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News and Notes

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A Word of Farewell.

BY the time this issue reaches our readers, Dr. L. E. Browne who until recently was acting editor of our paper, will be arriving in England, having left India and his work at the Henry Martyn School, Lahore, with real regret.

He came to us with the reputation of a first-class scholar who had gained experience in many fields of service. Formerly on the staff of St. Augustine's College, Canterbury, he afterwards joined that of Bishop's College, Calcutta, where he became greatly interested in Islam and Muslims. Later he studied for a time in Cairo and then moved on to Constantinople, where he was when it was first mooted that he should become a member of the staff of the new school at Lahore. A great lover of books, he was the perfect Librarian, and we shall miss him as the custodian of the valuable collection of volumes in Lahore.

He endeared himself to us all by his ready friendship and happy disposition, and to many a student of our Summer Courses in the hills will retain pleasant memories of our outings at which he added so materially to the enjoyment of the party.

It is fitting that at the close of his five years with us his work should receive such high recognition, in that Cambridge University is conferring on him the degree of D.D. for his latest book.

Our best wishes go with him and Mrs. Browne into his next sphere of work.

L. BEVAN JONES.

Simplicity.

A FRIENDLY Maulvi came in the other day and in the course of our conversation he said, "I cannot understand why Christianity is trying to substitute its most difficult teaching for the much simpler and plainer doctrine of Islam. If the doctrine of the Trinity is compared with *Tawhid* the latter can be understood far more easily." Last year we met a Christian missionary in charge of a great educational institution in Rhodesia who spoke of the full dress debates which took place in his school on the relative merits of Christianity and Islam and the same point apparently is being raised there. At some time or other most missionaries have heard similar expressions of opinion. The answer is not so far to seek as perhaps we imagine. The old theory that the sun moved round the earth is far plainer to the average man than the theory of relativity; but as astronomical science the latter is the last word though it may be—as it has been said—that there are only thirteen people who can understand that theory. Children may consider that life is simple but age and experience bring the realisation that life is complex and the complexities of this great universe cannot be explained easily. The religion which claims to be commensurate with all the ramifications of human experience, let alone the depths and heights of the Divine Being and Love, will have its mysteries.

Sir Muhammad Iqbal has drawn attention in his '*Lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*,' to the interest of Muslim thought in the concrete. This tendency to conceive things concretely and, it must be said, materialistically may create an illusion of simplicity because it extrudes all those reaches of spiritual experience which cannot be expressed so easily in the concrete. It is strange that in a religion where, when the attributes of God are discussed and definitions are asked of such names as *Rahim*, *Karim* and the like, the answer is given with the negative *la thani*,—it is unique—, and where there is a process of abstraction at work which threatens to empty the idea of God of all meaning lest anything should be predicated of Him derogatory to His Majesty, there should yet be a doctrine of intermediaries to whom God, as it were, delegates His authority and, in effect, a denial that God in Himself can directly inspire. The agent must be Gabriel. The *Kalam* cannot directly tabernacle with men. And so while the Muslim prides himself on his simplicity and cannot but use the concrete idea of a Prince sending his messenger to communicate his will, he endangers the very monotheism on which he prides himself. The Christian idea of an intermediary at once human and divine, preserves more truly the Sovereignty of God than the Muslim idea.

Compare a number and an equation and there is no doubt which is simpler but to advance in understanding there is also no doubt that to grasp the meaning of the equation is altogether desirable

for it expresses more. So we may say that if we can only be simple at the sacrifice of the richness of experience of the divine and by taking refuge in a semi-agnosticism, then we prefer not to be simple.

