

# Missionaries to Muslims League

News and Notes.

Series VI, No. 5.

September, 1917.

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## A FAKIR MOVEMENT

BY REV. JOHN REID, JESSORE.

The editor has asked more than once for some news of the movement among the Fakirs of the Presidency Division of Bengal, and it was perhaps due to the readers of *News and Notes* that an earlier account of this interesting piece of Muhammadan work should have been contributed. We were waiting to see how far the work was likely to extend before saying much about it, and were not a little sorry when an evangelistic periodical spoke of it months ago as a "Mass Movement." That was far too big a term to use of it. At the same time there is enough in the movement to make us very hopeful as to its development, and to make a brief account of it of some value perhaps to the members of the League.

It is hardly necessary to explain to them that the Fakirs are really the Súfis of Bengal though their system has much less of philosophy in it than real Súfi-ism. They stand for the inwardness and spirituality of true religion. The more courageous among them have broken with the ceremonial part of Islám. They care very little for the Qur'án or Muhammad. They practise *Dhikr*, wear long hair and follow the teaching of their Pir. The people among whom we have been having some success were disciples of the Homniapota Pir—Tamejuddin Shah.

The beginning of the work was in this wise. A young Muhammadan of orthodox family came under the influence of a relative who was baptised some years ago. He came to us seeking instruction and baptism. We kept him as long as we thought it was good for him to be dependent on us for his living, then sent him, at his own suggestion, to an industrial institution, where he could learn a trade as well as receive religious instruction. As he belonged to a fairly well-to-do family and had never done much work of any kind, we were not altogether surprised when he turned up again a few days later. One or two further attempts were made to solve the problem of his livelihood, but nothing resulted, so we had to let him go back to his home, for a time at least. Feeling the difficulty of being the only Christian in the village he tried to win some low-caste Hindus. Failing with them he turned his attention to some Fakirs who lived near

by. Turned out by his father, he went to live with these Fakirs. He had with him a copy of *The Mirror of the Heart*. The Fakirs were greatly impressed by the teaching of this little book, as well as by what the young enquirer was able to tell them of the Bible. They were perhaps still more impressed by the willingness of their teacher to give up his home and prospects for this new faith. Two of them came with him to Jessore to receive further instruction. Soon after two of them went to Homniapota to see their Pir. During a second visit he confessed to them his belief that the Christian religion was the true *ma'rifat*, and said he would with them become a Christian. He had been taught in his youth by an Indian missionary at Khulna.

Homniapota being in the C.M.S. Ranaghat field, after a joint visit to that centre the Ranaghat workers pitched a camp there, while the B.M.S. workers camped in Ulashi and other places in the Jessore district. In February last the Pir Sahib and a group of his disciples were baptised at Homniapota, and in March another group, most of whom were Fakirs, were baptised in Ulashi. Some of them, I regret to say, have already gone right back to Islám, but the more spiritually-minded are growing rapidly in faith and knowledge, and are seeking, amidst a good deal of opposition and persecution, to win others for Christ. Perhaps the Editor or some one else will some day write an article on backsliding among Muslim converts, and tell us how best to prevent it.

There have been various estimates of the number of the Homniapota Pir Sahib's disciples. At the lowest computation they run into thousands. The news of the conversion of their "Murshid" soon spread among them. Many at once disowned him and went back to the ordinary Muhammadan community. Others are continuing as Fakirs, though having no spiritual head. Quite a number have been to Homniapota to see the Pir and hear for themselves whether these things are so! We have just returned from a tour in one of the Fakir areas. We found that a majority of them had cut their long hair, and were doing Namaj and keeping the fast like their neighbours. Some of them had indeed been doing so all along. A good many of these had become disciples in the hope of being cured by the Pir of some disease, and had no great attachment to the spiritual truths for which he stood. The men who had become disciples for the sake of these and with the hope of finding that food for their spiritual hunger which ceremonial Islám had failed to give them, remain Fakirs. They are waiting to see. Some of them have been to see their aforesaid Pir and want to follow him in the new way. Others are waiting until they have an opportunity of consulting him. Another Fakir was recently baptised in this district, and I hear there are two almost ready for baptism at Homniapota. There are others of whom we cherish hopes. The difficulty is to get a large enough group in any one centre to make it possible for them to face the tremendous opposition which confronts them.

