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News and Notes

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The Offence of the Cross.

We preach Christ crucified unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness: but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. I Cor. i, 23-24.

THE death of Christ on the Cross is the heart of the Christian religion. With perhaps the single exception of the resurrection of Christ, no other part of our faith is so vital or fundamental. In the words of the Apostle's Creed, "I believe in Jesus Christ who suffered under Pontius Pilate was crucified, dead and buried." That historical fact is the main theme of the Christian message. "We preach Christ crucified."

That may seem to us Christians old news. But it gains new significance when we find that non-Christians recognise the outstanding importance of Christ's death, by making it their special point of attack. It was so in the earliest days: it is so in the present day. It is what Paul called, "the offence of the Cross" (*Gal. v. 11*). It has not ceased to be an offence.

In the early days Christ crucified was a stumbling block to the Jews. But they never denied the fact that Christ was crucified. What they maintained was that that fact proved that Jesus was not the Christ. It was the final proof that made the idea of Jesus being the Messiah quite untenable. Was it not written in the Law (*Deut. xxi. 23*). "He that is hanged is accursed of God"? How could one who was accursed of God be the Messiah? That was the stumbling block of the Jews. The Christ could not be crucified for that would mean He was accursed of God? Jesus was crucified therefore He could not be the Christ.

On the other sides were the Gnostics to whom the Cross was foolishness. Jesus Christ was the Saviour of the world but not because of what He suffered on the Cross, nay it was not the Saviour of the world Who suffered—as such He could not. "In union with the

mighty Spirit of God," Cerinthus held, "Jesus could not have suffered; by this union He must necessarily have triumphed over His enemies. The very fact of suffering is of itself a proof that the Spirit of God which was united with Him, had been beforehand separated from Him and had gone up again to the Father. To the suffering of the man now left to Himself, Cerinthus apparently no part of the work of redemption. Pseudo-Basilidians held that "when the Jews were minded to crucify Him, He, as a highly-gifted Spirit, knowing how to clothe Himself in every kind of corporeal appearance and to cast every sort of illusion before the eyes of the gross-minded multitude, caused Simon of Cyrene (*Mark: xv.*) to appear to the Jews in *His likeness*; He Himself took the form of this Simon and raised Himself up unencumbered into the invisible world, making a mockery of the deluded Jews. To these men the doctrine of the Cross was foolishness; . . . They despised the martyrs as men who gave up their life merely to confess in the name of a phantom."

It is unnecessary to show how unChristian in spirit such an explanation is—how utterly unlike Jesus to leave someone else to suffer death in His place while He escaped. I put these two opposing theories of Jew and Gnostic, to show how they cancel each other out, and leave us feeling more reassured of our own faith.

To come to modern times. The orthodox Muslim view is that Jesus did not die on the Cross—to them it is inconsistent with the dignity of a prophet that He should be put to such an ignominious death. And they honour Jesus as a great Prophet. They hold that someone else in the likeness of Jesus, either Simon of Cyrene or Judas Iscariot was put to death in His place, and He Himself was taken up alive to heaven, having not tasted of death and is there now alive. But at the end of the nineteenth century there appeared a man, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, who claimed He was the Messiah of the Jews, the Christ of the Christians, the Mahdi of the Muhammadans and the true incarnation of the Hindus. From him has sprung the sect of the Ahmadiyya, bitter opponents of Christianity. He had the acumen to see that the Cross was central to the Christian faith, and one of the great secrets of its power. So he set out to show that Jesus did not die on the Cross. According to his version, Jesus was taken down from the cross in a swoon and was revived by the application of an ointment called Marham-i-Isa. After his recovery he travelled eastwards, and eventually died in Srinagar in Kashmir at the age of 120 and the Mirza claimed to have discovered his tomb. The whole is a fabrication and a colossal piece of effrontery. The ointment which he claimed to know was found on examination 95 per cent vaseline. The tomb in Kashmir was of an old Muhammadan saint Yus Asaf. But you see what he was aiming at. He wanted to prove that Jesus did not die on the cross and so rob the cross of its power, and also to show that Jesus did not rise from the dead, but is now forever dead. His last legacy to His followers was this "Prove to them that Christ,

