

EDUCATION AND EVANGELIZATION IN PERSIA

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ARE we reaching Moslems in our educational work here in Persia, and with what results? Before we discuss what might be accomplished, we must understand clearly the present status of our work and try to grasp the significance of the opportunity already ours. In order to get the necessary information a set of questions was sent out to missionaries engaged in educational work in Persia, and answers were received from thirteen schools, as follows: Boys' and Girls' Schools of Urumia, Tabriz, Resht, Teheran, Hamadan; Boys' Schools of Doulatabad and Yezd; and Girls' School of Ispahan.

From the data so kindly given by busy men and women we find that for the school year 1911-1912, at least 1,000 Moslem boys and girls were enrolled in these thirteen schools. Figures for previous years were not so accessible, but from those at hand we believe that the total increase in the last five years has been *more* than 100 per cent. Educational work for Moslems in Persia in its present proportions is, therefore, a very recent development; this should not be forgotten in judging results.

What inducement do we offer Moslems to attend our Christian schools? The inducement of a *good education*, and we ask them to pay for it. The per cent. of free pupils varies from 0 per cent. in the Doulatabad School (which, of course, was opened under exceptional circumstances) to 100 per cent. in the Hamadan Girls' School, but the average per cent. of free pupils for all schools works out at a little less than 33½ per cent. Out of 1,000 Moslem pupils, nearly 700 are paying for tuition sums varying from two to twenty-five krans per month, to attend Christian schools.

Moslems are paying money to attend schools which

do not recognize Friday as a holy day. Only three of the thirteen schools are closed all day Friday. Three more give a half-holiday on Friday. Seven schools are closed on Saturday and Sunday and pay no attention whatever to Friday.

Moslems are also paying money to attend schools where they are required to study the Bible. In all our schools the Bible is taught ; usually in the vernacular by natives in the lower classes, in English by the missionaries in the higher classes—one school even has the Bible in French for one class. Only three schools report opposition or bigotry in regard to the Bible lessons, and this is said to wear off rapidly. In most schools the Bible lesson is popular or accepted without question as part of the curriculum.

The Boarding Schools alone require attendance on the Sunday services. The total number of other students attending of their own free will is very small.

Everyone readily admits the immense service rendered the community by a Christian school, in overcoming fanaticism and prejudice, in civilizing and uplifting the people, in making friends for the cause of Christ and the ultimate triumph of religious liberty. But that is not the highest ideal for Christian mission schools ; we must work *primarily* for converts, for souls for the Lord Jesus Christ. The number of baptized converts reported of those who have graduated or left our schools is less than twenty. The number of those not baptized but believed to have gone out Christians is about the same. More encouraging is the fact that several schools report little bands of believers among the present students with more genuine interest than ever before. But to me these numbers seem *pitifully small*. Granted that "numbers are not everything," granted that the whole educational work is a recent development, granted that there is no religious liberty, granted that up to now many of our pupils have been irregular and stayed with us but a short time—granted all this, I still maintain that the numbers of converts has been *pitifully few*, far less than we have the *right to expect*. "Is the arm of the Lord shortened that He cannot save ?" Is a Moslem child too hard a

proposition for the Saviour of nations ? Not one of us would admit such a thing. These Moslem children belong to Jesus Christ Who died for them. If they do not recognize His claims the fault is not His, we may be sure of that ; the trouble is with *us*, in our spirit or in our methods, or in our lack of faith and prayer.

Broadly speaking, the school offers all the evangelistic opportunities of church services, only a hundred times enlarged and intensified. What is the purpose of a sermon ? To teach God's truth about salvation from sin in this life, every day, as well as in the great life to come ; to persuade men to accept this salvation. What is the use of a sermon *every* Sunday ? To repeat the truth and reiterate the invitation. Now, if you could repeat the truth to these same people every day and make every influence around them an invitation to Jesus Christ, or a steady training in His service, would it not be worth while ? Eminently so. Well, that is what our Christian schools in Persia *must be*, places where every day the Truth is taught and every influence is an invitation to Jesus Christ. The opportunity is unparalleled because the material is young and plastic, as yet unformed, and the influence can be steadily exerted through a period of years. At any cost and by whatever means, the school must be thoroughly Christian in spirit and atmosphere.

Let us now consider some of the special features which make the school an evangelistic agency.

1. *Morning Prayers.*

In getting together all pupils, little and big, for the morning exercises, day after day, we have a permanent congregation on whom to impress the truth. The leader should try to make the exercises wide-awake, reverent and to the point. Prayer and the Bible should have prominent place. In some schools the Gospels are read responsively by students and teacher. In others, and this seems better, they are read and explained by the teacher. Or the missionary makes use of selected portions of Scripture which emphasize some particular truth. In Resht last spring, Mr. Schuler read the Book of Acts at morning prayers and commented on all passages referring

to the Holy Spirit. He "thought any Behai pupils would seriously contemplate leaving either Behaism or the school before he finished the book." In Teheran, we have found it helpful to have the girls memorize the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, the thirteenth chapter of 1st Corinthians and several Psalms, and to make the recitation of these selections a part of the morning exercises. There is a difference of opinion in regard to the use of the Lord's Prayer, but I do not see any reason why Moslem children should not be taught to use it reverently.

