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News and Notes

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August 1st = 4th Jamadi-uth-thani (6th mo.) 1357 A.H.

The Fakir.

BY REV. E. E. WATSON.

(Concluded from last issue).

IN 1937 we were in touch once more. The Fakir's faith in Christ had strengthened, and we pressed him for a declaration of his faith. He at once asserted his full belief in the divinity and saving blood of Christ, and said that he was preaching the same. We conducted services in his church ourselves, and though worried by certain crudities, and certain strange practices, we regarded it as an opportunity which could not be neglected. Here was a man who believed in Christ, and without any pressure or aid from us was teaching others to worship Him. He had not been baptized. The important question was what steps should be taken in the matter. Should we press or should we leave the matter to work out itself. We had discussed the question of baptism before. He had hesitated. Towards the end of 1937 we again raised the question, and he agreed that after some special instruction he should be baptized the first Sunday in November. The teaching was given and we were amazed to discover just how deep was the old man's understanding of Christ and his teaching. We were further amazed to note that he had set himself the task of learning Greek, and still more amazed to hear him recite the Apostles' Creed in Greek, and then proceed to explain to his ignorant, yet patient congregation what it meant. In accordance with what we believed to be right, we caused him to announce to his disciples his intention to be baptized.

In our church meeting, held on Saturday, 5th November, we decided that our service in Comilla the next morning would be suspended, and that all who desired could join in worship in "Our Lord's Holy Catholic Church," prior to the baptism of the Fakir.

At the same meeting it was agreed that one of the Fakir's disciples, an educated young Muhammedan, should be baptized with him. Both were to be baptized in the tank (small lake) opposite the church building in the Muhammedan village. The atmosphere was tense with expectancy, and not without some apprehension as to what might happen. We had been warned that we had better not come, and that in no circumstances would the baptism take place. Nothing daunted, about thirty of us went to the village next morning, and assembled for worship. It was a clear sunny morning. The air was crisp and our hearts aglow.

The building was packed, and the village echoed and re-echoed the strains of singing. We prayed, and preached. God was very near, and our hearts warmed more and more. The service drew towards the close. The atmosphere was tense. What would happen in a few minutes God alone knew. In a common room across the way a crowd of Mohammedans had assembled. There was bound to be opposition.

Just before the last hymn was sung we listened with bated breath while the two men made their confession of faith. The Fakir's declaration left nothing to be desired. He believed that Jesus was the Son of God, born of the Holy Ghost, through the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life, and was put to death on the Cross. He rose the third day, ascended into heaven, and will come again in judgment. He is both Saviour and Friend to those who trust Him. He believed in God as Father, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. His disciple, more timid and less experienced, was not so full in his statement, but set forth the essentials of a simple Christian belief. It was a great moment, and we gave thanks for the faith of these two men. Reverently we sang the last hymn, pronounced the Benediction and proceeded to the water's edge.

As soon as it was seen that the baptism was now to take place, the Muhammedans who had been waiting in the house nearby, advanced to the steps leading down to the water. Among them were the brother and nephews of the Fakir. He had gone into his room to change his clothes. An attempt was made to shut the door and imprison him inside. This was frustrated by the Fakir himself. The brother then laid hold of him by the wrist, and the rest, surrounded him, and he was plainly told they would not allow the baptism to take place. From that moment on it was their business to prevent me from getting within an arm's length of the old man. We reasoned, plainly pointed out that such interference was against the principles of all real religion. It was all of no avail.

After some half-hour of this reasoning, we prepared to baptize the Fakir's disciple. Here, too, plans, though cowardly, were well laid. First his brother advanced and, standing in front of him, told him plainly not to bring disgrace on the whole family. Nothing daunted, he moved towards the steps. Just as he reached them his seven-year

old son, crying bitterly, was thrown into his arms. It was like a knife to the heart, to hear the father trying to pacify him, and explain to him that he was not going away, he would still be his father. Just as he had quietened him somewhat, his old mother, who had been hidden in the courtyard, came forth with her eyes streaming tears. Taking her son by the hand she led him away. From that moment we did not get near the water again. We stayed among that restless, angry crowd, for another four hours, all the time trying to reason with the leaders and point out what an injustice had been done. We returned home very dejected, and with much obstinate questioning of mind.

We left the scene of a stubborn battle, with the agreement that they should be given a fortnight in which to persuade the Fakir and his disciple to change their minds. If they failed, the two men could be baptized without further protest. Apparently the leaders decreed a council of war as soon as we left. The disciple was plunged into an out-and-out boycott. No man would plough his fields, cut his rice, buy from or sell to him. The church bell was taken down, and the cross and the board bearing the words "Our Lord's Holy Catholic Church" were dislodged. The church doors were shut and locked, and the Fakir told plainly that there was to be no more of this Christian nonsense. With this pressure upon them, both men at last declared that they would not proceed with the baptism.

