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## News and Notes

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### A visit to the Shrine of Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti at Ajmer.

THE shrine of Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti in Ajmer is the most famous of all the Muslim shrines in India. A couple of visits to this shrine is regarded by many Muslims as equal in merit to the performance of a pilgrimage to Mecca. A peculiar feature relating to the main part of this shrine, however, is that *no Christian is allowed to enter it*. A Christian can go about within the precinct and may even visit the mosque, but he must not desecrate by his presence the domed structure containing the tomb of the saint!

The writer, a Christian minister, happened to be in Ajmer Sharif—holy Ajmer, as the Muslims call it—last winter. A missionary friend kindly took me to Dargah Sharif—the royal court of Khwaja Sahib—as it is popularly called. Bare-footed we entered through the lofty gate over which were suspended written instructions especially for women of ill fame, to be careful to enter modestly attired. These latter pay their visit to the shrine not so much to seek forgiveness of their sins, nor out of a desire to seek some such blessing as will reform their character, nor with a desire to obtain some respectable means of earning their livelihood through the intercession of the saint, but with base and unworthy motives. In fact on the occasion of the *urs*, i.e., the annual celebration of the commemoration of the saint's death, when thousands gather from different parts of India to pay their homage or seek some temporal or spiritual blessing from him, the place is infested with a large crowd of these women, who give open performances of their *nautch* within the precincts; it is said, in honour of the saint!

Inside the court, not far from the gate, we saw two cauldrons on two sides of the entrance; they were so huge and so high that in

order to have a peep inside we had to climb the steps which led up to their mouths. In these, on the occasion of the *urs*, or whenever a rich visitor bears the expenses (which amount to Rs. 1,000) rice mixed with other ingredients such as dry fruit, is cooked and distributed and in some cases, sold. The stuff is regarded as a thing of great value, and there is a great rush on the part of rich and poor alike to get even a little bit of it.

The cooked stuff is served direct from the cauldron and, for such a strange feast, a curious method is employed in serving it. When the rice is finally cooked and ready, in order to serve it direct from the cauldron men, having first covered themselves with sacks, jump right inside the cauldron and, taking out the stuff, hand it over to the distributors. In the midst of this process they actually faint, and then are pulled out from the cauldron and laid in a row like so many dead bodies!

So great is the reverence shown for this rice that not a bit of it is allowed to go waste—even the ground, whereon it keeps dripping in the process of distribution, is licked by the devotees! We did not, of course, witness all these things but a guardian of the shrine, (and there are many) who accosted us at the main entrance and volunteered himself to act as a guide, gave us a vivid picture of it all.

We passed the *madarasa*—the school for the study of the Quran, built and supported by the Nizam of Hyderabad, and the tombs of the wives of the saint, not at all magnificent when compared with other structures connected with the shrine itself. We also saw the beautiful mosque built by the Emperor Akbar, and the spacious porch facing the main shrine, and the “Paradise Door”, leading to the tomb of the saint; but this remains closed except once during the *urs*, when entrance through it entitles the devotee admission into heaven on the day of judgment without going through the ordeal of “account” and “balance”!

At last we arrived at the entrance to the main shrine, and another guide (a guardian of the tomb, perhaps he was the chief guardian) came to receive us. The one who had been our guide so far whispered something to him, and my missionary friend, an American, was requested to remain outside, while I was asked to follow the new guide.

Inside the domed building several Muslims were performing the rite of circumambulation round the tomb (as the pilgrims do in Mecca round the Ka'ba), which was surrounded by railings with an entrance to the tomb itself. The presence there of Hindus as devotees was a matter for surprise since the one aim of the Khwaja was to destroy Hinduism and wipe out idolatry from India. My guide, to my astonishment, now beckoned me to follow him *through the entrance leading to the tomb itself*. It was quite evident that the Muslims in general were themselves kept outside the railings, close approach to the tomb being a privilege allowed only to a few favoured persons.

It was something extraordinary, therefore, for a Christian to be asked to enter within the railing, when as a rule, no Christian is permitted to stand just outside of it!

As I was inspecting the tomb at close quarters, my guide casually remarked that of course I was not a Hindu, to which I quietly replied "No, I am a Christian." My remark was to him like a bolt from the blue! Hastily he retraced his steps and requested me to get outside the railing as quickly as possible. Evidently my guide had been impressed with the knowledge that I had displayed regarding the shrine, and so never suspected me to be a non-Muslim. He and the others, however, were polite enough to present us each with a garland. I reflected how greatly such garlands from the shrine of Khwaja Sahib would be treasured by my Muslim friends in Calcutta, which place I was next to visit, and so I packed them up and took them with me, to give away. Muslim friends of mine in Calcutta received these flowers, as I had expected, with deepest emotion. They kissed them and placed them on their eyes and forehead. One of them handed out the dry petals to his children as something most precious, and asked them to eat them up!\*

J. A. SUBHAN.

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\* A fuller history of the Khwaja Sahib, with a description of the Dargah and *urs* will be found in *Sufism*, by Mr. Subhan; published by the Lucknow Publishing House, Hazratganj, Lucknow; price Rs. 4. *Ed.*

## **Proposals for the Rurture of Muslim Inquirers and Converts.**

**T**HE Committee appointed by the Bengal Christian Council in the interests of work among Muslims in that province has recently been occupied with an inquiry into the methods of work adopted by various Churches and Missions among Muslims.