the Son of Mary, is for ever dead and you will be able to wipe the Christian religion off the face of the earth." One of his famous followers claimed of the Mirza, "He has broken the cross." You can judge for yourselves what confidence can be placed in a story concocted in order to win a position for himself, as he himself said, "The death of Jesus is the door to my claim," *i.e.*, the death of Jesus not on the cross but in the way he would have us believe. But the death of Jesus on the cross followed by His resurrection shuts the door in the Mirza's fantastic claim and so he must find way for his claim to be accepted !

On the other hand, in modern times, we have the Arya Samaj whose founder died only fifty years ago (1883). They are also bitter enemies of the Ahmadiyya, but like them they turn their attack on Christianity upon the death of Jesus on the cross. But it is not the same story they have to tell as the Ahmadis. It would take too long to give their account in full. The gist of it is that Jesus was taken down in a swoon from the cross and while lying in the tomb He revived, lived among the disciples for a few weeks and died. Here is the review in the Expository Times of the book in which this theory was propounded, "Crucifixion, by an Eye-witness (Narayan Swami ; As. 6), is an obvious piece of anti-Christian propaganda which is being circulated among the members of the Arya Samaj. It purports to be a translation of an original document, written by an Essene, which describes the Crucifixion and (alleged) Resurrection of Jesus. No evidence at all of the genuineness of the document is attempted, and to Western eyes it is a patent attempt to revive the famous "swoon theory" which even opponents of Christianity in Western lands no longer venture to urge. The 'translator's' credulity is shewn in his attempt to claim 'Publius Lentulus' as the predecessor of Pilate as governor of Judaea. History gives the appointment from A.D. 15-26 to Valerius Gratus."

For our part we might say let these opponents of Christianity settle among themselves what their alternative is to the fact of Christ's death on the cross and then we will be prepared to reason with them. But as a matter of fact, after all, the criticism which has been aimed at the account of Christ's death and resurrection does but leave us the more convinced that the Gospels' accounts are true for there is no satisfying alternative to offer. The fact remains a fact attested by Roman, Jewish and Christian evidence, "Suffered under Pontius Pilate was crucified, dead and buried."

The Cross is an offence to other religions ; no other religion has anything like it. And if the Cross is as we believe it is, the heart of our religion and the supreme anchor of the soul, it is no wonder that religions which have nothing to offer to compare with it are envious and attack it with bitterness and seek to discredit it. Unless they can succeed in that object, they themselves are doomed.

And the Cross is an offence to the whole temper and spirit of

the age in which we live. Self-assertion, ourselves first, seems to be the watchword in Politics and Society, in the principles which govern national and private life. The fact is that the Cross is an Eternal offence to the unregenerate proud heart of man. For it declares openly his sin, your sin and mine, our helplessness in the face of it and our need of a Saviour to bear our sin for us, and that is humbling. It declares openly the incapacity of the human mind to plumb the mysteries of evil and suffering and sin. It declares Justice and Mercy of God in such a way as to overwhelm completely man's little measure of what Justice is. The Cross is a flat condemnation of selfishness and self-seeking. It declares the love of God in a manner to make our own love unworthy of the name. And if we have never felt in our own heart the offence of the Cross it is certain we cannot have felt its wisdom and power unto salvation.

J. R. DRUMMOND.

Henry Martyn School Extension Courses, Hyderabad.

WE have recently had a visit from the Rev. J. W. Sweetman of the Henry Martyn School of Islamics, Lahore. He came at the invitation of the Methodist District Synod to give a course of lectures to the students at Medak and to advise us about the general policy of Urdu work. In addition, he visited Karim Nagar and gave a series of lectures in Hyderabad which were open to members of other churches.

