

Missionaries to Muslims League

News and Notes.

Series VII, No. 5.

SEPTEMBER, 1918.

MUSLIM MARRIAGE

I have a Muslim acquaintance who boasts a distinguished foreign lineage. Like so many of the old Muhammadan families of Bengal, he claims descent from the Mughal race, who in the days of the Muslim domination swept through the land as warriors of the Crescent, and brought millions under control by the power of the sword. But that he is of pure breed is not likely. Rather his descent was from those freebooters who were encouraged by the Mughals to marry the women of the villages where they came, and so settle down on large tracts of land given as rewards for service rendered. They were persons privileged to plunder and profit by the administration of the Imperial taxes.

There are many such—Muslim half-castes if you like—all over the Province, who did well till the advent of the British. That altered everything. Persian, the State language, had to give way to English and the people's vernacular; new laws were introduced; taxes, instead of being farmed as heretofore, were deposited in the coffers of the Government treasury by duly appointed officers. But the Muslim descendants of an ancient aristocracy were too proud to come into line with the new regime, and therefore sullenly retired to their landed estates and allowed the Hindus to surpass them in learning, ability, and influence. They lived to themselves. They became entangled in litigation, and found it impossible to win cases over property against the more able Hindus, until to-day many of the descendants endure an existence in premises that present the appearance of a ruin.

Our Muslim acquaintance is one such, but he belongs to a fairly large section of the community who are trying to redeem the past by giving their sons an English education and their daughters in marriage with the few who have made some progress in Government employ. They still assert that foreign descent is the highest claim to social distinction, but are quite prepared to marry their daughters to even the native born among the Muhammadans (*Sheks* they are called) who have stepped up into the upper circle of education and ability.

Our acquaintance, the quondam ruler, had secured such a bridegroom for his sister, and I was invited to attend the wedding ceremony. And when I say that the brother negotiated for the bridegroom, with the aid of matchmakers, it must be remembered that no Muhammadan girl has any say in the matter. True, the legal books of Islám state that her consent is necessary, but usually that is a mere formality. Woe betide the girl who dare dissent from what her relatives have arranged. It is a *mariage de convenance*, without affection and without courtship, the couple rarely being allowed to see each other till after the wedding is over.

The service was impressive, but certainly strange with not a solitary woman about. It was night. The ceremony was held in a specially decorated room, lit up with lights placed down the middle of the white muslin-covered floor. On either side sat, tailor-fashion, twenty men related to the bridal pair. At the end of the room the bridegroom had the place of honour alongside the Muslim legal functionary who was there to conduct the service. After the first chapter of the Qur'án had been read in Arabic, two Wakils, or go-betweens, in the persons of the bride's uncle and brother, left to visit the bride. We were told that within the harem, in a similarly decorated room, the female wedding party awaited the Wakils. Their return was a sign for all to rise, for were we not receiving the deputies of the bride! The company challenged them to swear that the bride had really deputed them to give her message of consent. This they did. The bridegroom was then asked if he still agreed to the conditions made beforehand by the matchmakers. Upon his word being witnessed, the marriage was declared as having been contracted. The bride and the villagers were notified by the letting off of bombs and the firing of guns.

The writing of the dowry document in high-flown Persian took a long time, but it was a most important piece of business. We were asked to put our name to it as a witness. The bridegroom pledged himself to give the bride a dowry of Rs. 12,000 (£800)—Rs. 6,000 on demand, if called for, but the whole amount if, through divorce or any breach of faith, his wife was discarded. He also agreed to give her Rs. 15 per mensem for clothes and pocket-money. He was further made to promise that in her life-time, so long as she remained his wife, he would not marry another.

Here it is scarcely necessary to explain that the Qur'án allows to every Muslim four legally-married wives at a time, and as many slave-concubines "as their right hand might get possession of," but the influence of Western ideas on the educated has led them to see that there is more peace and domestic happiness in monogomy, hence the above pledge to marry only one.

We were told that the first glimpse of his bride would be given him by one of the bride's family, who would lead him into a room where the girl, a veiled figure, sitting on a stool before a looking-glass,

would await her life-partner. He would sit beside her on another stool, and the guide, pulling back the veil, would give him his first peep through the looking-glass. If a vision of ugliness, if the attractions were not all they were described to be, what then? Often the relatives crowd round outside to hear a bridegroom's opinion, whether favourable or otherwise, and in Arabia and Egypt, we are told, a bridegroom's displeasure is a sure sign of speedy trouble.