We have seen and talked to both men several times since this decision. Both declare that their faith in Christ is undimmed, but that for the present any open declaration of their faith is impossible. We have not ceased to pray for them, and at times there rises within us the hope that even yet they will break away and identify themselves plainly and irrevocably with Jesus Christ.

Questions.

Some very important questions, which might be a basis for a study circle, arise out of the foregoing :

- 1.—Was it right, under the circumstances, to press the question of baptism ?
 - 2.—Is it conceivable that, left alone, the Fakir might have influenced great numbers for Christ ?
 - 3.—Was it wise to attempt the baptism in the village or should we have brought the candidates to the Mission Compound ?
 - 4.—How far should we interfere with the practice of bringing gifts to such a man as the Fakir ? What would you do in the matter of people's belief in water touched by him ?
 - 5.—Do you think we should have sought the aid of the law or police in the matter of the church being closed down as it was ?
 - 6.—What steps would you suggest should be taken at the present time ?
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The Challenge of Bombay Muslims to the B.R.C.C.

ONE of the saddest facts about present-day missionary work in Western India is that not one missionary is set apart to work among the nearly four and a half millions of Bombay Presidency Muslims, as reported in the Census of 1931, the exact Muslim figure being 4,456,897. We would like to place the serious claims of these four and a half million Muslims on the conscience of the Bombay Representative Christian Council. A few years ago this Council had an effective committee on Work Among Muslims and the more than two hundred thousand Muslims in the strategic centre of Bombay City alone represent a responsibility which *all the Missions and Churches unitedly should consider*. Our friends of the C.M.S. and S.P.G. began mission work among Bombay Muslims in 1859 and 1862 respectively and there is at present one Indian Minister doing this work whose congregation worships in Bellasis Road, Byculla. But what is urgently needed is that Western India's Churches and Missions should *all unite* in this great task, and we understand that if a certain amount of funds were forthcoming there could be appointed a well qualified European at an early date. This is surely one of those sacred causes which should secure at least one offertory a year from most of our Indian Churches and a small annual grant from each Mission. The amounts need not be large, as many small amounts yield a good sum, and we *must* do our duty to four and a half million Muslims.

—*Dnyanodaya.*

(What is here said about Bombay can be said of practically every big city in India. *Ed. N. and N.*)

The Rear East.

The Arabic paper *Beirut* publishes an article which severely criticizes the growth of the drink traffic in the Lebanon. The internal tax imposed on intoxicants is to be increased by 25 per cent. The writer demands a reduction in the number of wine shops which are spreading into every street, and the imposition of a deterrent tax on imported foreign whisky, champagne and vermouth. Moslem sensibilities are especially wounded by seeing 'young women sitting at cabaret tables.....in the night clubs in a disgraceful condition for which the head bows in shame!'

Al Insha (Damascus) says that king Ibn Saud has issued orders touching foreigners who have embraced Islam, and desire to enter the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. They must present to the religious authorities in Jedda certificates attested by those before whom they embraced Islam, such as Moslem Ulama or other high authorities in Islam. Those not furnished with such certificates **must**

stay in Jedda for a period of fifteen days, and after proper examination the Sharia court may issue to them certificates declaring their sincere adoption of the Islamic religion.

Beirut publishes an article by Amin Said which discusses the suggested revival of the Caliphate in the person of His Majesty King Farouk. The writer believes the idea does not command the adhesion of high religious authorities. The conclusion he arrives at is that the times have changed, and if and when the Caliphate is revived its religious leadership would not carry with it authority over Moslems as a whole. The advocates of a revived Caliphate are, therefore, urged rather to strive for a real leadership of the Arabic-speaking countries contiguous to Egypt under King Farouk by binding the Arabic-speaking countries together in a true unity. Such a union would bring 60,000,000 souls under the leadership of the King and place Egypt in the front rank of the nations.

— *World Dominion Press.*

“Woe unto you Oh Palestine! Our calamity comes from the English, the Jews and ourselves! The calamity from ourselves is politics and our desire of politics. God curse it manifold! Everything has been spoiled by it, confidence and interests: it has made people look upon everything as possible of being offered for sale, the homeland is for sale, religion is for sale, honour is for sale, everything becomes cheap compared with personal interest and love of self.”

Al-Jamia-al-Islamiya.

BAHRAIN.