The replies received have indicated that there are inquirers almost everywhere. Wherever possible these are made to support themselves from the beginning. In most cases no financial help is given. Most inquirers not helped, however, are lost—inquirers helped by regular teaching and shelter and finance, wisely administered, have proved more satisfactory than unsatisfactory. Most places have no course of Instruction for Inquirers while some Missions have no arrangement at all for giving either casual or permanent shelter to them. Further, it has been revealed that nearly all organisations have no provision in their estimates for rendering financial help to those who fall into difficulties because of their determination to follow Christ. Some Churches and Missions have a joint committee to look after inquirers.

## EXPERIMENTAL POLICY.

At this stage the Committee feels justified in suggesting to Churches and Missions the following policy, which should be regarded as experimental, for the nurture of Muslim inquirers.

1. That the aim be to win and keep the inquirer in his own environment *i.e.*, by keeping him in his own home, village or district. This also applies to his family, if any.

2. That regular visitation be made and a systematic course of instruction followed. (N.B. A Course of Instruction is now being prepared).

3. That to facilitate instruction sincere inquirers be given hospitality for short periods (*e.g.*, over week-ends or for several consecutive days). Wherever possible such hospitality should be arranged by the local Church. If the need be felt the Church may appoint a Committee for dealing with inquirers.

4. That provision for shelter of a simple nature be made in each station for such local inquirers as cannot stay in their own home owing to presecution, and that the financial help involved be considered a legitimate charge on Church and Mission Funds. The Committee urges the creation of a special fund for this purpose.

5. That the inquirer be kept in touch with his relatives and every attempt made to make him self-supporting in his locality with a view to establishing the local Church, and that the financial help involved in such an effort be considered a legitimate charge on Church and Mission Funds.

6. That in all cases baptism and Church Membership be not hurried and great care and time given to teaching inquirers the Truths of Christianity, to developing in them a personal Christian faith and a Christian Devotional life.

7. That while such provision for inquirers is regarded as being of an experimental nature, no inquirer be baptised until the Church feels reasonably sure that he is firmly established in the Christian Faith.

## SUPPLEMENTARY REMARKS.

1. It is recognised that while the policy is not an ideal one from the theoretical point of view of what ought to be, it does however grapple with the realities of our everyday work.

2. Re. Financial Help: It is realised that where there is a large group it is impossible to give such help, but where there is no community at all, it is felt that some help in the first stages is essential when, because of opposition, the Muslim inquirer if he persists in his determination to become a Christian is unable to get work.

When an inquirer is economically independent and has a home and land it is not necessary to give financial help. Most of our inquirers however are youths who have no land or any other such resources.

3. The citing of one case in which the above policy was followed may help. In Chandpur several youths four or five years ago were regular in attending Church and Bible classes. As a consequence they were driven out of their homes. They were then given a place to stay at—a hostel on the Mission Compound. They did their own cooking and any other odd jobs which required doing, such as gardening, painting etc. They attended daily Bible Class, took notes on the subjects discussed and wrote answers to questions (writing is considered essential). Promising ones were allowed to read at school. Two were given some training as a watch maker and compounder respectively. Another was helped in such a way that he was able to keep land in his own village. The result to-day is that they have been baptised. Three of them are quickly becoming independent, two in their own village, while the others are becoming independent Christians near their own villages and visit their relatives from time to time. They were given ten to twelve pice daily for food and only when necessary were they enabled to get clothes. It has meant a great deal of time, anxiety and sorrow because of the failure which occurred from time to time, but the comment now is that whereas before no progress was being made, under this new policy some definite advance has been possible. The Church and Mission have now a joint committee to help such inquirers. Most of the Mission's funds for this purpose are administered by this Committee. If the principal had been followed of baptising only those who are economically independent, these youths probably would have gone back to Islam, which is just what so often happened before the above suggested policy was followed.

4. It is said that through fear of what may happen we are in danger of attempting nothing. It is the Committee's hope that this idea will not prevent you from taking some action along the lines suggested above.

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While the above is published here by way of information we shall welcome any helpful comments and suggestions. *Ed.*

### Notes.

*Muslim Dissolution of Marriage Bill.*—(see May and July issues). A retired woman missionary writes concerning Quest. 5:— "I think it would be *dishonest* to colour Christianity with Muhammadanism (*e.g.*, fasting in the month of Ramadan)—to *pretend* to be a Muslim is as bad as to pretend to be a Christian."

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*Quran Sales Bill.*—A member of the U.P. Legislative Council (India), Md. Faiyaz Khan, proposes to introduce a Bill next session to prohibit non-Muslims (presumably Hindus) from printing, publishing and

selling the Quran. The penalty proposed is a fine of Rs. 1,000, or imprisonment up to one year.

