered. When she had finished she lifted up the book and kissed the page and then reverently closed it and turned to salaam us.

"Three times a day I read this book," she remarked, "and pray in this direction", indicating it with her hand, "and where is *your* qibla?"

Rather a startling question but a reasonable one, and one which could be answered with certainty.

We were reminded of another woman who as she conversed with Christ made the remark.

"Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men out to worship."

"Neither in this mountain nor yet in Jerusalem" answered Christ: "they that worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

"Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them" said Jesus on another occasion.

"Show us the Father", pleaded Philip, as if he said, in what direction shall we look for Him?

"He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father," was the answer.

Our friend's question haunted me for long after we had left her home. It is a question we need to ask ourselves. In what direction are we looking when we pray?

We need fresh inspiration for the work. We need guidance, in what direction are we looking for it? The Psalmist's words are a tonic, they are bracing, lifting us up out of ourselves:

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the mountains; from whence shall my help come? My help cometh from Jehovah....."

A living God, and our prayers are in the Name of One who is alive for evermore.

The Meccan direction is towards the grave of a dead prophet.

"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day and for ever." It is here where our hope and inspiration lie, and to whom we pointed our friend that morning.

The Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. "Who didst purchase unto God with Thy blood, men of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. . . ." The living One.

It is related in the Annals of the Early Caliphate that the death of Muhammad came unexpectedly at the end, and Omar in order to quieten the excited crowd outside proclaimed that the Prophet was not dead but in a trance, and that he would surely like Moses return again. Abu Bekr hearing these words came out of the chamber of death and putting aside his friend uttered these remarkable words,

"Whoso worshippeth Muhammad—let him know that Muhammad is ~~dead indeed~~, but whoso worshippeth God—let him know that God liveth and dieth not."

E. M. MITCHELL.

The Muslim Press in India.

France's high-handedness in Morocco.—'The most sacred of liberties is the liberty of conscience and belief, and the gravest attack which has been made upon this liberty in recent times is to be found in the action of France in Morocco. France wishes to force a whole people to abandon its faith in order to embrace Christianity.'

In these terms a commission in Cairo announces to the world of Islam that France is persecuting the Muslim Berbers of Morocco. The great

majority of the present population of Morocco are Berbers, and for centuries they have been Muslims. Recently legislation has been introduced whereby the Berbers, as against the Arabs, are to follow Berber customs and are to be forbidden to follow the religious law of Islam, submitting instead to legislation that accords with the ancient law of their ancestors. Tribunals of the Shari'a, and Quranic schools, both of long standing, have been closed. The fact that the French Resident General has compelled the present Sultan to sign such a decree is so bitterly resented that riots have taken place in Morocco, the echoes of which are heard in Egypt and elsewhere..... from *The Sunrise*, Qadian.

Fear of Hindu aggression.—After commenting favourably on the Premier's statement at the conclusion of the R. T. Conference, *The Sunrise* for 30th January goes on to express the fear, apparently never far from the minds of Muslims, that the Muslim minority in India, notwithstanding all assurances to the contrary, is not likely to receive adequate safeguards.

Thus, 'No amount of reasonableness and no amount of effort to make themselves indispensable for the country, on the part of Muslims, will placate the Hindus. In the minds of the Mahasabhaite (Great Assembly) Hindus...the question is not whether or not the Muslims are reasonable or indispensable, the question is whether Islam should be allowed to exist in India or be exterminated. It is not a question of a few political rights, it is the question of the very existence of Islam in India!'

It is this fear that lends special significance to the proposal put forward by the Persian poet of Lahore, Sir Muhammad Iqbal, in his Christmas week presidential address at the All-India Muslim League, that there must be preserved "a Muslim India within India." He rejects the idea of Hindu-Muslim unity as a basis for the freedom of India, in favour of Hindu-Muslim adjustment. Much is being made by *The Light*, Lahore, of this new and bold idea that Muslims must secure for themselves an area in N. W. India, within which they will be free to develop their own Islamic culture, thus making their contribution to India, while at the same time withstanding all attempts on the part of the Hindus to reduce them to impotence.

'Kamal Pasha in saner mood.'—*The Sunrise* thus comments on the 'revolution' that has recently taken place in Anatolia. 'The latest insurrection in Smyrna...has opened his (the Pasha's) eyes to the very deep-rooted resentment of the masses against the reforms that he has so ruthlessly foisted on the Turkish people'... He 'has realized that he can no longer insult the religious sentiments of his people with impunity.... In future, innovations which are contrary to the teaching of Islam will not be encouraged.'

FOR PRAISE AND PRAYER.

PRAISE for the brighter outlook in India as the outcome of the R. T. Conference; pray that a spirit of wisdom and good-will may prevail in the further deliberations now taking place.

PRAYER is asked for those now studying at The Henry Martyn School, Lahore. One is an Oriya evangelist, another was born in Baghdad of Turkish and Arab parents (he is to be an evangelist), another is a Punjabi graduate who is soon to enter into training for the ministry.

NEW MEMBERS

Rev. W. Idris Jones,
Miss E. M. Calkins,
Rev. O. Hermansson,

Ch. of Scot. M.
M. E. M.
Swedish Mission,

Sheikh Othman, Aden.
Shahjahanpur, U.P.
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Any notification of change of address, names of new members or remittance of subscription, etc., should be sent to the Superintendent, Orissa Mission Press, Cuttack, India, and *not* to the Secretary of the League. The annual subscription to the League is Rs. 2-0-0 (English 3s. od.).

Matters of interest to members of the League, items of news and requests for prayer should be sent (if possible, early in the month) to the Hon'y. Secretary :—

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