And ultimately this desire for simplicity plunges us into the very perplexity we have sought to avoid. It may be simple to some types of mind to have a code-book in which rules for conduct are drawn up on a recognised system and to be able, when in doubt, to run ones finger down the index to find out what ones duty is to ones neighbour and to find that forty houses in each direction from ones own house constitutes neighbourhood, within the limits of which there is special obligation. But then I am plunged into perplexity as to No. 41. The ultimate simplicity is with Our Lord in the parable of the good Samaritan, and in that final and all embracing simplicity, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

There is the simplicity of the poem which hides the labour of the years spent in achieving the art of which it is the result. Such simplicity we may rejoice in and such simplicity is an outstanding characteristic of the Christian Faith. Indeed if we will only rid ourselves of the confusion between simplicity on the one hand and crass concreteness and crude formalism and legalism on the other then we shall at once be able to claim that the Christian Faith is the greatest simplification of life in its entirety that the world has ever known. It does not achieve this simplicity by ignoring the ugliness of life and dismissing the problem of evil with some formula about the will of God, but it faces life whole and, taking its stand on the greatest of all simplicities, "God is Love," it not merely accepts life with patient submission but welcomes it with holy joy.

And that great simplicity will out and take the heart of the Muslim by surprize as when an old and reverend Muslim friend brought back the copy of Henry Martyn's Persian translation of the New Testament which I had lent him to read, and weeping said, "To believe that Christ died as it is written here is against my creed but O my heart longs for it to be true."

J. W. S.

The Status of Women in Arabia before Islam.

A PASSAGE in *The Light* quoted in our February number attributed the degraded position of women in Islam to the mullahs.

Other people are often inclined to put the whole blame on Muhammad. The question was gone into very thoroughly by W. Robertson Smith in his book "Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia," a book first published in 1885, but re-issued with additional notes by the author himself, by Goldziher and by S. A. Cook, in 1903. A

short summary of some of the conclusions reached on the question of the position of women will no doubt interest our readers.

Originally, it appears, the custom in Arabia was for the woman to remain among her own people. If her husband belonged to another tribe he visited her, either from time to time or continuously so long as the marriage lasted. The children of the union belonged to the mother's tribe, *i.e.*, descent was traced through the mother. Under this system the woman had a great measure of independence: "The women in the Jabiliya, or some of them, had the right to dismiss their husbands, and the form of dismissal was this. If they lived in a tent they turned it round, so that if the door faced east it now faced west, and when the man saw this he knew that he was dismissed and did not enter." (Quoted on page 80, from *Aghani*, 16.106). There is evidence from a European writer that this sort of marriage prevailed two centuries earlier than Muhammad, but by the time of Muhammad this ancient custom had almost disappeared owing to changes in the tribal system of Arabia. The constant blood-feuds and petty warfare between the tribes led frequently to the capture of women. These women were taken as wives by their captors, and naturally lived with their husbands in the husband's tribe. Then there grew up a custom, somewhat analogous in its result to this marriage by capture, whereby the husband bought his wife from her father. W. R. Smith shows conclusively that the money paid by the bridegroom was not a dowry or gift to the bride, but a payment to her father. The bride was not actually a slave, her position being for instance different from that of an Abyssinian slave-girl, but the bridegroom had purchased rights over her which he could sell to another man or leave to his heir. Under these circumstances, the children belonged to the husband's tribe, and descent was traced through the father. The later Muslim fabricators of genealogies, which always go through the male line, nearly succeeded in concealing the earlier matriarchal system in Arabia.

In the time of Muhammad there was in vogue a common practice of temporary marriages called *nikah-al-mut'a* which "were abolished with great difficulty, and only after much hesitation on the part of the prophet, if it be not the better tradition that they were not fully condemned till the time of Umar." (page 82). The real difference between this kind of marriage and ordinary marriages is not that the former were temporary—for ordinary Muhammadan marriages may be only temporary but that after a fixed time they could be dissolved by either party. The *mut'a* marriage was, in fact, a survival of the earlier type of Arabian marriage in the days when kinship was reckoned through the female line.

Let us now return to consider the conditions under the system of "marriage of dominion," *i.e.*, by capture or purchase, as it obtained in the days of Muhammad. W. R. Smith says (p. 117), "It is certain that where, as at Medina, marriage by purchase and male kinship were the rule, the position of women as regarded property was unfavourable.

