

THE POSSIBILITY AND JOY OF PERSONAL WORK AMONG MOSLEMS

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A PROMINENT Moslem convert in Egypt and worker among Moslems says that even within the last ten or fifteen years a remarkable change has taken place in the attitude of Moslems towards Christian truth. There was a time when almost every Moslem refused with scorn even to listen to the Gospel message. This was followed by a period when most Moslems met the presentation of the Gospel with open hostility, debating at every opportunity; but, at the present time, most of those whom he meets are ready to listen to the Word, if not with eagerness, yet with respect and tolerance. There is no doubt that there is more freedom and a greater possibility of personal work among Moslems than ever before. It is also my conviction, as a result of experience in itinerating work on the Nile boat, that the majority of Moslems personally invited to hear the Gospel messages, as presented in the churches, schools, and other places, would like to do so were it not for the difficulty in overcoming prejudices, and especially of being criticised by their fellow Moslems. This being the case, it presents to the Christian a wonderful possibility of doing personal work for the spiritual welfare of the Moslems,—the possibility of tactfully approaching them with the Gospel and of making it easy for them to hear the truth,—the possibility of bearing personal witness to the truth.

During the itinerating work of the past year, there were countless opportunities of giving personal invitations to Moslems to come and listen to the Word of life. Verses from the Bible have been printed and distributed to all, regardless of religious belief, and at the same time word has been given to a great many Moslems to attend. The result of such personal invitations has been very encouraging. Meetings, at which quite a number of Moslems have attended, were held in most of the Protestant churches of Upper Egypt. Similar meetings have also been held in Coptic churches. Frequently, meetings were held in school buildings, in Christian homes, in the store and work-shop, in the flour mill and by the river-side, sometimes on the street and on the Nile boat. Often 20, 30, 40, even 70 or more Moslems, besides a large number of Christians, attended these meetings. Undoubtedly there was no place where such work was done and invitations given without some Moslems attending. Once, two Moslems, one wearing the green turban, guided the missionary through the town, inviting everybody. Many came to the meeting, which was held about eleven o'clock Friday morning. Knowing that the Moslems wished to attend prayers at the mosque at noon, the speaker promised to inform them when it drew near the noon hour. He did so, and what

was his surprise when nearly half of the audience arose and left. He had no idea that there were so many Moslems present, and doubtless all these came in response to the personal invitation. In another place, in an audience of seventy-five, seventy were Moslems. Although an opportunity was given to all to leave after the first sermon, yet the most of them remained to hear the second discourse. On one occasion after communion service, which was held in a flour mill, the missionary went to the home of one of the church members for dinner. Three of the five who ate with him around the dinner table were Moslems. One said to the host, "I am going to eat with this man whether you allow me or not." Another of these, a Moslem sheikh, rode to a neighbouring town in the afternoon to hear a second Gospel discourse. A native Christian telephoned to the Moslem postmaster in the next town to be sure to attend the meeting to be held there. There was an open square in the town just beside the post-office. Being a suitable place for a meeting, the postmaster brought chairs, benches, and a light, and the first meeting was held in the open. He, with many other Moslems and Christians, attended the meeting, held a little later in the school near by. A visit to the *omdi*, or mayor, of a town has, on a number of occasions, been the means of his coming to the meeting. Often as a result of a friendly visit to the Government, Moslem, or other schools, a number of the Moslems and Christians have come. It is not at all uncommon for one or more Moslems to come to the boat for a special talk, or for tracts, or a book.

There are wonderful possibilities of work among Moslems by showing the Christ-like love, which means self-denying love—love under trial and provocation. The greatest need of the Moslem world to-day is the Christ love. There is a terrible lack of love, sympathy, and compassion on the part of Christians towards their Moslem neighbours. Without this love Christ never intended to win Moslems, and without it, it is impossible for the Church of Christ to win them. It is wonderful how it disarms prejudice and wins a hearing. This may often be shown by the manner in which the invitation is given. If for any reason, as often happens, a Christian objects to your inviting a Moslem, give the Moslem another invitation, and show him that you would be especially glad to have him present, and to bring his friends with him. It is often a great joy to see the smile light up his countenance as he sees the Christian love, which is extended to all alike, and makes no distinction of persons. Such personal invitations, given in large towns and villages, never fail to bring Moslems as well as others. When we remember how difficult it is for a Moslem to enter a Christian Church, and that frequently, when he comes to the door, he refuses to enter until he receives the second invitation, one realizes the importance of showing that love, which dispels fear, and makes him feel that he has a right to listen to the message. If this is accomplished, he generally listens very attentively, being deeply impressed with the Word, which is so new to him.

