

# Missionaries to Muslims League

News and Notes.

Series VI, No. 2.

June, 1917.

## “NAFS” AND “THE FLESH”

Recently a Muslim gentleman opened up his mind to us in the following striking statement. He said, “My greatest enemy is my *Nafs*. Many Muslims if they revealed their inmost thoughts would say the same thing. I despair of ever overcoming. It matters not how careful I am in the performance of the five religious duties of Islām my *Nafs* is not brought into subjection.” The speaker, like so many Muslims in Bengal to-day, had come under the influence of the Pirs and their crude form of Sūfism, hence the use of *Nafs* in a sense which gave us an opening to tell of Paul’s great truth of the co-existence and mutual hostility of the “flesh” and the “spirit.”

*Nafs* is used in various senses in the Qur’ān. It may mean soul or self or spirit, man or person or life, but to-day the tendency in Muslim thought is to use it very definitely for the evil self.

Professor Macdonald says, “By a curious accident, the word in Arabic which literally should mean ‘soul’ has come to be the nearest equivalent for our word ‘flesh’ in the theological sense. This word is *Nafs*. Etymologically it is closely connected with the idea of ‘breath,’ and is the same as the Hebrew *nephesh*, frequently translated in our Bible versions ‘soul,’ and sometimes ‘breath,’ ‘life,’ ‘appetite.’ The last is primary, for the essential idea of the word is life on the side of its passions and appetites—it is, in a word, the appetitive soul. Of the many meanings, then, which *nafs* can have, al-Ghazālī says that two are our purpose. It is used to express the idea which combines the force of anger and fleshly appetite in man. The Arabic word for fleshly appetite (*shahwa*) can be used in either a good or a bad sense. It is ‘truthful’ (*sādiqa*) when it indicates a physical need which must be met if the body is to be sound, and ‘lying’ (*Kādhibas* when that is not the case). It is used of desire of food, etc., and of sexual appetite. This usage is the prevailing one among Sūfis, for they mean by the *nafs* that which combines in man his blameworthy qualities, and they say that man must fight against the *nafs* and break it. In this way the prophet used it when he said, ‘thy *nafs* . . . . is thy worst enemy.’ Here, of course, we have exactly our idea of ‘the flesh.’ And ascetics, as Sūfis are generally, would naturally describe all physical appetites as movements of the flesh, and regard as a religious duty their suppression to the limit of possibility. The second usage is . . . the soul of a man.” (*The Religious Attitude and Life in Islām.*)

We all know how Christians in all ages have been accustomed to represent moral struggle as a conflict with real personal enemies or

demons, but the Sūfis go further and teach the materiality of *nafs*. Professor Nicholson writes, "Muhammad-ibn-Ulyan, an eminent Sūfi, relates that one day something like a young fox came forth from his throat, and God caused him to know that it was his *nafs*. He trod on it, but it grew bigger at every kick that he gave it. He said, 'Other things are destroyed by pain and blows: why dost thou increase?' 'Because I was created perverse,' it replied, 'what is pain to other things is pleasure to me, and their pleasure is my pain!' The *nafs* of Hallāj was seen running behind him in the shape of a dog; and other cases are recorded in which it appeared as a snake or a mouse"—(*The Mystics of Islām*).

Methods of mortification, meditation, faith and *dhikr* are used to bring *nafs* into subjection, but the New Testament says, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" and "In me [that is, in my flesh] dwelleth no good thing," and "They that are in the flesh cannot please God."

While there is certainly a point of contact in the Muhammadan idea, there is a vast difference between it and Paul's idea. Both agree that the better self through sin had been suppressed and vanquished by the lower self, but in the Muslim remedy of effort by the deeds of obedience to the law all is hopeless. No one knew this better than the Apostle. With the finest legal prescriptions, the captivity of sin remained. Even for the regenerate soul there is the conflict of two opposite principles—the flesh and the spirit, but "the law of the mind," renewed by grace, overcomes "the law of sin in the members," for "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made us free from the law of sin and death."

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## SHALL WE USE THE TITLE "ISA NABI?"

We recently received a private letter from a member of the League expressing "surprise" at our ascription of the title "Nabi" to our Lord. In the judgment of the writer of that letter the use of the terms "Isa Nabi" either in books or in oral addresses to Muslims is a mistake calculated to lower the dignity of our Lord and destroy His unique position amongst men. The matter is of sufficient importance to justify the quotation of our friend's letter, in the hope that some of our senior workers will favour us with their views on the whole question.