At Medina, as we are told by the commentators on Sura iv, women could not inherit. So far as the widow of the deceased is concerned, this is almost self-evident; she could not inherit because she was herself—not indeed absolutely, but *qua* wife—part of her husband's estate, whose freedom and hand were at the disposal of the heir, if he chose to claim them, while if he did not do so, she was thrown back on her own people. But further, there is an explicit statement, confirmed by the words of the Sura (verse 126), that the men of Medina protested against the new rule, introduced by the prophet, which gave a share of inheritance to a sister or a daughter." The author then explains that though women could not hold property, there is no reason to think that they could not own jewellery or money. He then goes on to say (page 120), "What does appear to be possible is that the alleviations which the prophet introduced in the hard condition of married women were partly based on the more advanced laws of his own city of Mecca. In Mecca the influence of higher civilisations may have been felt, for the townsmen had large commercial dealings with Palestine and Persia, and some of them had lived in Roman cities like Gaza. And here accordingly we find that Khadija, though—if the traditions can be believed—she could not marry the prophet without her father's consent, led a perfectly independent life as a rich widow engaged in a lucrative caravan trade. . . . But at Mecca, quite as much as at Medina, the husband became absolute possessor of the right to use a woman as a wife, and there is evidence to show that this right could be inherited and was not forfeited by simple divorce. . . . All this is true even under Islam; the theory of Moslem law is still that marriage is purchased, and the party from whom the husband buys is the father, though by a humane illogicality the price becomes the property of the woman, and the husband's rights are not transferable. And so, though Islam softened some of the harshest fetures of the old law, it yet has set a permanent seal of subjection on the female sex by stereotyping a system of marriage which at bottom is nothing else than the old marriage of dominion. It is very remarkable that in spite of Muhammad's humane ordinances the place of woman in the family and in society has steadily declined under his law. In ancient Arabia we find, side by side with such instances of oppression as are recorded at Medina, many proofs that women moved more freely and asserted themselves more strongly than in the modern East. The reason of this lay partly no doubt in the conditions of nomad life, which make the strict seclusion of women impossible, and so allow a more independent development to the female character. But what chiefly operated to check marital tyranny and to preserve a certain sense of personal dignity under the humiliating conditions of marriage by purchase was the great weight attached to the bond of blood," that is to say, a husband was afraid to treat his wife too harshly for fear of the tribe from which she had come, and of which she was still a member by the bond of blood. What Muhammadanism has done is to stereotype the "marriage of dominion" which was

current in Muhammad's day, while the break-up of the old tribal system has removed the one safeguard that alleviated to some extent the lot of the married woman in the days before Islam. In a striking sentence later in the book (page 208) W. R. Smith says, "The Coran with its inflexible precepts has made progress impossible beyond these reforms of Muhammad which, real as they were, were too dearly bought when the price of them was that they should be accepted as final."

L. E. B.

It was not Intended to Raise a Laugh.

IN the Quiver for July, there is a most extraordinary story of a just-arrived young Swedish missionary who, while journeying to her station in Western India, allows herself, in the most incredibly foolish manner to be beguiled by a soft-spoken Muslim. This man eventually "lands" her, at nightfall, within the walls of his own courtyard in a remote village. That she is eventually rescued, just in time is due to the fact that her 'Senior Missionary' (to be) gets to hear, quite accidentally, of the amazing 'capture' from a small Christian girl.

The story, which is said to be "founded on fact and faithfully describes conditions in that great country" (*pace* any Muslim reader!) was written "by a missionary in India."

The narrative reveals amazing ignorance of certain things in Islam which, one would have thought are now known by all missionaries with any length of service to their credit in this country. To say nothing of the fact that no missionary should still be using the incorrect spelling, *Mahomet*, *Mahometan*--what are we to think of this? The Muezzin was calling out "from the top of the mosque at two o'clock" (*i.e.*, at night!) "La Illah Ruh Ullah, Mahomet Rasul Ullah."

Further, as the predatory Muslim was helping the young girl down from the *ekka* before taking her into his *harim*, he was observed by a group of men who knew him for what he was. Indeed, one of them with a sneer reproached him saying: "And would ye go further than the Prophet himself, then? *Four* wives were enough for *him*! Needs it that ye should outdo even your namesake, O Mahomet, Son of Shafi?"

The Work of the Osmania University.

