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News and Notes

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1st June=28th Saffar (2nd mo.) 1354 A.H.

The Chief Shi'a 'Alams of Hyderabad.

AS I write it is Muharram, the first month of the Moslem year. During the first ten days of the month the Shi'a sect, followers of 'Ali, mourn for Hasan and Husain, the sons of 'Ali, the former of whom was poisoned, and the latter killed in battle at Karbala.

One of the customs in Muharram is to set up some kind of standard representing Ali, Fatima, Husain, and to keep it for ten days in what is known as the '*Ashur-khana* (literally, the Tenth Day House). Most Shi'a homes have their own standards in their own private houses. There are also many important ones in the city in buildings which are open to the public. My Urdu teacher and a Shi'a friend of his took us round this morning to see these. It was most interesting. These standards take various shapes. The two most usual are first, the hand, each finger standing for one name of each of the *Panch Pak Ajsam* (the five holy bodies) Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain; and second, these names mingled together in a kind of monogram in Arabic lettering, on the right side the letters being the proper way on, and on the other side the same in a symmetrically opposite direction.

The '*alams* which we saw were as follows:—

1. *Badshahi 'Ashur Khana*. (Kings' '*Ashur Khana*). Here the royal '*alams* are kept which are said to have been handed down from the time of the Kutb Shahi Kings (16th Cent.). These are all of gold. Five large ones were in the centre, and numerous smaller ones along each side. The centre one was the most elaborate, with most intricate lettering on it, and from the top of it two large "arms" extended representing the sword of 'Ali. H. E. H. the Nizam gives the dhattis (cloths) which decorate these '*alams*, delicately coloured ones of costly silk valued at Rs. 200 to Rs. 300 each.

At each 'alam we visited our Muslim friends offered a small garland of flowers and an incense stick, and sometimes took away a little piece of paper containing ash from the incense burner. Ash burned in front of an 'alam is considered to be sacred.

2. In the same courtyard there is a side room in which is the heaviest 'alam in Hyderabad. It is said to weigh two to three tons. The usual names enscrolled in the centre of this have the appearance of a lamb's face. It is supposed to be of special artistic merit when the scroll can thus take the form of the face of an animal.

On the wall behind this 'alam were several framed pictures of Mecca, Quranic texts, Persian couplets, etc. The top one of these was about 2ft., 6 ins., by 2 ft., in size. We could not see what was written on it, but our Shi'a friend told us that the whole of the Quran was there. This is hard to believe seeing that the Quran is about the same length as the New Testament, but I know that Arabic writing can be microscopically small, so it may be true.

In the centre of the courtyard is the *alawa*, the fire pit in which the wood is burnt on the 10th night of Muharram to make a bonfire round which the devotees dance,

3. *Nal Sahib* (Horse-shoe from 'Ali's horse).

This horse-shoe was encased in sandal paste and so it could not be seen. Every year more sandal is added to the case.

Bundles of peacock feathers were leaning up against this 'alam. These are waved in front of it when the incense is burning.

4. *Qadam-i-rasul* (Foot-print of the Prophet).

This was encased in a coffin-shaped representation and there were several other 'alams ranged on either side. Then a little to the front and to one side was the *Skula* (swing cradle) to represent the child of Husain who died.

5. *Panja Shah* (*panja* from *panj* five, means the outspread hand, hence *Panja Shah* means Royal Hand).

At the entrance was a slab of black stone—a rare stone not found in the Deccan—on which was inscribed in Persian "Whoever comes here with sincerity, his wishes are surely fulfilled." In front of the stone was a tray of the same material where offerings for the poor could be placed when wishes had been fulfilled.

The 'alam consisted of twelve hands representing the Twelve Shi'a Imams, the name of an Imam being inscribed on each one. These hands were arranged as follows: First there was one large hand, then on top of that five smaller ones in a row, and on the top of these five two rows of three. I omitted to notice what order these were in, but I assume the large hand would represent 'Ali, and the others would work upwards from right to left.

Behind the 'alam, in a sandal wood case which was specially opened for us to see, was an impression of 'Ali's (?) hand in stone. It is said that there are only two such impressions in the world. The other is in Arabia. This one was brought from Arabia in the time of

the Kutb Shahi Kings. The descendants of the Arabs who brought it have been in charge of the '*Ashur Khana*' ever since.

On the walls were some very old documents dating from the time of Abu'l Hasan, the last of the Kutb Shahis. The paper of these documents was made in the Deccan.

Across the front of the room was hung a heavy iron chain, said to have been worn by the saint Mahmud (?) a descendant of 'Ali. Several Persian inscriptions were attached to it.

6. *Bibi ka 'Alam* (Lady's '*Alam*'). This is to represent Fatima, Muhammad's daughter and wife of 'Ali. This '*alam*' is very costly and important and on the tenth day it is taken in procession round the city on an elephant. It is all of gold and consists of the intertwined names. On each side of it three green bags were suspended like ear-rings. These are said to contain real diamonds.