Of the fight which the Maulvis and others have been putting up *News and Notes* has already told. There is another difficulty which we have to overcome. In or near all the villages in which the Fakirs live there are large numbers of Muchis, some of whom belong to the Roman Catholic community. The only Christians some of the Muhammadans know are these Muchi Christians, who are in many cases more Muchi still than Christian. To be a Christian is represented by our enemies and regarded by some of our friends as joining the Muchis. A few of the more advanced converts are already glorying in the fact that in Christ there is neither Muchi nor Muhammadan, all being one in Christ Jesus, but it is not necessary to explain how the proximity of these "Muchi Christians" affects the man who is hesitating as to which way to go. We have deputation after deputation of these Muchis—some Roman Catholic, some non-Christian—coming to entreat us to receive them. We have not yet seen any real spiritual desire among them, so we feel quite justified in confining our efforts almost entirely to the Fakirs and other Muhammadans among whom we have found not a few who are saying, in their own way, what Philip said to Jesus, "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us."

## THE SOUL OF A MUSLIM ENQUIRER

AS SEEN BY A MISSIONARY.

One Saturday afternoon, about fourteen years ago, a bright-eyed intelligent lad, with features of the Afghan type, came shyly into my Bible class for English-speaking school boys. He has told me since that all through the lesson hour he wondered whether he ought to stay. He had heard so much about the evil teaching of the Christians that if he stayed he felt he should combat every idea put forth in the exposition of the Bible passage. But he found no opening; not that he had no opportunity to speak, but the lesson appealed to him as being in keeping with truth, and Jesus, as depicted in the Gospels, was so transparently genuine that Muhammad, although not mentioned in the lesson, appeared in comparison quite on a lower plane.

Soon he became a regular attendant, and later on came very near decision for Christ, when, like so many more, he decided that since he had no accurate knowledge of Islám and the Qur'án he should drink deep of the Fount of his own Faith. But he wanted English; would I read Sale's translation with him (Kodwell's was not then available). We read together the Bible and the Qur'án, and his eyes were opened to the vast difference between the two. When the Qur'án seemed unreasonable he went and plied the Maulvie of the high school with questions, who told him he must accept things as he had been taught and not pry into origins and morals. He brought Maulvies and Munshis from the villages to the mission house, and when the interviews were not quite to his liking he would throw

in a question now and then to bring out the strong contrasts between their Faith and ours.

Then he began to attend regularly the Bengali church services, and was so impressed with the Christian form of worship that he himself began to express his own thoughts and desires in private prayer, in preference to the set Arabic phrases of the Muslim liturgy, laid down centuries before by the Imams for the use of the Faithful. When remonstrated with by the townspeople for attending Christian services, he said, "Why shouldn't I go there when I get a spiritual uplift?"

A shrewd Muhammadan, understanding the bent of his mind, introduced him to Syed Amir Ali's *The Spirit of Islám*, which, unknown to me at the time, he carefully read. In many ways it appealed to him. He liked the author's phrase, "The eclectic faith of Muhammad." He himself was sure that the Prophet had drawn much from Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Christianity, but when the Syed resolved polygamy, easy divorce and slavery into temporary provisions permitted by Muhammad for the attracting of the Arabs to the new Faith, our enquirer felt that the Syed was more an adept at special pleading than at correct exposition of Islámic theology.