WE draw the attention of our readers to the very interesting account in the Calcutta edition of the *Statesman* for August 25th of the work of the Osmania University at Hyderabad and the Dairat-ul-Ma'arif which is affiliated to it. The Anjaman-i-taraqqi-urdu is issuing translations which are of great interest. When as yet there was no new edition of De Boer's *Philosophy of Islam* in

English it was possible to procure one in Urdu. Lecky's Moral History of Europe and Buckle's History of Civilisation can now be obtained beside other valuable books, in an Urdu dress. For students of Arabic there is good news that the Dairat-ul-Ma'arif in collaboration with the learned of Al Azhar University is to publish some rare Arabic MSS of which 375 have been found up and down India.

'The State of Islamistan.'

SOME months ago we had the privilege of meeting a Christian convert from Islam who came from Central Asia with the desire to receive theological training and return to his home to evangelise his Muslim compatriots. He had suffered imprisonment and torture for his new-found faith but by the accident of British citizenship he finally escaped a worse fate. His story is recalled to our mind by an article in the *British Weekly* of July 26th, 34, by Mildred Cable the joint author of 'Something Happened.' Here it is prophesied that Chinese Turkistan is about to declare itself as the Central Muslim State and the writer proceeds "Reliable private information has reached the writer of this article from the North-West Frontier of India which tells of the arrival of Christian refugees from Kashgaria, whose declaration is: No Christian will be tolerated in the State of Islamistan. Behind this we sense the manifestation of another rebellion not directed against a form of world government, but against the Lord and his anointed. There has been murder, imprisonment and torture in the small Christian community, and the reports declare that there will be exile for all survivors."

It was further of interest to read the assertion of Dr. Sheldrake made at various places recently that there were no Christian Generals in China but that they were all Muslims. Dr. Sheldrake is of course thinking of his own little bit of China in the North.

Rumour is floating round. Who can know the truth of the movements now disturbing Central Asia? Apparently there is in existence a formidable block of Islamic States along the ancient trade routes from Istamboul to China. But for us the problem is just this; What is being done to evangelise the Islam of Central Asia? Perhaps with a little more modesty and some sorrow we might ask: what is the Church doing to evangelise Islam in India where so many favourable opportunities present themselves? Pray ye therefore the Lord of the Harvest that He send forth labourers into His vineyard.

Enquiries.

A member writes:

"In the U.P. Census 1931 under Religious occupations, the following members are given.

	Males	Females
Saiyid	754	19
Shaikh	1,927	117

Will you kindly say what kind of work the Muslim women are engaged in as a religious occupation."

We should be glad if any of our readers can throw light on this interesting item in the census.

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Another member is enquiring for a second-hand copy of Platt's Urdu and Hindi Dictionary. If any reader hears of one will he write to the editor, please.

* * * * *

We repeat an enquiry which came to us a couple of months ago. Will you kindly tell me if this is true of the Mussalmans of Bombay in the past or the present?

"The dislike, almost loathing with which an Indian Mussalman looks upon divorce is so great, that his strongest oath is: 'May she who has given me birth be thrice divorced if I do so and so.'"

Tribes and Castes of Bombay Vol. III.

(On the face of it this saying does not seem to indicate a loathing for divorce in general but simply the divorce of a mother which most Muslims would not look upon with equanimity. Ed.)

A Word to the Wise.

"I cannot conceive of a missionary honestly and sympathetically meeting Muslims in religious discussion, without subjecting his own theology to an overhauling which cannot be without its risk. There is reason in all this for carefulness without timidity."

W. A. SHEDD.

Requests for Prayer.

PRAYER is requested on behalf of the Committee of the Henry Martyn School, Lahore, for divine guidance in the selection of a successor to Dr. L. E. Browne.

PRAYER is requested on behalf of a convert who since baptism has been passing through most difficult times, that he may be guided and strengthened so that his faith may not fail.

PRAYER is asked for a Muslim convert of some years standing who is being tempted to return to her old faith.

Notice.

Matters of interest to members of the Missionaries to Muslims League, items of news, and requests for prayer and praise, should be addressed to Rev. J. W. Sweetman, Ram Katora, Benares.

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 Editor. The annual subscription to the League, including *News and Notes*, is Rs. 2-0-0 (English 3 shillings).