In another part of the '*Ashur Khana*' was an emblem in the form of a mouth with a small hand on the top of it. This is taken in front of the '*alam*' in the procession to intimate to the people that the '*alam*' is approaching. This is the only '*alam*' in Hyderabad that is taken out on an elephant. It is very popular.

The *alawa* (fire pit) is the largest in Hyderabad. We peeped into it and saw several pice and *cowries* which had been thrown in as offerings. In most of the '*Ashur Khanas*' there were vendors of *cowries*—one heap for one pice. Those who buy give them to beggars who in turn give them as offerings.

On the ninth day of Muharram this '*Ashur Khana*' is made *pardah*. As the street approaching the building is very narrow, I imagine the crush of vehicles will be rather terrible.

There were two other interesting things which we saw.

One was a *taziya*—a representation of the tomb of Husain—made out of cress, in the form of a camel—because Husain travelled from Mecca to Karbala on a camel. The side view of the camel's face looked like a horse, but when we stood right in front of it, it really did look like a camel.

The second thing was a number of old statues displayed on the balcony of Shiva Raj Bahadur's palace. These are only shown in Muharram and are not so numerous as they once were. They included an old type of soldier, priest, negro, toddy carrier, *dhobi*, stone-breaker, drummer, a bear and an elephant.

K. GREENFIELD.

Some Additional Notes on Muharram.

IT is interesting to note that the tenth day of Muharram which is called '*Ashura*' or '*Ashur*' is an exact transliteration of the Hebrew name for the Day of Atonement (vide Lev. 16: 29) especially in view of the fact that the Passion of Husain is regarded

as having atoning efficacy. Tracts are published from such centres as the *Madrasatu-t-Wa 'izin* in Lucknow comparing Calvary and Karbala.

The *Marthiya* (lamentation or elegy on the death of Hasan and Husain) is frequently great literature. The *Marthiya* of Mir Anis in spite of its extraordinary length, its manifest anachronisms and its hyperbole, is a piece of literature which, when recited during the ten days, stirs the deepest emotions and rouses the strongest feelings. Its descriptive power is great and its appeal moves the strongest to tears. The taunts of the warriors in the battle and the description of the tiny babe, which was slain, so young that it "was not able yet to open its little hands," the depicting of the fierce heat of strife and the equally moving and tender narrative of the calmness and courage and the affection of the family of Husain are such as to affect not merely the Shi'a whose faith inclines him to take these things to heart, but the Sunni also, as we know from actual experience. These *marathi* are stores of information with regard to the ideas which are held by the pious Shi'as.

It would be interesting to have a description of the '*alams* in Lucknow and other Shi'a cities to place along side the description given us by Miss Greenfield. In Lucknow a great part of the city is symbolic of the events of Muharram. There is the whole of Husainabad, the Shah Najaf—which is said to be a replica of the shrine of 'Ali at Najaf, and the extensive 'Karbala' outside the city where the *Taziyas* are buried. In Husainabad there is in a glass case a stuffed white horse representing Husain's swift steed. And here it should be noted that most frequently the symbols of the horse or horse shoe are associated with Husain rather than with 'Ali and the lamentation of the passion centres rather in Husain than in his father.

The word *Taziya* is in its original significance applied to any expression of sympathy and secondly to the passion play of the Shi'as. In India it has come to mean the copies of the tombs at Karbala, etc., which are carried in procession. The usual '*alams* are the banner, spear, and bow of Husain. The mourners are given cakes of earth from Karbala scented with musk which they use to place before them as they bow in the ritual prayer and on which they rest the forehead in prostration. These are called *Muhr*. Many strict Shi'as cultivate the mark on the forehead made by such prostration and make it their boast that the mark of the Passion of Karbala is on their foreheads.

In some case the tears which are shed in lamentation are preserved, sometimes by some authorized person and sometimes by the mourners themselves. They are wiped with cotton wool. These tears are reputed to have power to cure sickness and one common idea is that when the one who has shed them passes away and is subjected to the purgatory or inquisition of the tomb, these tears mitigate the pains from the fires of purgation.

The outspread hand represents the five intercessors including

Muhammad himself. The idea that intercession is efficacious is far more common among the Shi'as than among the Sunnis who at most accept Muhammad as intercessor. But in the dying prayer of Husain in the Passion Play we find these words :

“O Lord, for the merit of me, the dear child of Thy Prophet ; O Lord, for the sad groaning of my miserable sister ; O Lord, for the sake of young 'Abbas rolling in his blood, even that young brother of mine who was equal to my soul, I pray Thee, in the Day of Judgment, forgive, O merciful Lord, the sins of my grandfather's people, and grant me, bountifully, the key of the treasure of intercession.”
(See Pelly's *Miracle Play of Hasan and Husain*, Vol. 2., p. 81ff.)

J. W. S.

A Moslem Seeking God.