It is this system of seclusion that makes Muslim marriage such a lottery, and as in other lotteries people take as many tickets as they can afford, so in Muslim society the average Muhammadan will take other wives until he is satisfied, knowing that he does not transgress any law of his faith. To aid him he has always that Islâmic method of easy divorce. And divorces are appallingly common. In Egypt not more than five per cent. of Muhammadans retain the first wife to the day of her death, and that is a Muslim estimate. In sheer caprice a man may utter the fateful words, "I divorce thee," to the wife.

Many a missionary to Muslims would endorse this statement. We like Mrs. F. E. Penny's books. In many ways she is the best novelist who deals with India. Her books show an amazing knowledge of the people, so we are all the more surprised when she says on pp. 130-131 of *Love in a Palace*—"No Muhammadan can put away his wife in a sudden caprice—so careful are the followers of the Prophet about the welfare of the next generation. . . . Divorce is not common among Muhammadans. Four wives are permitted by the Qur'ân; the necessity of getting rid of one wife before marrying again does not occur." But the point is, in East Bengal at any rate, that the average Muslim cannot afford to keep four, and so practises an irregular form of divorce. The Kazi in our town says that not a quarter of the divorces are registered, and divorce is common.

It is because of this easy divorce that all grades of Muslim society demand exorbitant dowries as a deterrent, and such dowries are the woman's only legal means of redress. Apart from this the whole system is based upon considerations for the man. J. T.

A RECENT MUSLIM MIRACLE

One of the League members sent a young convert from Islâm to study at a Christian college, with the idea of his becoming a preacher. The lad read an article in the *Islâmic Review*, which has impressed him very much. We reproduce the lad's letter—

"One thing I am going to ask you to know the fact. On the 12th June, 1917, a fish flung itself into the boat of a fisherman fishing in the sea near Zanzibar. One purchased the fish, and noticed that the tail fin bore marks akin to writing. . . . says the *Ceylon Independent*. . . . He read the Arabic words, 'La ilaha illallah' on one side of the fish,

and 'Shan Allah' on the other. The first are the Qur'anic words meaning, 'There is no deity but Allah,' and the second means 'Majesty of Allah.' However, the fact may not be denied, as it was taken to the British Residency, and was examined by experts. The markings were quite pronounced. Chemicals were used to test whether they were natural or not, and after thorough examination it was definitely established that the inscription on the fish was natural. The photographs of the fish have been taken. Now it is in safe custody. The photographs are being sold by thousands. The owner of the fish has refused an offer of Rs. 30,000. It has been placed on public exhibition. The Arabic lettering is perfectly plain. However, I could not understand what does it mean. The photo of the fish can be had from H. H. Abdul Ali, Fourth Cross Street, Pettah, Ceylon. I have seen the photo here from a Muhammadan student of 4th year class.

"I found this article in the *Islâmic Review and Muslim India*, edited by Khwaja Kamaluddin, B.A., LL.B. I can send you, if you want to see it. I pray to God always that He may lead me into the true path. I hope God will save me from all temptations, and will lead me to His path, the only one path, Jesus Christ our Lord. I might have been moved a little to see it, but, heaven be praised, that when I look upon Jesus all my anxiety and doubt fly away at once, and when I look upon Muhammad I need no proof in favour of Muhammadanism. The ugliness of Muhammad's character takes me away from Muhammadanism. Christ is my Lord. Lord Jesus be with me for ever. Amen!"

Commenting on the letter, the missionary says, "Can you suggest any means of investigating the story? I think it should be investigated, for it is things like that that impress people's imagination more than our arguments."

MUSLIM OPPOSITION IN CHINA

One has seen a good deal lately in various missionary periodicals about the peculiar accessibility of Chinese Muslims to the Gospel, and one is sincerely glad to think that they are more easily approached than their co-religionists of other countries. But there is another side to the question, which should not be overlooked by those who pray for the bringing to salvation of many of the Chinese Muhammadans. That is, that their friendliness is too often only apparent and superficial. Occasionally the animal bares its teeth! As an illustration of this I copy a few lines from a letter just received from Mr. F. H. Easton, who works in a neighbouring province (South Shensi), thinking that it might be of interest. He writes from Hanchongfu, of a visit to one of the mosques in that city:—