This attitude should also be shown in private conversation with individuals, and in our prayer with them and for them. We should remember them by name, often requesting the same blessings for them that we desire for others, remembering that there are only two classes of men before God, the saved and the unsaved, the good and the bad. This love should also shine forth throughout all the preaching service. We should seek to show the heinousness of sin in the sight of God, the depravity of the soul, man's utter helplessness and lost condition, and

the great need of salvation, and point to the Saviour, who is not only able but longs to cleanse from all sin. Interruptions may come and questions may be asked, for which a courteous reception is necessary. The right of individuals to ask questions should be acknowledged, and an opportunity given to confer privately at a subsequent time. At the beginning of the service, it is often well to acknowledge and express pleasure at their presence, to allow them perfect freedom to stand or sit during prayer, and to thank them at the close of the meeting for coming. If the loving personal touch is shown, we are not only doing personal work, but are ever increasing the possibility of doing more.

There is also great joy in personal work for this needy people. The more one shows of love and interest in the spiritual welfare of the Moslem brethren, the more he longs to show. It becomes a part of his prayer and very life. The difficulties met seem only to quicken, strengthen, and deepen his love for their highest good. His faith in this work grows, and the hope for the future becomes bright. Perhaps the greatest need of Christians in Moslem lands to-day is to begin to do something definite for the spiritual good of the Moslems, neighbours in the name, and for the sake of the blessed Lord and Saviour, and to persevere in it. During the past year, one of the prominent Protestant pastors in Egypt rose during the Annual Prayer Conference, and promised that by the grace of God he would speak to a number of Moslems each month about spiritual things. This was rather remarkable, for only two years before the same pastor arose and confessed his lack of faith in the conversion of Moslems, and asked the members of the conference to pray that he might have faith in that. Just recently it was the writer's privilege to visit him, and found him greatly encouraged and rejoicing in his experiences. He had spoken to many Moslems, among them judges, lawyers, merchants, and others. On trains he had sometimes gone from one compartment to another in order to get an opportunity to converse with Moslems on religious subjects. He had also had the opportunity of speaking at some special meetings, at which a number of Moslems were present. He remarked, "I think I shall never lose faith again in the work for Moslems." Another pastor, who has passed through a similar experience, has taken a deep interest in helping a Moslem who wished to become a Christian, to overcome difficulties and receive special instruction in the Word. Through his influence, the inquirer was taken from a neighbouring town, provided with a home, and carefully instructed in the way of salvation, and after a few months received into the church. There was joy in the heart of the pastor and church members on that occasion. There is no doubt that definite, persevering, personal work on the part of Christians in general will bring joy and a great change in the attitude toward the great problem of reaching Moslems.

How great is the possibility, and how many are the opportunities for personal work among Moslems! There is the opportunity of paying and receiving friendly visits, the opportunity of inviting and accompanying them to religious services. During the past year a Moslem merchant, while visiting his Christian partner in business, attended preaching services night after night for a period of forty days. Another did the same during his visit of a week or more. There are also opportunities of visiting them in the time of sorrow, of giving a tract or book in the name of the Master, in showing the Christ-like character in the daily contact with them in business and public life, and often

of delivering the Gospel message at an opportune time. While talking with two Egyptian workers who had been assisting in the personal effort to reach Moslems, one of them said, "This work requires great faith, great boldness, and the fulness of the Holy Spirit," and shall we not add above all great love. Yet when we think for a moment of the possibility of becoming a help and a blessing to the Moslems of the world, when we think of the Pentacostal joy of bearing personal witness to Christ even in the midst of trials and persecution, when we think of the blessed results of personal work, and when we think of the marvellous love of Christ for each one of us and for each one of them should we not be encouraged to go forward in this glorious work assured that the Word of the Lord will not return unto Him void.

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