It was my privilege to be in Medak during Mr. Sweetman's stay there and to accompany him on his visit to Karim Nagar. The main subject of his lectures was "A Presentation of Christian Truth in relation to Muslim Thought" dealt with under such heads as Jesus Christ, Sin, Salvation, Revelation, Doctrine of God, the Trinity in its Redemptive Aspect. To many who listened his line of thought was quite new and original. It is comparatively easy to give students a mass of information about Islam and Moslem beliefs and yet leave them without the very help they need in the understanding and expression of their own faith. At the close of the course in Medak one student remarked, "We have learned more about Christianity than about Islam." Others declared that they would now be able to mingle with Moslems without that feeling of fear they had experienced before.

Some of the most interesting discussions we had were the informal ones at meal times after lectures were over. Everywhere he went Moslems sought him out for private talks. In Karim Nagar no less than sixty gathered on the bungalow verandah. And in Hyderabad St. George's Gymnasium was filled, the majority being Moslems, for his lecture in Urdu on "The Christian Doctrine of God." The

practical suggestions which he made before a District Committee were very sound and far-reaching. We are deeply grateful to Mr. Sweetman for all he did, and trust that the advance we hope to make in our Urdu work in the coming years will prove that his visit has not been in vain.

K. GREENFIELD.

Mussoorie and Landour.

CCOURSES were held at the above centres, the first at Mussoorie during May and the second at Landour from August 2nd to August 27th. The whole staff took part in these two extension courses. The following is a student's report on the latter.

The Community Centre kindly put their hall at the disposal of the lecturers and the twenty to thirty people who took part in the course. On the 11th and 12th at the usual August Community Centre Conference the subject of Islam and Christianity was dealt with by the members of the staff and there were some interesting discussions.

During the course Mr. Bevan Jones, the Principal, spoke on the way of approach to the Moslem in connection with such subjects as the Koran and the Bible, the Life and the Person of Christ. Mr. Subhan spoke on the Faith and Practice of Moslems and on the Shia sect. Mr. Sweetman dealt with the relation of Islam to Judaism and Christianity at the time of Mohammed and the development of Islamic theology after his time. Important points of cleavage between Moslems and Christians were dealt with under such subjects as the death of Christ, the doctrine of revelation and salvation.

Let me give the gist of some of the statements which struck me especially:—On the reproach of the Cross, this; that 'true love does stoop to save and stooping is not degraded.' 'The Ahmadis are rationalists fighting for a community.' 'Christianity, while it may be called a religion is better understood as religion itself.' 'Though the Bible is the work of many authors of different ages and the Koran that of a single author dealing with a very short interval the real unity of the former is greater than that of the latter. "The incarnation of Jesus Christ is not so much our problem as God's solution of our problem.' 'In Islam God is the tremendous autocrat. The power and will of God, to which all his attributes are ultimately reduced, corresponds to the materialists' natural force. It leads to blank agnosticism about the nature of God.'

It is greatly to be hoped that the staff of the Henry Martyn School will be able to hold such very worthwhile courses during the summer months and that more and more missionaries and other evangelistic workers may take advantage of the opportunity thus offered.

J. N. McDOUGALL.

Book Review.

What is this Moslem World, by Charles Watson.

Friendship Press, 150, Fifth Avenue, New York, pp. 207.

Price 1 dollar.

The book, in the words of the author, "is an endeavour to understand the Moslem peoples and their politics-religious civilization" and also "a practical consideration of how Christianity should deal with this gigantic world-problem involving one-seventh of the human race." In chapter one the author proposes an air journey across the Muslim lands to visualize these places and their Muslim populations. A large part of this geographical survey is devoted to N. Africa, while less than half of the chapter is devoted to the rest of the Moslem world. As he makes us face this "far-flung, self-sufficient, for the most part untouched Moslem world," his counsel is not that "of despair nor of presumption but of Christian faith and hope and love."