But he was enamoured of the Syed's main contention, that if Muslims adhered to "*the spirit of Islám*," then all that is best in Western ideas—whether religious, social or political—would be found to be in perfect accord with it, and the adopting of the same ideas would not compromise any true follower of the Prophet. But the enquirer was quick to see that the Syed had to give a caricature of Christianity for the modern Muslim to fit in with a reformed Islám. He felt, too, that there was something to be said for the Syed's contention that Christianity had failed to give well-defined commands for the conduct of a man's life, whereas Muhammad had been careful to give the minutest instructions. But the weakness of this argument was shown in many ways. For instance, many deal with plunder, but for the Muhammadans of India nothing was given to cover their very many land troubles, and nothing was provided for any possible Muslims living in the Arctic regions and having to wait six months for night to come, in which they might break their fast. Christianity, on the other hand, has laid down certain great and enduring principles, which have been applied to peoples everywhere in every aspect of their life and action.

He read also Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's books, and admitted that he had learnt from them much of Islám's ancient glories and of a time when things were certainly different from to-day, but he was not satisfied with any of the rationalistic writers. He said, "They give no correct conception or criticism of Christianity, and their definitions of Islám are not true to facts." At the same time he read Khuda Bukhsh's *Essays: Indian and Islámic*, and wished there had been more constructive and less destructive criticism in his book.

By this time he had appeared at the Intermediate Arts Examination, and been appointed a master of English in his old school. To

help him financially we gave him some pamphlets to translate from English into Mussulmani-Bengali for Muslim readers. He could not keep away from our Sunday and mid-week services. He hungered for spirituality which the modern Muslim writers could not give him. He then went down among the illiterate villagers who revere the Pirs, and studied their crude form of Súfiism. I remember his excitement when he brought some of their songs expressing great craving for the Love of God, for instance—

“ He who does not possess the Love of God  
May be virtuous, but he has not firm faith.”

“ Bring a knife and rend my heart  
That you may see, O God, the depth of love I have for Thee.”

It was not till some time afterwards that he said he had practised *Dhikr*, that is, “The glorifying of Allah with certain fixed phrases, repeated in ritual order, either aloud or in the mind, with peculiar breathings and physical movements.” The villagers who practised it told him that thereby he would experience an ecstatic feeling that would certainly bring to him a sense of the presence of Allah. “But,” he said, “to continue such a method I found would be harmful, so gave it up.” Then he added, “If you only knew the deep devotion of these people, and their spiritual craving, and if you had Christian workers who would go amongst them and preach simply the story of Jesus, especially His Sermon on the Mount, which would give them the noblest conception of religious duties, they would be drawn to your Faith. They long to know the Love of God, which you Christians preach. Our Maulvies preach only fear, and give such lurid pictures of punishment that the villagers often spend whole nights in prayers of penance.”

A new excitement arose. His old Persian teacher became an initiated member and leader of the Qadiani sect, and took over with him several of his own students, but our enquirer had no sympathy with the founder of that sect, who claimed to be the Messiah, Madhi and Krishna, all in one, and who, against all the acknowledged facts of Christian and Muslim history, maintained that our Lord Jesus Christ is now dead. The Maulvie was outcasted. No longer would the orthodox of the place accept his leadership in prayer, and he was banned the mosque.

For two years I was in the homeland, and while there received letters from the enquirer full of interest and longing. During my absence he read some Greek with my colleague. On my return I saw a difference in the man. His pugri had increased in size and his robe had been lengthened, evident signs that he had become somebody in the community. He was now looked upon as a Pir. He had disciples who spoke of his goodness, and proved his saintliness in the fact that he had never married. He was also a strength to the orthodox, who desired arguments against the Qadiani preachers.