IN one of the cities of India, a young man was invited to live in a Christian home. He had come from one of the best of Moslem homes, having had many advantages which would be coveted by others. His father was a very learned and respected gentleman in Government service. His mother was of high social standing and a good woman. The youth loved his home and had many things to say in appreciation of it.

On leaving his Christian friends, he used words to this effect : I have been grateful for the privilege of being in your home, eating at the family table, and thus getting to know the various members of the family and guests who have come. I am greatly impressed with the things you talk about, the ideals and standards you hold in life, and especially the sincerity and purity which I see lived out daily. And thus has been exemplified “I was a stranger and ye took me into your home.”

Let us pray for this young man. He has borrowed a number of Christian books, among which are two by Dr. Stanley Jones. He likes Dr. Jones and will read his books with interest. It may be that he is near the Kingdom. He is fond of the following prayer :

“As for me, I will obey God, come what may,
My life, my affections, my strength, my all,
Shall be spent for Him who is worthy and demands
All there is of me.”

G. B. T.

A Correction.

IN the addition to the Classified List of Urdu Books which we published in our last number there was a slight error. The author of Nos. 108, 109 and 110 should be Gardner and not Gairdner as there written.

NEW BOOKS.

WE have great pleasure in commending to our readers the second edition of *Islam for Beginners* by Dr. Murray T. Titus published by the Oxworth Book Service (Lucknow Publishing House). This second edition has been revised and enlarged to 69 pages. No price is marked on it but we believe it costs 8 annas. There is now a new chapter on the Muslim Objections to Christianity written by Rev. J. A. Subhan of the Henry Martyn School. This is a very valuable addition and will prepare the way for further study, so necessary if we are to commend our message to the Muslim mind.

The bibliography and suggestions in the preface of this book are such as to lead to a very sound knowledge of Islam.

A synopsis of Dr. Titus' six suggestions is as follows :—

1. Make many contacts with Muslims to learn their beliefs and their objections to Christianity. Seek answers to their objections.
2. Read Muslim books in the vernacular.
3. Visit mosques and shrines and take notes of what you see.
4. Visit bazar booksellers and get to know what books they sell on Islam.
5. Make a comparative set of facts for Islam and Christianity.
6. Use maps.

Anyone who follows these suggestions will greatly increase his efficiency as a missionary to Muslims. This is a wonderful little primer, and we are glad to note that it has been translated into Gujarati, Hindi and Urdu.

Dictionary of Islam, by Hughes. We notice that this most valuable book has been reprinted and can be had from Luzac for £2.2.0.

Das Hukm (The Ten Commandments) by Miss R. Greenfield has been published by the North India Tract Society, Allahabad, in Persian-Urdu and can be purchased for 8 annas.

MUSLIM BOOKS IN URDU.

We have been asked to give the names of some books which should be useful to those who wish to read what Muslims themselves have to say on their own religion.

We would head such a list with the *Sirat un-Nabi* by Shibli. This is an exhaustive work on the Life of Muhammad, in four volumes. The later volumes are by Sulaiman Nadwi. (Ma'arif Press).

Other books are: *Huquq o Faraiz-i-Islam* published by Maulvi Faiyuz ud-din and Sons, 119, Circular Rd., Lahore. This book deals with the duties of religion and quotes copiously from the Quran and Traditions. (Sunni).

Tohfat ul-'awam. This is a book which is used by the Shi'ahs and the subject is the same as the last. It is obtainable from the Sadiq Press, Rikabganj, Lucknow.

Five books published by the Ma'arif Press, Azamgarh. *Kalam, Ilm ul Kalam, Al Ghazali* by Shibli. These are of value for the study of the development of philosophy and dogmatics in Islam. *Tarikh-i-Fiqh-i-Islami*, History of Muslim Jurisprudence. *Tasawwuf-i-Islam*, History of Sufism by 'Abdul Majid.

Nafahat ul Uns, a translation of a book by the Persian poet Jami on the lives of the Sufi saints. Obtainable from Fazl-ud-din, Bookseller, Kashmiri Bazar, Lahore.

If readers of *News and Notes* wish to know of books on any particular subject, we shall be glad to do all in our power to help them.

Praise and Prayer.

PRAISE God for His wonderful patience with us in our misunderstanding of His will and in the half-heartedness we often betray.

PRAY that God may in our time bring to pass a new era of Muslim evangelisation.

PRAY for the work of the Henry Martyn School and for its staff.

PRAY for those who are engaged in literary work, that they may have the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

PRAY for the Missionary Societies at home, that they may have such real evidence of the devotion of the whole church to world evangelisation that their hearts may be lifted up with joy and courage.

LET US with an act of consecration give ourselves again to trust in God, the never failing treasury filled with boundless stores of grace, and to turn from our feverish apprehension lest the arm of flesh should fail us.

Notice.

Please note the Editor's change of address.

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 Hony. Secretary:—

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