

Confidential.

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Nov. 1st = 19th Safar (2nd mo.)

Nov. 13th = 1st Rabi'ul-Awwal, 1339, A.H.

The Rhymed Couplet in Sacred Narrative.

SOME months ago, when writing to News and Notes on the question of 'A Life of Jesus' for the Muslims of Bengal, Mr. Takle remarked on the popularity of the *puthi* in that province, and suggested that a somewhat similar style of writing might with advantage be employed here and there in a vernacular translation of the proposed 'Life.'

There is much in the suggestion to commend it to those who are anxious that a more popular account of the life of our Lord should quickly gain a footing amongst the simpler folk of India.

We of course, can only speak of the Muslims of Bengal, yet it may be that the state of things here obtains in other parts as well. The main facts in the situation as we find it in Bengal are these:—

1. The *puthi* type of literature is composed, for the most part, in doggerel such as children love—and what, after all, are millions of the people of India but children, at least in mind. The lines are in the form of the rhymed couplet, very crude at times it must be admitted, but exercising nevertheless a wonderful charm for such minds. We have caught the *khidmatgár* on the back verandah with such a book in his hands, reading it in the customary sing-song fashion with a look of unmistakable delight on his face. One is led inevitably to think also of the astonishing hold which Tulsí Das' popular rendering of the *Rámáyan* has on millions of simple-minded Hindus in North India.

2. This style of writing is very frequently employed in the preparation of books for the common people, on religious history and teaching. For instance the popular version of the far-famed *Qusús-ul-Anbiya* is, in Bengal, produced in this style. Another widely-read book of this nature is one entitled *Mufid-ul-Islám*, with its detailed and vivid descriptions of Heaven and Hell. The language is not exactly Bengali, for it has a strong admixture of Arabic and Persian terms which, for the most part, are tortured into taking a Bengali form.

3. These books, though produced at the lowest possible price in consideration of their size, are printed as a rule in large, clear type, which in itself is a great gain for untutored eyes and for folk who can do little more than read their own vernacular.

There can be, one ventures to think, little doubt that if we were carefully to prepare some such *puṭhī* containing the main story of the life of Jesus, and put it on the market at a low figure, it would have a ready sale. The little book of which we wrote two months ago, viz. 'The Master Man,' might, after treatment, be done (in whole or in part) very effectively into this popular style.

It remains to add one further remark upon these *puṭhīs*. While we delay in the matter of preparing this 'Life,' or, with the unfamiliar style of our ordinary translation of the gospels, fail to capture the imagination of the simpler Muslims, they are reading accounts of Isá in these very *puṭhīs* which, following the lead of the Qur'an itself in this respect, give them altogether false notions about our Lord. It makes one positively sad to reflect that they really believe some of the puerile stories of Isá to be found therein, whereas we might be giving them, in a literary form they love, an entrancing story of Jesus, the Friend of little children and sinful men, the One like Whom no man ever spake, the Great Physician, the Vanquisher of Death, the Saviour of men.

As it is multitudes of them have learnt from the Qusús-ul-Anbiyá, as we show below, that Jesus was just a good Muslim!

We have, for the purposes of this note, attempted a translation in a similar doggerel, of the *puṭhī* expansion of the words Jesus is supposed to have uttered from the cradle. (cf. Qur'an Chap. XIX, vv. 31-34).

Said the Prophet Isá } 'Allah's slave I am I,
 Allah'll give the Injil through me } from His heaven on high.
 He is going to make of me } a prophet for this time,
 Such will be His favour to me } through His grace sublime.
 On me has He enjoined } his commands most proper,
 Alms² have I to give } and my prayers³ to offer.
 For as many days as } in this world I live,
 To the commands of Allah } attention I must give.
 Obedience to my mother } I will always show,
 Give offence to no one } never strike a blow.
 On the day that I was } born into this race,
 The salám of Allah } rested on my face;
 It will also be my portiou } when I join the dead,
 And in the day that I shall rise } from out my earthy bed.

We shall be grateful if members will contribute their views on this subject.

L. B. J.

1banda. 2zakat. 3namaz.

Impressions of Islam.

By L. J. EGERTON SMITH, S.C.F.