"They (i.e., the Ahong, students, &c.) treated me and my companion with great rudeness, not asking us (according to Chinese

etiquette) to sit down and drink tea, nor did they ask our names, but commenced to argue with us at the top of their voices in a mixture of Arabic and Chinese—scholars, worshippers, and priests alike joining in. I declined to argue, saying that I had come to make their acquaintance, have a friendly talk, and, if they were agreeable, to leave some books for their perusal. They waxed more and more furious, and used all the insulting language they could. We, they said, were godless, irreligious and defiled; what did we mean by coming to their holy place to make trouble with the worshippers of the true God? What an impertinence to give them our Scriptures! They had the Koran, what more did they want? I said that the Koran spoke highly of the Pentateuch, Psalms, and Gospel—all these books spoke of Jesus—*this* was the Gospel of John. He (the Ahong) spat on it, and said it was a lie—we had corrupted it—it was not the true Gospel. He refused to accept a single book, and started to go for the crucial point—the divinity and sonship of Christ. They kept on shouting out—“Proofs! Proofs!” I mentioned the Scriptures and the Resurrection of Christ. But this last was more than they could stand; the Ahong said: “Has He really risen? Did He really die? Then where is He now? Has He gone to heaven?” “He really died, rose again and ascended to heaven,” I answered. “Then go up with Him—go on! go up to heaven! go up to heaven!” and suiting the action to the word, he seized my arm, and pushed me up and up, till he and the rest had pushed me out of the door. Several students, still holding my arms, escorted me outside their front gate, using furious language all the way. . . . I shouldn't call this brand very accessible, should you?”

MARK E. BOTHAM.

THE NEW LEAGUE COMMITTEE

In our note in the June issue we pointed out that the present League Committee so far existed for reference, and should be strengthened. A stronger committee will be able to do more for the advancement of our cause. On consulting the Committee it was decided to ask the following members of the League to act. The names with an asterisk are members of the old committee:—

Bengal

The Lord Bishop of Calcutta
Miss Taylor
Rev. E. T. Butler, M.A.
Rev. L. Bevan Jones, B.D.
Rev. W. Goldsack *
Rev. J. Takle *

Panjab

Miss Davidson
Rev. E. M. Wherry, D.D.*
Rev. H. A. Walter, M.A.*
Rev. Dr. Griswold
Rev. Siraj-ud-Din, B.A.

Madras

Miss Potter *
 Rev. Canon Goldsmith, M.A. *
 Rev. Canon Sell, D.D.

W. India and Hyderabad

Rev. J. Lane-Smith, M.A. *
 Rev. A. French, M.A.
 Rev. G. E. Brown, M.A.

United Provinces

Rev. Ahmed Shah

OTHER LANDS

| | | | |
|----------------|--|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Burma:</i> | Rev. J. Smith, M.A. | <i>Egypt:</i> | Dr. Zwerner |
| <i>Ceylon:</i> | Miss Ledward | | Mr. A. T. Upson |
| <i>China:</i> | Mr. F. H. Rhodes * Rev. C. L. Ogilvie | <i>England:</i> | Rev. U. Weitbrecht Stanton, D.D. |
| | | <i>Persia:</i> | Rev. W. A. Rice, M.A. |
| | | <i>Persian Gulf:</i> | Rev. Jas. Cantine |

NEGLECTED ARABIA

The difference the war is making is most marked in the mission fields near the Persian Gulf. Dr. Harrison has been touring in places where missionaries were never allowed to visit before the war. Writing to the missionary magazine, *Neglected Arabia*, he says—

“As to inland Arabia, words fail us. There has been the object of our hopes and prayers and the goal of our plans and endeavours for the past twenty-eight years. Now, as the doors swing open, who is to enter? Kateef would be glad to have a resident medical missionary now. Hassa probably could have been entered before this if anyone had made the effort. Riadh itself, the key position of Arabia, and indeed, as some of us think, of all Islâm, is opening its doors.

“It is to men whose hearts burn with the fire of Christ’s own ambition for His world that Arabia makes her appeal. Let Hassa serve as an example. Here is a city of probably thirty thousand inhabitants, surrounded by date gardens which stretch for miles. There are fifty-one cities and villages in this area, many of them cities of thousands, some of them mere villages. The evidences of material prosperity are everywhere. The whole district is one of date gardens, wheat fields, and beautiful stretches of dark green alfalfa. It is the richest district of Arabia and doubtless also the most densely populated. The inland Bedouins come here to trade from almost the entire eastern half of the peninsula. The Church of Christ occupies no point in Arabia comparable to this in strategic importance.

“But it is a bigoted, fanatical place, whose doors are shut to everyone except the Medical Missionary. What are the opportunities for medical work? Opportunities of the sort that break men. A mass of diseases to be treated, of surgery to be done, such as ten men could not overtake. Indeed, fifty men could not handle it properly. A sanitary situation as bad as human ignorance and filth can make it. The worker in Hassa with his little hospital must undertake single-handed the fight against the forces of hygienic depravity of the whole eastern part of Arabia. The inertia of centuries, ignorance so profound that it is almost sublime, some of the bitterest religious prejudices of the world, will all be pitted against him. But an inch at a time he will forge ahead and finally win, because the promises of God and the laws of God are with him.