Again we came to close grips with him, but he repeatedly found shelter behind the difficulty of belief in the Divine Trinity, and what

appeared to him to be the inconsistency of Christian nations at war when it was evident that Christ taught non-resistance. Then did I think that any man could honestly repeat the Lord's Prayer and say, "As we forgive them that trespass against us"? But he could not remain away from the mission house and Church services. The townspeople still see a danger in his attending, and are using means to put him in a false position. Regarding him as being their most all-round scholarly man in the place, they recently asked him to show from the Qur'án and Traditions all that Islám taught about singing. This he did, and with other Maulvies signed a statement in which it was clearly shown that the books of Islám are against singing. Immediately the people turned on him and said, "If your findings are correct, how can you attend a Christian service where singing is an essential part of worship?" For him to say that the Christian hymns were devotional and uplifting, as he thought them to be, was of no use.

He now wants to reform the Muhammadanism of the Bengal villages, on the basis of the best in Islám with much that has helped him in the teaching of the New Testament. We hear of pouring "new wine into old wine-skins," but to watch the procedure daily in an individual is truly enlightening. He turns up sometimes in the most depressed state of mind. He says, "Those who have any standing in the community are largely political. They look only for favours from the Government to help them materially. Religiously, they cling to the old forms, with no conception of spiritual truth, while the lower classes are so ignorant and superstitious. When I urge them to live on a higher plane, to be sincere, to give up falsehood, to enter more into the real meaning and spirit of prayer, to start a crusade for the enlightenment of Muslim women, they laugh in my face and ask when I last went to the mission house. I and my teaching are suspected all the time." Another day, in course of conversation, he said, "My relatives are urging me to marry. They say I cannot be a true Muslim otherwise, but I really cannot. I know what the Muslim women of East Bengal are like. I could not be happy wedded to such ignorance and bigotry and low conceptions of life and conduct." He was eager to start a campaign for the advancement of women, but I pointed out it could not be done on the basis of Islám. I suggested that he write to *The Epiphany*, and thus begin a discussion among advanced Muhammadans. He was inclined to do so, but a talk with his friends led him to see that his position as a Maulvie and leader would become precarious in the extreme. He was checked.

This leads me to the summing up. I fear that pride hinders his walking in the right path and becoming a reformer on a right basis. He needs a real experience of contact with Christ! The possibility of position and leadership in a large community, now lacking leaders, is too attractive, while the comparative insignificance and persecution given to an Indian Christian preacher are not inviting. But his

intimate acquaintance with our Scriptures and form of worship has led him to throw his weight in our favour. He is not against us. He claims to be "a friend of Christianity, helping the illiterate, uncouth Muhammadans to soften towards Christ, and so be fitted to understand His loftier teaching." He accepts Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's position that the Bible could not have been tampered with as the ordinary Maulvie says it was. Twenty students, members of our Bible Class, are his disciples, and attend at his request. He is always urging us to issue cheap booklets published in similar style to Muhammadan books, and containing fewer arguments and more of Christ's sublime teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, and the facts concerning His death, resurrection and ascension, for he believes that "Muhammadans must come to accept these accounts as true, although they may not go the whole way with you in the acceptance of the Atonement." At the last Id festival, he led the prayer service at one of the mosques, and in his sermon urged all the people to a higher morality, and advocated the study of the New Testament, wherein they would find helpful teaching, and more proof against the Qadiani's contention that Christ was not alive, than in any other book.

Such is the history of a soul as seen from without. There is an inner history, which the soul and God alone have known. That Christianity has made a great impression there can be no doubt. The character of Muhammad he will not discuss, but his conscience is alive to its important bearing upon the truth or falsity of Islam. And he will not face the great essential of all true religion to make plain a redemption from sin that will be in accord with Divine Justice.

I have written this believing that the enquirer is but one of many, many cases to-day, who are wholly dissatisfied, yet would do much to rectify things, but feel the hopelessness of their position. Then why, if so attracted, do they not link up with us? How are they to be won? Why is not the Power of Pentecost so manifest in our midst that they are swept in in spite of themselves? Enquirers like these must be bathed in prayer! Their minds must thus be opened to see that in Christ alone is the only hope of regeneration and reformation, both for the individual and the community.