(Continued)

ISLAM is a great equaliser of persons. The wealthy merchant and the "hawal" from the streets stand side by side. The shopkeeper and the aristocrat bow together in worship. Only the Sultan worships aloof in his Maafil, for he is the Khalif of all the Mussulmans, or such is his pretentious claim. As a preacher myself, I have always envied the opportunity of the priest, when, the service of worship at an end, he gathers a circle of listeners round him, and, sitting there together, he admonishes them concerning the faith. And the immediate response given to his points, the signified assent, sometimes the quick laugh of approval, reveal that he is entirely *en rapport* with his audience.

The Mohammedan makes no apology for his faith. It is a part of his daily life. Nor, so far as I can judge, does he love to pray that he may be seen of men. Quietly, unostentatiously, does he withdraw from the crowd, and, spreading his prayer-carpet towards Mecca, performs his devotions. I have seen the sailor on his ship, the dealer among his merchandise, the traveller with his coach stayed by the wayside, the labourer in the fields, the beggar on the streets, all oblivious to men and things, praying to the great God. The midday service for business men may almost be said to be the normal thing in Moslem lands. And in all this I have thought we have much to learn. I remember pulling up my car outside a shop under the very shadow of St. Sophia and calling out an inquiry to the shopkeeper standing in his doorway, and impatiently repeating my request because he seemed to ignore my presence. It was then I saw he was at prayer. I shall bear for many days the silent reproof of that act.

But what of the ethical power of Islam in the lives of its adherents? Of that I cannot speak because of the natural reserve of the Moslem in all matters of religion. So far as the general results are concerned, they are open to the world. Perhaps I may quote Professor Millingen. He cites the remark of an intelligent Mohammedan to a Christian friend :

Christianity is perhaps the best religion, but it is too high for frail human beings. Therefore God, in His mercy, has given us another religion, Islam, which, if not so lofty as yours, is more easy of attainment and practice.

What they do not see is that the whole question is one of dynamic. Islam has none. This may be said, that the Moslem faith inspires its people to many beautiful deeds of human kindness. Whether almsgiving is motivated by the desire to purify the soul and secure pre-eminence in paradise, as some assert, at any rate it is true that a benevolent spirit lightens the lot of the poor and needy. It is

a common sight to see a well-dressed Turk cross the road to thrust a few piastres in the hand of some pitiable specimen of humanity.

Inevitably one sizes up the missionary problem in relation to Islam. It is a tremendous task. Did Paul come to-day I am persuaded he would adopt such methods as he employed at Athens: "I perceive that in all things ye are very religious." It is the fuller revelation of God that Islam needs. Islam fosters seriousness, calm, the dignified acceptance of the inevitable, but it would be an incalculable gain if there were added to these things the loyal, joyous co-operation of the soul of men in the work of God. For the Musulman has no joy in his religion.

There are deficiencies in Islam. These are obvious. The absolute submission to God which it inculcates, because it is submission to a deity whose chiefest revelation has been rejected, tends to sap the energy of the soul and produce a blind, unreasoning fatalism. It offers no Saviour to men. It has no message of redeeming love. But I can never escape the conviction that if Islam accepted Christ it would be the greatest power in the world. At its best, Islam is a spiritual worship, and it is only fair to judge it at its best.

A Message for Muslims.

George Adam Smith on Isaiah Ch. i. has this suggestive note:—That God should argue at all is the magnificent truth on which our attention must fasten.....God reasons with man—that is the first article of religion according to Isaiah. Revelation is not magical, but rational and moral. Religion is reasonable intercourse between one intelligent Being and another. - God works upon man first through conscience.

Over against the prophetic view of religion sprawls and reeks in this same chapter the popular—religion as smoky sacrifice, assiduous worship, and ritual. The people to whom the chapter was addressed were not idolaters.....In this hour of extreme danger the people are waiting on Jehovah with great pains and cost of sacrifice. They pray, they sacrifice, they solemnize to perfection. But they do not *know*, they do not *consider*; this is the burden of their offence. To use a better word, they do not *think*.....In all their worship conscience is asleep, and they are drenched in wickedness. Isaiah puts their life in an epigram—*wickedness and worship*.

Moslems in Turkey Waiting for the Christian Church to Act.

JAMES L. BARTON, D.D.