WHILE we are travelling over the featureless coast line from Kuwait to Bahrain let us read parts of one of the first reports of work in Bahrain Station:

“On May 7th the Kadhi of the Island called me to his house and forbade me selling Scriptures from the shop, of which he was the agent. I declined to comply with his request except on a written command from the ruling Sheikh of the Island, but I offered to vacate the shop. On Saturday, May 13th there was trouble at the shop. The following day word came to us from the Kadhi to come to his house. Because it was the Sabbath we promised to come the following day, but soon after a crowd of native police came to bring us by force. After leaving the Kadhi I continued to sell books and patients continued to come for medicines. On Wednesday the Ruler of the Island sent word requesting me to leave on the next steamer”.

(S. M. Zwemer, *Neglected Arabia*, April-June, 1893).

Well, here we are swooping down upon one of the finest natural landing grounds in the east, and soon are in the midst of a group of Mission buildings, two hospitals, two residences, and a chapel, and here are the reports:

Mr. Van Peurseem on evangelistic work among the men :

" In addition to our usual three services on Sunday, a service has been started at the oil camp, which the evangelistic missionary has been asked by the manager to conduct. This service is held in the theatre and is attended by about ten per cent of the employees. It has been a joy to conduct such a service for men and women who other-wise have so little of the religious life. Some of their collections have been devoted to work in the Mission.

"Our midweek prayer service has been well attended. On Wednesday, three days before Christmas, holy communion was celebrated. At this Lord's Supper thirty-nine persons partook, the largest number on record so far. The spirit of fellowship was clearly felt even though some months previous serious divisions had arisen among our Indian brethren. The communion, in fact, proved to be a suitable preparation for the Christmas season.

"Weekly visits have been made to the villages. Had gets a visit weekly from a doctor and an evangelist. There have been as many as 100 patients and inquiring friends to meet us. These visits are very worth while, for it is from this town, through these visits, that are converts have come. All the other villages on the island receive a visit in their turn.

"The Book Shop has been open six days a week. An average of thirty-four men have entered the shop daily. The daily papers have been the great attraction and also English school books. The sale of Gospels has been limited, but discussions about the Gospel have been many."

Neglected Arabia, 1938.

New Book on Sufism.

We are glad to be able to inform our readers that *Sufism, its Saints and Shrines* by Rev. J. A. Subhan of the Henry Martyn School is now in print. It can be had from the publishers, Lucknow publishing House, Hazrat Ganj, Lucknow, U.P. India. We hope to have a *Review* of this book in our September number. The price is Rs. 4, probably not inclusive of postage, which is cheap for a book of four hundred pages.

Friendly Discussion.

WE have received a small booklet from Rev. Alfred Nielsen of Jerusalem of some fifty-eight pages, the fore-runner of a series of such books in Arabic on certain matters which have been the subjects of discussion between Mr. Nielsen and some Muslim Sheikhs. The series is called *Aikar Mu'minin li Haga' iq ud Din* and the subject of the present booklet is, "Why do I follow my own religion and not another?"

It is intended that four other subjects should be published, and in all probability they will be "Christ's Death and Resurrection" "Does the New Testament speak of a prophet after Christ?" "The meaning of Inspiration."

Mr. Nielsen writes, "It is my conviction that such a discussion of religious subjects between Christians and Moslems is worth while and should be of interest both to Christians and Moslems, so that Christians may know what thoughts and arguments Moslems are having and Moslems know what are really the contents of the New Testament."

Any one interested should write to Mr. Nielsen at Upper Bakaa, Jerusalem.

Notice.

The Editor will be leaving Landour on September 15th and sailing for England on October 1st. So far no arrangements have been made for the carrying on of the editorship of *News and Notes* but notice will be given of this in the September number. Will those who wish to communicate with the present Editor please note that his address will be :

4, Kingsmead Close
Selly Oak,
Birmingham, England.

Prayer and Praise.

O God, who hast made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the whole earth, and didst send Thy blessed Son, Jesus Christ, to preach to them that are afar off, and to them that are nigh, grant that all the peoples of the world may feel after Thee and find Thee; and hasten O Lord, the fulfilment of Thy promise, to pour out Thy Spirit upon all flesh; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty God, without whose blessing no work can prosper, let Thy favour rest upon all ministers of Thy Word, upon all evangelists, those who give instruction in our most holy faith, every person who is seeking to restore the lost and set the captives free; strengthening their hearts that they may not weary in well-doing, and granting unto them the joy of harvest; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

LET US PRAY for the reading-room in Karimnagar, and other work which is being initiated in Hyderabad.

LET US PRAY for the projected conference of workers among Muslims to be held in Lucknow before Tambaram.