The letter is as follows:—

"One detail I want to criticise—the use of the title 'Isa Nabi.' I confess to much surprise that the title is used at all. Personally I avoid the use of it studiously except for uses of argument. Does it not put Christ in a class, and yield much to the Muslim mind that we are constantly trying to refuse? The title is of course literally and intentionally 'Jesus the Prophet.' Rightly or wrongly, this is not good enough for me. If I deliberately use it in preaching and then claim deity for Christ I am ordered back to explain myself. I hold very strongly that 'Hazrat' or 'Isa Masih' should be our exclusive titles for Christ. Anything that puts Him *in a class* is fatal to the force of our message. I would like to know your views on the matter."

Personally we do not share the fears of the writer of this vigorous letter. We must, it seems to us, insist upon the dual nature of Christ, and in doing so acknowledge His perfect humanity no less than His essential divinity. If the Lord Christ became, in the 'incarnation, in any real sense the representative of humanity, and in that representative capacity was "made sin for us," we cannot afford to belittle the great truth of His perfect humanity. Dr. Hort, in his *Dissertations*, has some wise words regarding this subject. He says:—"The minimizing of the meaning of His manhood is (among other things) largely accountable for the development of an exaggerated devotion to His mother and the saints. In proportion as the real human experiences, sufferings and limitations of Christ during the period of His humiliation are forgotten and ignored, in that proportion men will go to seek human sympathy from on high in some other quasi-deified being. We must recover the strength which the Christian creed is meant to derive from a Christ made in all points like unto His brethren, apart from sin."

We believe that sometimes an easier approach can be gained to the Muslim heart through an emphasis which is laid upon the doctrine of the human nature of our Blessed Lord. He was foretold as Prophet, Priest, and King, and by keeping in the background the first of these Messianic titles we divorce him from some of the grandest prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures.

There are few subjects, again, which appeal more to a Muslim hearer than that of the present high-priestly work of our risen Lord at the right hand of the Father; and yet one of the grandest passages of the Scriptures dealing with this great truth is that in which the one Mediator between God and man is declared to be "the *man* Christ Jesus." Indeed, in another place, one of the grounds upon which we are exhorted to draw near with boldness to the throne of grace, is the very fact that "We have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

A study of the Gospel message, as preached by the Apostles in the early days of the Pentecostal Church, will show that it was upon the human side of our Lord's character and work that the greatest emphasis was laid. He was the "Prophet like unto their brethren" who had been foretold; and it was as God's "Servant" that Peter boldly described the Christ whom his hearers had slain. Yet that Servant was the "Prince of Life" through Whom there was to come the healing of the nations!

It cannot be wrong, therefore, or even unwise, to speak of our Lord as the "Prophet Jesus." Rather may not the great truth of His Prophethood be made a stepping-stone to the apprehension of His Divinity? It is to the great Prophet, foretold by Moses, that men are bidden to hearken, and the threat of divine vengeance held out to all who will not hearken may well deter those who have come to recognise the Lord Jesus Christ as God's chosen Messenger, from denying His own claims to union with the Father.

Curiously enough the correspondent referred to accepts the non-scriptural title "Isa" without demur, but there are not a few missionaries who think that Christian workers would be well advised to keep to the Biblical "*Iesous*" and its equivalents in Arabic, Urdu, Bengali and other languages.

W. GOLDSACK.

**Editor's Note:** *We should be glad to publish brief communications from members upon the general question of the use of the term "Isa Nabi."*

## "WAKING A SLEEPING LION"

This Indian proverb aptly describes the desperate efforts of the Mussulmani-Bengali newspaper, *The Muhammadi*. Every week it storms at Muhammadan society, so full of illiteracy, indifference and irreligion, and fumes over the inroads of Christian teaching and influence.

In its issue of April 20th it has an article, a column long, entitled "The Christian Missionaries' Ability to Work." We cull the following:—

"Bands of numerous European and Bengali missionaries have been camping among the ignorant villagers in the districts of Jessore and Khulna (Bengal), and trying to convert them to the Christian Faith. Failing by argument, they have used singing, music, bioscope, free medicine and treatment, and we hear that they have even lent money at the rate of six per cent. In fact, hundreds of preachers and an abundant supply of money have been used in this campaign to bring whole villages *en masse* into the Christian Faith. The strength of the poor Islám Mission in comparison was pitiful; it was like a drop of dew in the ocean. But although so weak to stay the tremendous stream, yet, by the help of Allah, the servants of truth were able to overcome.

"But there was a calamity! In this part a famous Pir, well known for years for his cunning tricks—a usurer and son of a pig, one born to sin and not to prayer—suddenly, not knowing what he did, went off with his disciples to the Christian Faith. They were baptized with Jordan water and obtained new spiritual life by the Holy Spirit. [What an admission!—Ed.].

"As a result the zeal and labours of the Christians in these districts have increased a hundred fold, and the Pir's village is now a centre of missionary operations.