It was my privilege during the last few months to travel widely across Asia Minor, Anatolia, through Armenia, Syria and Mesopotamia. I was everywhere impressed with what seemed to be the breaking up of old Moslem conservatism, which was so marked thirty years ago. Mohammedan officials of all ranks declared that the atrocities that had so shocked the civilized world were due to Moslem fanaticism, accompanied by crass ignorance. They all plead for more missionaries and more missionary institutions. Their thoughts apparently were centered upon educational institutions, but they well know that a missionary educational institution is Christian, teaching Christianity to all its pupils. Everywhere there is manifest a spirit of intense dissatisfaction with things as they are, and a willingness to lay aside prejudice against the preacher of Christianity.

Mohammedans who have been secretly reading the New Testament, are beginning openly to make profession of their belief in Christ. I had a long conversation with an influential Hodja, who, through private study of the gospels and occasional conference with a Christian missionary, had taken his stand openly for Christ. Mohammedans of high rank tried to persuade him to deny Christ and return to Islam, arguing that unless he recanted all the Mohammedans of his city and of the surrounding towns would become Christians. In September he had gathered about him a group of Mohammedans among whom he had formed an inquirers' class. They had got together a group of Mohammedan Christians who formed what they called a Christian Church, and through a delegate to the Mission Conference in October asked that their Church be recognized by the Mission. One or two of their number have already applied for special theological training in order to prepare for evangelistic work among their own people, and while the Turkish authorities are aroused, the good work goes on.

Another indication of this movement is in the increased number of Mohammedan pupils in Christian schools. I myself visited a school and spoke to the students where out of nearly two hundred young men in the room over one-half were Mohammedans. The responsibility upon the school management to give these pupils adequate Christian instruction is exceedingly great.

In a word, the field of the old Ottoman Empire is ready to be entered. Kurds in the eastern part of Asia Minor plead that work should be begun among them. The Governor of M. himself a Kurd, joined in the plea that in the missionary work of the future his people should not be neglected. Anyone who has known the Kurd in his native haunts recognizes the inherent strength of the race, and the mighty possibilities if only they can be brought to Christ.

From a bulletin of the A. C. L. S. M.

Notes on the Muslim Calendar.

REV. AHMAD SHAH.

Rabí-'ul-Awwal.

THE chief superiority of Rabí-'ul-awwal over other Islamic months is that Mohammed was born in this month. Therefore it behoves every Mohammedan that he should, in appreciation of the stupendous divine obligation in the form of the prophet's advent in the world, according to the best of his ability keep the behests and commandments of the law in mind, give adequate expression to his joy, participate in the meetings held to commemorate the anniversary of the birth of Mohammed, read the "Durud" incessantly, and distribute money and cloths to orphans and the needy.

The Mohammedans of every town generally hold a public meeting with great pomp and show in celebration of Mohammed's birthday, and invite some devoted scholars and eloquent preachers to relate the excellence and virtues of Mohammed; but they do not keep in mind the etiquette that is fitting to the hearing of discourses on such a theme, nor do they take care to see that none of the audience does anything unseemly or unbecoming. It is deplorable that the modern educated but voluptuous Mohammedans have reduced such functions into occasions for the gratification of their sensual passions. Consequently attractive singers who are themselves the very incarnation of falsehood and wickedness are selected for carolling the Nativity song. A deal of extravagance and show are indulged in to give pomp to the meetings, whereas the rite of narrating the life of Mohammed is wilfully neglected. The gathering is simply degraded into a place for the recitation of eulogistic poems. Stories and anecdotes are recounted which are purely fictitious. Such false allusions and references are made, that, far from augmenting love for the prophet, positively provoke in the minds of the hearers, especially of the young men, unwholesome suggestions.

With regard to the day of the birth of Mohammed there is a difference of opinion, but in Mohammedan dominions the 13th day is celebrated as the festival of the birthday of Mohammed. The people of Mekka also observe this day. On this day the birth-place of Mohammed is visited.

'The Moslem World,' January Number, 1921.

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NOTICE.

The Nile Mission Press, Cairo, Egypt, will be glad to furnish Missionaries in India who are in touch with Moslems conversant with the Arabic language, with a sample package of tracts and booklets together with catalogue. Address correspondence to Dr. S. M. Zwemer, 14 Sharia abu Sebaa, Cairo, Egypt.

‘Notes on the Bible.’