J. T.

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## "PROPHECIES CONCERNING THE CHRIST AND THEIR FULFILMENT"

The above is the title of a little book which has recently been prepared by Miss M. R. Greenfield, and is published in Roman-Urdu. Its purpose and nature may be best understood from the authoress's own words:—"It was compiled to help the preacher or teacher in meeting Muhammadans with *proofs* from the books of Moses, Psalms and other prophetic books (which they acknowledge to be the Word of God)

that Jesus is the Christ. The prophecies are taken up one by one in the order in which they occur in the Old Testament, and proofs of their relevancy from the New Testament are given in the parallel column. . . I know how difficult it is in the course of a preaching or argument to turn up passages in the Bible, and many preachers carry only the New Testament with them in their pockets. This little book may serve as a hand-dagger when the larger sword is not available."

The book undoubtedly meets a real need, and its general plan is both good and helpful. The accumulation and comparison of so many scriptural passages brings home with overwhelming force the close connection that exists between the prophecies of the O. T. and the Christ of the N. T., but to my mind the book would be more valuable if there had been fewer O.T. quotations and those quotations had been confined to passages which were indubitably Messianic prophecies. For instance, it is doubtful whether Job 19: 25 was originally written with any definite reference to the Messiah. Then, too, the way in which some of the N. T. writers cite the O. T. is hardly in accord with present ideas of prophecies and their fulfilment. To give one instance—the reference to Ps. 78: 2 which is found in St. Matt. 13: 35 cannot be strictly interpreted as a direct Messianic prophecy. A distinction needs to be drawn between parallel ideas which are found occurring both in O. T. books and in the records of the N. T. on the one hand, and direct predictions on the other hand, which find their distinct and unmistakable fulfilment in one or another incident of the life of our Lord. Miss Greenfield has again and again inserted a quotation from the Psalms which refers to the way in which many a good man has been persecuted for righteousness' sake, and which, though perfectly in accord with the experience of Christ, can in no wise be regarded as referring solely to Him (e.g., Ps. 27: 12; 35: 11, 12; 38: 12, etc.). The words in Ps. 31: 5 "Into Thy hands I commit my spirit"—are *quoted* by our Lord on the cross, but can hardly be regarded as a special prediction made concerning Him. Other dying ones have found help from these words also. Then, too, the verses in Ps. 50: 3, 4, 5, 6 are not a Messianic prophecy, in my opinion, and it does not help us in our argument to quote them as such. Verses such as those to which I have alluded above are just the verses which a keen-witted and studious maulvi would seize upon and claim that we were misinterpreting them, and so the force of the unmistakable predictions would be weakened in his estimation. We bid Muhammadan readers carefully study the context of passages which they adduce as alleged prophecies of Muhammad, and they would have a weapon to use against us if they studied the context of some of the passages in Miss Greenfield's book. The book may be of service undoubtedly in its present form. Missionaries and the more intelligent Indian workers who are able to read it with discrimination will find it a most handy little volume to have at hand for reference, but I do not think it should be circulated amongst non-Christians at present. If a second edition of it could be prepared containing only indisputable Messianic prophecies at any rate in a section



of their own, and, if so desired, parallelisms in a separate section by themselves, the value of the book would be distinctly enhanced.

J. IRELAND HASLER.

Copies are obtainable from Miss Greenfield, Oak Hill Cottage, Murree. Price, 4 as. each, or Rs. 3-8-0 for 16 copies.

## AN ENCOURAGING REPORT

We are always glad to receive reports of mission work having mention of efforts made for Muslims. One such report just to hand deals with the splendid work done last year by the Church of England Zanana Mission workers in Bangalore and Mysore. Miss Potter, the senior worker, has been a member of our League Committee from the beginning, and is one of the keenest helpers in the cause.

Perhaps one of the finest pieces of work done was the starting of a *Training School* for Hindustani-speaking mistresses.