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*Speeding up the Near East.*—"Two factors will speed up events in the Near East . . . (1) OIL. The whole peninsula of Arabia is now surrounded by a belt of oil concessions. When the Arabs get to watching pressure gauges instead of the inscrutable will of Allah, fatalism will give place to enterprise. I for one am sure the old Islam cannot float on a sea of oil. (2) Forty-six aeroplanes a week now thunder through Basrah, connecting Europe with the Far East. Arabs by the thousands listen to broadcasts in Arabic every day, and world events are on the lips of even the women in the harims."—Rev. John Van Ess.

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*Plea for Peace in Lucknow.*—(see June issue) Fourteen members of the Panjab Legislative Assembly including the well-known lady, Begam Shah Nawaz, issued over their signatures a statement concerning The Shia-Sunni dispute in Lucknow. While deprecating this "fratricidal strife," which is "rendering the greatest disservice to Islam in India," they pleaded: "For the sake of Islam give up the innovations of *Madhe—Sahaba* and *Tabarra* as recently introduced in Lucknow and like true Muslims restore peace to that unfortunate city and other places where the contagion has spread."

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*'Christianity Explained to Muslims.'* A correspondent writes: "I am using it at the monthly devotional meeting which I have with the 25 workers in this district. At one meeting I dictate a number of the objections raised by Muhammadans, and during the month the workers write down their own answers, and at the next meeting we discuss these answers and I give the answers that I have derived from this book. We find this interesting and profitable. About 30% of the population here is Muhammadan." (W. India).

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## Review

“THE Qur'an," translated with a critical rearrangement of the Surahs, by Richard Bell, D.D. T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh—Two volumes, 698 pages, price 25sh.

Dr. Bell, lecturer in Arabic at Edinburgh University and author of *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment*, here presents the results of a critical study of the Qur'an at which he has been working for the past twelve years. It is a task for the expert with a very competent knowledge of the original Arabic and even then a most difficult task, inasmuch as "there is as yet no critical edition of the text available."

The main quest of the author (who evidently believes that Muhammad himself wrote the Qur'an) has been "to understand the deliverances of Muhammad afresh as far as possible in their historical setting, and therefore to get behind the traditional interpretation." He pays tribute to the "great care" with which the redactors of the Qur'an must have done their work, and says that only rarely has he adopted emendations suggested by

other scholars in the field, because in many cases "study of the passage has shown that the text is to be accepted as it stands and the difficulty removed by other methods."

It is not possible in a brief review to indicate precisely the scheme used by Dr. Bell in presenting the results of his study in this English translation (the Arabic text does not appear), but it grows out of his attempt to "unravel the composition of the separate Surahs." He retains these in their usual order, only rearranging their contents wherever it seemed necessary to remove confusion, such as is normally caused in ancient manuscripts through corrections, interlinear additions, marginal notes, etc. While following Fluegel's numbering of the verses, he has sometimes changed the verse divisions "in accordance with older divisions shown by the occurrence of internal rhymes within the present verses."

The peculiar setting of the printing is meant to indicate his rearrangements. Thus we often have two, and occasionally three columns to the page—that on the left is taken to be the earlier form of the verse, that on the right a later substitution for it. Each Surah opens with an explanatory synopsis of the contents and there are headings to sub-divisions, etc., nevertheless we share the author's regret that, owing to cost of printing, from his vast accumulation of notes the barest minimum appear here as foot-notes.

It is interesting to note that the author rejects the notion, advanced by some, that a probable confusion between *parakletos* and *periklutos* (at the back of the name, *Ahmad*, in surah 61 ver. 6) could have originated with Muhammad himself. But it is astonishing to find that Professor Bell passed the proofs at this place in the manner now printed, viz: *periklutos* (not *parakletos*) is given as "Comforter" (John xiv, 16) while *perikletos*, (not *periklutos*) is printed as the form yielding "celebrated."

This mistake is likely to cause embarrassment as well as confusion !

L. B. J.

(As we go to press a letter from Professor Bell himself has come to hand, in which he expresses his distress of mind that this confusion of the terms should have escaped his notice and that of others in the proof-reading).

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*Islam for Beginners.* We are glad to see that Dr. Titus' primer of this name has been translated into Telugu by Miss Kate Greenfield, Pubd. C.L.S. Madras, 50 pages. 4 annas.

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### FOR PRAISE AND PRAYER.

PRAISE for news at intervals of yet more inquirers and converts, and prayer that those dealing with them may be given all needed patience, wisdom sympathy and love.

PRAISE for encouraging attendance at the classes of instruction at the Henry Martyn School, and prayer that God's blessing may continue to rest upon all the work of the School.

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## NEW MEMBERS.

Rev. J. H. Davey,  
Rev. E. Sadiq,

I.P. Mission  
Bishop's Coll.

Cambay.  
Calcutta.

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 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. 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 Honorary Secretary:—

Rev. L. Bevan Jones,  
Lal Tiba,  
Landour, Mussoorie,  
N. India.