"To the man of softness and ease, Arabia has little to offer, but to the man who thirsts to fight for the bodies and the souls of men, against everything that the world, the flesh, and the Devil can muster, it has everything to offer, hard tasks for strong men. Dangerous tasks for brave men. Long, tedious, back-breaking tasks for faithful men, who serve the Lord Christ."

THE PLANTING OF THE LORD, THAT HE MAY BE GLORIFIED

(STORY OF MD. IBRAHIM).

Sometimes a garden that is carefully tended yields but disappointment, and a wild bit watered only by the rain of heaven produces a fruit-bearing tree which is a joy to the traveller who lights upon it.

Amid many disappointments over carefully taught converts, there is sometimes given the joy of finding one who, without teaching from any missionary, has come to the Light and knows the Word and gives it out to others, and is gathered into the heavenly fold without having entered the visible Church on earth.

Such was Muhammad Ibrahim, of H—, an old pineh-duz (cobbler). He could read well, and in early life had been servant to a Persian who had a New Testament and secretly read it. When he found that his servant was "mahram" (to be trusted), he shared his book with him. Muhammad Ibrahim, a few years ago, returned to his village and met with a woman who had been in the women's hospital with her little girl, who was miraculously cured of an incurable discharging wound, after a dream that Jesus Christ laid His hand upon her and healed her. The mother and daughter had learnt much in the hospital, and the mother had at one time wished for baptism, but was frightened from that desire by other women. No doubt her knowledge of the Christian religion attracted Muhammad Ibrahim, who married her, and she taught him all she knew, and the little girl always said that Jesus Christ had healed her. A New Testament that they took out with them became the study of the old man, and he knew it well. A year and a half ago a missionary and a Bible-woman visited that village in order to find S. J. and her little daughter, Najmeh, and made the acquaintance of Md. I., who said he wanted to know the commands of Hazrat-i-Isa, and to join His flock. A Bible was given to him, and he was advised to come to Isfahan to get more instruction and be baptised. He constantly read the Gospel to those who gathered round him to hear it.

He never got to Isfahan to be taught: he became ill some months ago and could not afford a donkey to bring him in. Finally he had a dream, in which he saw Jesus Christ, who put His hand on Najmeh and said, "She belongs to Me; I healed her, and I could heal you, but your time is up; do not be grieved; I will baptize you and take you to be with Me." Muhammad Ibrahim woke up and told his wife his dream and said, "Do not be grieved that you cannot take me to Isfahan; I should not reach there; I am going in a few days. Jesus Christ will baptize me and take me to heaven. When my little child is old enough to learn, take her to the ladies to go to school and let her be baptized instead of me." In three days he died, and said his trust was in Jesus. Some in the village did not want him to be buried in their graveyard, because he read "the Book." But others said, "Bury him; why not?" The mother, S. J., and Najmeh, and the two-year-old little girl, have come in to the hospital, and are preparing for baptism. The New Testament was left to a neighbour who would read it; and it will again "accomplish that for which it was sent."

By MISS BRAINIE-HARTWELL,

Isfahan, Persia.

NOTES

In the last report of the Nile Mission Press mention is made of the possibilities of work in Palestine. "Although nothing may be feasible for a few months, we have been urged to have our plans in readiness for going forward. Perhaps God may give us a small Depôt in Jerusalem."

* * * * *

It is rather a belated piece of news, but still it is of interest. A chaplain reported concerning the taking of Jerusalem that the Turks were terrified when they heard General Allenby's name, which they pronounce "*Allah Nebi*"—Prophet of God.

* * * * *

The Decadence of Islam.—Muhammadans, like the Hindus, are becoming increasingly tinged with the pessimistic view that the golden age is past and gone. We have been reading a book just published, by a Muslim, on the *History and Problems of Muslim Education in Bengal*. The author tells how "from the numerous schools and academies of Granada, Baghdad, and Damascus, the Mussalmans once taught the world the gentle lessons of philosophy and the practical teachings of stern science. . . . To think of those palmy days of Islâm and the present fallen condition of the Mussalmans in India. Arts and letters are almost dead; science and philosophy have taken shelter in other lands; faith has lost her grip; even the spirit of Islâm, in which the Muslim lived and died, is fast waning in our midst. Nowhere has this fall been so complete as in this Presidency. We are hopelessly fallen, and have managed to forget our glorious history and the lofty ideals of Islâm. Our ideal has no longer the same charm for us. Our history does no longer animate us to the same spirit of world activity. If ever a people stood in need of human sympathies and co-operation, of Government aid and patronage, it is we, the Mussalmans of Bengal. Poor in education, lost in power, shut out from all legitimate and noble vocations of life by force of circumstances and stress of competition, and, lastly, reduced to the lowest stage of penury, we find ourselves hopelessly lost in the battle of life. And all this is due to our want of proper training and education."

*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.