"It began in July, the Government of India having accorded administrative sanction of the scheme for a period of three years on the first instance, at a cost of Rs. 1,200 during 1916-17 and of Rs. 2,000 in succeeding years. There are ten students in the training class, of whom four are Christians and six are Muhammadans; of these latter all but two are living in our compound, and so are under direct Christian influence. They are all very keen on their studies and show a special aptitude for drawing and handwork."

In connection with the *Boarding School* there have been excellent results. The report says:

"We have had the joy of seeing several belonging to our orphanage 'family' baptized this year, in all ten Muslim and two Hindu.... A new need which arises out of growth is a hostel for the Muslim boarders, of whom now in 1917 there are ten. The orphanage cannot take an unlimited supply of these, and now they have started coming who knows when they may stop, and no one wishes them to stop."

Of other schools we read: "The average attendance of our three day schools for Muhammadans has been higher this year, 92 instead of 78, and the little ones are as fascinating as ever."

One little Muslim boarder of twelve, when looking at a large picture of Christ with children of many nations gathered round Him, said, "Mem Sahib, why am I not there?" She was satisfied with the answer given—"But you *are* there, that little Indian girl sitting on His knee means you." (There was no child dressed in Muhammadan clothes.)

The distribution of literature has been hopeful.

"We find that we are able to sell an increasing number of Gospel Portions outside the Muhammadan Id-gah on the occasion of their two feasts, and we heard of two enquirers as a result of the distribution. They have neither of them taken a definite stand, but they have been asking about the way of life. One had helped at a bioscope in which the life of Christ was portrayed, and he had been immensely impressed by the scenes of His death and wished to buy a bioscope for himself, so as to go round the district exhibiting the pictures to other Muslims."

Miss Potter writes: "Our Punjabi Christian soldiers left us in October for Thayetmyo to guard Turkish soldiers. Before leaving they presented the Church with a very handsome book-rest for the communion table, a silver watch to Rev. L. Dhan Singh and a very pretty gold brooch to me; the latter was most undeserved and unexpected. They have now been sent to Mesopotamia."

Concerning two Muhammadan women baptized, the report says:

"A Muhammadan teacher and her brothers turned up one morning in a bullock cart, bringing with them a young woman, and asked us to take care of her and, as they said, 'make her a Christian.' The story was that she was an orphan and had no relatives, and that she had wanted to come for three years. On enquiry the girl said that she had heard street preaching at the 'Shandi', *i.e.*, market, while remaining inside the zanana. This should be an encouragement to those who undertake the difficult task of bazaar preaching and sometimes feel that the message has been delivered in vain. The brother and sister who brought her had been in touch with us for several years previous to this, and when they moved elsewhere some eleven years ago a missionary had remarked to them that it was sad that they had heard so much of the Gospel without accepting it. This apparently had rankled in the mind of the young man, and he said, 'For this reason I have brought you this young woman.' She has since been baptized by the name of 'Barkat,' which means blessing. May she become a blessing to her Muhammadan sisters.

"The other woman is the one who had heard the Gospel years ago, before her marriage. She was then living far away from Bangalore, but was visited by a missionary and because she was interested and wished to become a Christian her people arranged a marriage for her. Her husband took her away to another place, where one missionary visited her. After twelve years her husband died, and as soon as it was possible she and her four children came back to her father, who, in the interval had been baptized with his son. Later on she was sent up to us with her three little girls, but the fourth child, a boy, was taken off by his Muhammadan relations, and we have heard nothing of him for some time."

We are sure that we voice the feeling of all our fellow members of the League when we say that, with full hearts, we give praise to God for the Christian effort and influence of our friends, and rejoice with them in all the success that has attended their labours of love. In their encouragement we are encouraged.

## NEW MEMBERS

229. Rev. E. E. Calverley, Arabian Mission, Kuwait, Persian Gulf.  
 230. Miss M. A. Ledward, Colombo, Ceylon.  
 231. Rev. P. F. Lanyon, Australian B. M. S., Comilla, Bengal.

*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.