"How long the cowardly Muhammadans had been indifferent to this movement it is hard to say. The secretary of the Islám Mission visited the place and cleansed away the poisonous atmosphere and exposed the worthlessness of the Christian religion. When he went there he found crowds had flocked to the Pir's village to prepare themselves for becoming Christians, but through his efforts the majority were saved to Islám. But it was impossible that the secretary should tour all those parts. It was impossible, too, to keep a large band of Muslim preachers there, because of the expense.

“Beloved readers! Everywhere in Bengal we see this state of things! There is but one remedy—support the Islám Mission! If we can engage a big band of worthy preachers then the stream of the missionaries’ oppression will easily be stemmed. We can say with confidence that if the Islám Mission could collect one thousandth part of that collected by Christian missions we could paint the picture of coming days an absolutely different colour, because the power of truth is with us.”

After abusing the missionaries, the article ends:—“From different parts of Bengal we hear of this kind of heart-rending news. Every year crowds of people are becoming Christian. Through lack of religion and discipline our community is being wrecked. Drop the political agitation and attempt something to meet the greater needs of our society. Try by all means to prevent this drift away from Islám, or we are ruined.”

## NOTES

*“God’s greatness flows around our incompleteness: Round our restlessness, His rest.”*

**Muhammadans eager to hear.**—The Rev. J. Pengwern Jones, of S. Sylhet, writes, “Just now I have two Muhammadan converts here, one that I baptised two years ago, and he is the best worker I have ever had. He knows Arabic well and Persian and Urdu and Tamil and English, and has learnt Bengali. He is from Ootacamund. The other man is a student recently baptised in Sylhet, and has come here to have a talk with Qadir Badshah. I hear from Sylhet that there is quite a movement among Muhammadans there. We had a grand meeting in the open air last evening. Badshah was speaking with great power on Jesus as the only Saviour from sin. There were many Muhammadans, and Badshah stated with tremendous earnestness how that he was in their position some three years back—a *Muhammadan*, and did not know the love of Christ. ‘Now,’ he said, ‘I know Him, and what a change He has made in my life.’ All listened intently, and we sold many *Injils* afterwards.”

The Rev. J. Lampard writes, “There is a large Muhammadan population in Godhra, but we have no workers here really qualified to *do much among them*. Our efforts at present are confined to the sale of Gospels and distribution of tracts, in which there seems to be more response of late on the part of our Muhammadan friends than I have hitherto known. We also get a fair sprinkling of Muhammadan listeners in our street preaching.”

From all sides we hear of the Muslim’s eager desire to hear the Word. We have a Bible class, mostly Muhammadans. The crying need is for workers who will give themselves up to the work of wooing the Muslims who are now, more than ever, inclined to believe that there is a Heart in the Universe. The opportunity is truly great!

**Turkey and America.**—Since our last issue Turkey has broken with America. For years Americans have been received with unusual good favour by the Turks, for they knew that the United States had no desire for a political foothold in their territory. They were given many concessions, and property worth quite eight million sterling had been built up in the Ottoman dominions by philanthropic agencies. Missionaries and non-missionaries have developed there an educational and medical work unsurpassed in the history of philanthropic effort in the East—a work which has had far-reaching effect on millions of people.

Our concern is for the groups of Christians from the Armenian and Syrian communities who have linked up with the Reformed Churches and, therefore, during the war, have been receiving the safe protection of the American flag, and for the hundreds of orphanages and industrial homes full of refugees from past massacres. God help them! The songs of all the Christians in that part have always been associated with past fears. Their meaning will be doubly significant now. Here is one of them—

“Why art thou sleeping, my wife, my wife?  
 Awake, for the Turks are seeking thy life;  
 I hear they are robbing the young and the old,  
 Turning them out in this terrible cold,  
 Tempting young brides to be faithless and bold,  
 Traitors to Christ whom we love and uphold,  
 Awake, my wife, awake.”

**New Days for Baghdad.**—We recall a letter written a few years back by a Muslim Shaikh of Baghdad. It had the arrogant title, “A Last Word to Europe.” It stated the attitude of Islām to Christianity as follows:—

“Christian peoples, that hour to listen to us has come. Islām’s hatred of Europe is irremediable. After centuries of efforts to understand each other, we have come to this conclusion: We have a greater horror of you now than at any other epoch of our history. Understand then, you clever men of Europe, a Christian, whatever may be his position, because of the one fact that he is a Christian, appears to us a blinded creature, who has completely lost the dignity of mankind.”

Yet when the British troops entered the ancient city of the Khalifas, the people welcomed them as saviours, sure that a new reign of justice and incorruptibility would now begin. Is it not the same everywhere—in India and in Egypt? Paradox though it is, though Christianity to an orthodox Muhammadan is the essence of Satanic invention, yet the adaptation of Christian principles in the politics of the land in which he dwells is always desired. Ask any Hadji how the government of the Hedjaz—the holy land of Islām—compares with the Indian Government, and he waxes eloquent against the iniquities of Mecca and Madina.