BY REV. W. HOOPER, D.D., C.M.S., MUSSOORIE, N. INDIA.

Published by C.L.S., Madras; 374 pp., price 4/8/-

ALL who know the veteran Dr. Hooper, his honourable career and ripe scholarship, will welcome this volume of ‘Notes,’ while regretting that it may be, as he himself thinks, his ‘last written contribution, at least in English, to the edification of his fellow-Christians.’ For all that Dr. Hooper gives out is good. He is essentially a teacher. Old students of his will find his well-known love for preciseness peeping out again and again in these pages. But that which will make the volume more valuable still is his manifest love for the Sacred Scriptures, and his characteristic desire to place at the service of others the fruit of his long-continued and painstaking studies of the Bible. In saying this one is reminded also of the debt we owe him for his excellent notes on the Hindustani language. Concerning the present work he says, ‘It is just a collection of ‘notes,’ which have occurred to me from time to time for many years, and which, as I believe and hope, may be useful to many others, as they have been to myself.’ Some of these notes were first given to his divinity students in the eighties in Allahabad, others again more recently at Bible readings in Mussoorie.

There is little or no attempt at sequence in the 103 sections in which the various topics are treated. This has an obvious advantage, since the reader can choose at will any subject that may attract him.

Dr. Hooper uses the Revised Version (except in cases where, in his opinion, his own rendering of the original is more correct) because he unhesitatingly believes it to be, on the whole, *far better* than the authorized. ‘Higher criticism,’ however, does not come within his scope.

We may notice as illustrative of the kind of subjects treated, the following:—

God’s Self-revelations; Progressive Revelation; Retrogression; Fore-shadowings of Christ in the O.T; Nationalism and Universalism; Attraction and Repulsion; Qibla; Zeal and Jealousy; Trusting God in O.T; Mystery; Anthropomorphism; The Will of God; The aspects and objects of Christ’s Death; God’s Image; Calling to oneself, and Taking to oneself; Children and Sons; The Ascension of Christ; Texts misquoted, misinterpreted, mis-applied.

Not the least valuable part of the work put into these notes results from Dr. Hooper’s investigations into the various shades of meaning to be found in the original terms used in the Hebrew and Greek texts, and the different uses to which the same terms are put.

By way of indicating the author’s more common method of procedure we quote his prefatory note to a study of the six passages in Scripture which speak of ‘walking with God.’

“‘To walk’ is used in almost countless places in the Bible (as it is in ordinary speech) in the general sense of spending one’s life; of all the various activities, outward and inward alike, alone and with others equally, which every conscious person unavoidably passes through. ‘To walk with God’ is, therefore, to go through all this in companionship with Him, realising His presence with one.

This involves (1) *talking* to Him (for who ever deliberately walks with a person without talking to him?) *i.e.*, telling Him all that comes into one’s mind, in short making a *confidant* of Him; (2) *listening* to what He says, whether in reply to our talk, or otherwise; for though He loves to hear one talk, we miss a great deal by not listening to what He would say to us; (3) *subordination* to Him, for the phrase is not of God walking with us (though in a sense this is true), but of our walking with Him; *i.e.*, we must ascertain the way by which He walks, and walk with Him in it; and not expect Him to come and walk with us in our own self-chosen way.”

The notes will prove a valuable aid to preacher and teacher alike.

L.B.J.

N.B.—The book is obtainable at C.L.S., 35, John St., Bedford Row, London, W.C.1.

All profits go to the C.L.S.

For Praise and Prayer.

1. Let us praise God for the opening up of Asia Minor to the Christian Missionary; for the eagerness of the Kurds to participate in the benefits of missionary enterprise. (v. p. 153.)
2. Let us pray for God’s blessing on the work of Missionaries to Muslims who are now on furlough addressing the home churches on the needs of Muslims.
3. Let us pray that many in the homelands will hear the call to preach Christ to the Muslims and rise up and obey.
4. Prayer is asked for two Mohammadan families in the Punjab.

NEW MEMBER

31. REV. YOEAN MASIH, PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN INDIA, INDORE.

The annual subscription to the League is Rs. 2-8-0 (about 5s. od. English). News and requests for prayer are always welcome and should be sent as early as possible to the Hon. Secretary :

Rev. L. Bevan Jones,
Baptist Mission,
Dacca, Bengal.

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