The author next introduces us to a Moslem's way of living. For this purpose he takes us to the Mosque and shows us how "it is integrated into the life of the people, located close to the busy mart of daily life." Then in words of appreciation he describes the grace and dignity of each custome department the atmosphere of leisure and repose, veil and lattice, hospitality, feasts and festivals and the prevailing sense of God, as far looking "at the side of a Moslem's life that charms and attracts." The author then turns to the study of those features of the Moslem's way of living which excite Christian sympathy. These are the meagreness of his physical life, and the missed privileges of childhood. A long section is devoted to "Woman's rights and wrongs." The wrongs she suffers are too well-known, but one wonders what rights she enjoys in Islam when her condition may be described in words such as, "Man is the absolute master and woman the slave. She is the object of his sensual pleasures, a toy, as it were, with which he plays, whenever and however, he pleases. Knowledge is his, ignorance is hers. The firmament and the light are his, and darkness and the dungeon are hers. His is to command, hers is to obey blindly. His is everything that is, and she is an insignificant part of that everything."

Other "shadows" as the author calls these dark features of the way of the Moslems' living, are illiteracy and the fatalistic conception of life which makes him think that misfortune is an inscrutable decree of God. "When God frowns, what can man do?" It is truly remarked that these "shadows are dark and real." If they can be removed "races and areas can be made a part of the Kingdom of God upon earth. Have we as Christian's faith enough for that?" Chapter three under the title of "the Gripping Power of Islam" describes some of the elements of strength in it. "Islam can be truly described as totalitarian. By a million roots, penetrating every phase of life, all of

them with religious significance, it is able to maintain its hold upon the life of Moslem peoples." The chapter, therefore, is an attempt to answer the question: What is the gripping power of Islam?

An appraisal of Islam is the subject of the next chapter. The author is generous in his estimation of the character of Muhammad, of the Koran as God's revelation and of Islam's formulated beliefs and practices. But even his generosity cannot make him overlook the deficiencies in Muhammad's life as a religious leader, chief of these being social and sexual shortcomings, his appeal to physical force instead of a supreme reliance upon moral force and the fact that the Moslems loyalty to Muhammad binds his life to a past in every detail and blocks progress. Chapter five on "Ferment and Revolution" deals with changes in social, educational, economic, national and religious life, chiefly that of the Moslems of Egypt and Turkey. Chapter six dealing with the subject of Islam's contact with Christendom, gives a historical survey beginning with the rise of Islam down through the centuries to the modern period. Chapter seven gives a rapid review of the work done by the pioneer missionaries such as Henry Martyn, Pfander, Van Deck etc. It next describes some of the present day methods of approach *e.g.*, the printed page, public preaching, the harem (zenana) worker, the doctor, the school, social service, work of oriental churches and the Church. The last chapter is an attempt to answer the questions. What of the future of this Moslem world? What can Christianity do to serve it? In answer to these questions the author makes the following suggestions: a clearer recognition of our resources in God, a generous recognition and use of our resources in man, an adequate appraisal of the difficulties, a clearer definition of the task, a more adequate expression of the unselfish character of Christian missions, a greater display of strategy in the Christian approach, unification of the Christian forces and inspiring vision of the finished task and its significance. Some of these deserve our special attention, but we feel that to these should be added a more adequate and clearer expression of the Christian faith and a sympathetic understanding of Moslem's difficulties. Last, though not least is the need of fuller consecration of our life, remembering that it is God's enterprise and that we are but instruments in His hand.

The book has a glossary of Islamic terms, a reading list based on each chapter of the book, and an index. On the whole, the book provides a study of Islam written in an interesting style. The author throughout is very sympathetic and he endeavours, so far as he can, to see Islam at its best.

JOHN A. SUBHAN.

New Member.

Rev. H. Reinhont,

C.I.G. Mission.

Idgah.

NOTICE.

Any notification of change of address, names of new members or remittance of subscriptions 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. 0d).

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 Honorary Secretary:—

Rev. J. W. Sweetman,
30, Mozang Road.
Lahore.