**That Black Blot.**—There are still certain Christians who regard Islām as being a stepping-stone to Christianity. The Rev. G. K. Simon, a missionary in Sumatra, has no such idea. Writing of the influence of Islām on the women of Sumatra, he gives good proof that

it is fallacious. The black blot on Islám is undoubtedly the insufferable social condition. He says:—

“Through the advent of Islám the social position of women was distinctly degraded. According to the old law of the Bataks, divorce was subject to penalty and extremely difficult. Cannibals though they were, they regarded matrimony as in principle a sacred institution. Adultery was punished with death; in fact the adulterer was eaten; this being the most disgraceful form of punishment according to Batak law. In contrast to this the Muhammadan Batak can divorce his wife when he pleases. . . . It is especially the religious leaders (the *Hadjis*, that is, pilgrims to Mecca, and the *Muallims*, that is, teachers) who are given to change their wives. Nor do they thereby suffer in authority and esteem. *It may be said that the Muhammadan woman has been degraded socially through the Islámic conception of marriage in the same degree as the Christian woman in Sumatra has been raised by the sanctity Christians attach to that institution.*”

**Muhammad to Blame.**—Dr. Macdonald, the well-known professor of Arabic and Islámic subjects, in one of his books expresses the opinion that the woman question in Islám would hardly now exist but for the attitude of Muhammad himself. If, after the death of his first wife, he had remained a monogamist, and if he had encouraged his wife to go with unveiled face, Islám would have been a vastly different system to-day. He says, “The veil would never have existed except for the insane jealousy of Muhammad.”

**Book Reviews.**—*The Handbook for Workers*, by the Rev. H. A. Popley, and published by the C.L.S., is a useful little booklet of 68 pages written specially in connection with the Evangelistic Forward Movement. “The purpose of this movement is to inspire the Indian Church with a new zeal and power for service, and to win India for Christ through the agency of the Church.”

One has said that “The average church member has been more like a pumpkin in a basket, which his pastor is trying to carry to market, than a soldier fighting for his cause.” How to draw out the best in that church member and make him an efficient soldier of the cross is the purpose of the author in writing the book.

**Dr. Zwemer** will be in India during part of June. Apply for programme of tour to Mr. Peterson, Y.M.C.A., Lucknow.

## PRAISE AND PRAYER

“How mighty, how wonderful a thing is prayer! That man has yet to appear in the world who shall prove to the utmost what prayer can accomplish.”—John Foster.

**From Burma:** Mrs. Armstrong writes, “I want to ask special prayer for Afghanistan, and for an evangelist who went there from here a year ago. Pray that he may be instant, in season, out of season, preaching the Word.”

**The District of Sylhet, Assam:** "We are just contemplating the baptism of two young Muhammadan boys who profess confession of faith in Christ. One is a student. We feel this is a very great step and would like the prayers of the members of the League on their behalf.

## LEAGUE FINANCIAL STATEMENT

For the year ending April 30th, 1917

### Receipts—

To Subscriptions .. .. .	391	13	0
Refund .. .. .	0	8	0
Debit Balance .. .. .	20	2	0
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	Rs. ..	412	7 0

### Expenditure—

Deficit from last year .. .. .	13	12	0
Printing <i>News and Notes</i> .. .. .	361	6	0
Owing to Rev. W. Goldsack .. .. .	10	10	0
Postages, M. O. Commission, and Office Expenses .. .. .	26	11	0
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	Rs. ..	412	7 0

*Audited and found correct,*

A. L. COWLES. 25-4-17.

## SPECIAL APPEAL

In presenting the Financial Statement we would draw attention to the Debit Balance of Rs. 20-2-0. The Rev. H. Walter and W. Goldsack have found it most difficult to get in the members' subscriptions. If all members had paid their dues the secretaries would not have been out of pocket. There is still owing Rs. 14-7-0 to Mr. Goldsack on the 1916 Prayer Cycle account, and a debit of Rs. 30-10-0 owing to Mr. Walter was put down on the account book in 1915 as a donation. This should not be. We would ask all members to make a special effort to help us to keep the League in funds during the war crisis. *We would welcome special donations to clear our liabilities.*

## NEW MEMBERS

222. MR. D. E. ALLEY, University, Glasgow.  
 223. MR. H. H. PETERSON, Y. M. C. A., Lucknow.

*The Annual Subscription to the League is Rs. 2-8-0 (3s. 4d.)  
 Members are requested to send news and requests for prayer to*

*Brahmanbaria, Bengal.* JOHN TAKLE,  
*Hon. Sec., M. M. League.*