2. *The Bible Lesson.*

Here is the choicest opportunity for evangelization—the teaching of God's Word, day after day, to young impressionable hearts. To the little ones, the Bible should be taught as to little children at home—the sweet, simple stories of Jesus their Saviour, till they come naturally to speak of Him as Our Lord Jesus Christ, and to associate everything pure and lovely with Him. They should be led to give their hearts and lives to Him and to be practical Christians, just as little children at home are led to Him. Islam should be ignored. In all the lower grades memory work is of great importance, the children drilled in word and meaning, for in after days these Bible verses and chapters will doubtless return to their minds and hearts and bear fruit. In the writer's opinion there is no class in the whole school so important or so precious an opportunity as the Bible work in the Primary Department.

In the higher grades the work should be kept in the vernacular as long as possible, and when the study goes into English the Bible lesson must not be sacrificed.

Native Christians can often teach the Bible more effectively than a missionary, but their work should be carefully supervised lest they fall into ruts or hammer perpetually on a few pet doctrines.

Have we in our Bible classes laid our greatest emphasis on the need of a *new heart*, and have we persistently taught that Jesus the Sinless One alone can give the new heart? It is easier merely to teach Bible stories or the history of

the Hebrew people ; we need to remember that a crucified Lord is the heart of the Gospel we have come to bring.

One of the trying features of our school work in past years has been the irregularity of Moslem pupils, many coming a short time and then dropping out, a large proportion of most of our schools, year by year, thus being made up of *new* pupils. But now that attendance is more regular and continuous we need to work out our Bible course with great care and thought. A course for Moslems requires something different from what we would offer Christians. It is a sad fact that a Moslem, as well as other people, may get an amazing knowledge of the mysteries of Christianity, without having them touch his own soul. To what extent shall we teach the Bible to unbelievers ? How shall we arrange our course to lift up Christ most perfectly ? What place shall we give to text-books in Ethics or Fundamentals of Christianity ? Even in Persia conditions in different schools vary so widely that it is unlikely we could all adopt the same course, but an ideal course of study might be worked out by some of our most experienced teachers, and this would be a guide to the rest of us.

Probably no influence of our schools is more strongly felt in the homes or bears more fruit in the families of our pupils, than the Bible lesson. We frequently hear of pupils reading the Bible to members of their households or relatives, and perhaps the father or brother takes the book to read for himself. This is another reason why our Bible work is supremely important, and it demands supreme consideration in the arrangement and adjustment of all our school work.

3. *Practical Demonstration of Christianity.*

Third in the list of evangelistic opportunities in educational work, but scarcely second to any other in importance, let us place the practical demonstration of Christianity, given day by day, by Christian teachers and scholars in a Christian school. It may not be the loftiest motive imaginable for a scholar to wish to become a Christian because he admires or loves his Christian teacher, but shame be on us, if the life we live is not one

to be desired by every young life that touches ours. "What you *are* speaks so loud I cannot hear what you *say*," are the familiar words of Emerson. It would be pitiable indeed if all our Bible teaching were drowned out by unworthy action or unlovely life on the part of us who have come to preach the Gospel. But if every day and all day Christian men and women are living before their pupils, the Gospel of patience and love and sacrifice and victory over sin which we teach, surely there can be no more effective way of preaching Christ than this—without it certainly all other preaching is vain. Every class gives opportunity for witnessing for Christ and for showing the every-day application of Christianity. Courtesy and fairness toward all our students, *absolute honesty* in all our dealings with them, count for a great deal. No preference or partiality toward Christian students is one way of lessening the commercial estimate of Christianity and a powerful way of demonstrating its high standards of justice. The boy who said to Mr. Jordan in Teheran, "I will become a Christian if you will give me a diploma," was soon made to understand that a Christian school could not do things that way and a diploma could not buy allegiance to Christ. Christianity stands out white and shining when scholars understand that it means love and truth and justice to all men.

4. *Personal Work.*

Here is our great weakness, especially in our larger schools. We are so burdened with the weight of administration or the routine of teaching that outside of school hours we have little time or strength for personal work with our pupils. Now most of the work and life of the schoolroom is like seed-sowing and watering. The essential thing is to *gather the harvest* for which we have worked. God alone gives the increase, but to get the best results the gardener must give individual attention to individual plants, and the finest fruits are hand-picked. I have no patience with the man or woman who looks a bit dubious when boys and girls love their missionary teacher, or who says that the love of these young disciples

for Christ is but worship of the creature. I do not believe that any true missionary will take to himself any of the devotion or honour which belongs to Jesus Christ. On the other hand, did anyone ever help or inspire *you* whom you did not love or admire? Children cannot be nagged or preached into the kingdom of heaven—they must be *loved* into it. There is no place in a mission school for a teacher who does not love his pupils or is not loved by them—the two go together.

There are no rules for personal work: its scope and character depend entirely on circumstances and individuals. Three things, however, are absolutely necessary—the leading of the Holy Spirit, a genuine love for the life you want to claim for Christ, and thirdly, a whole lot of common-sense. Dozens of natural ways for a friendly talk will suggest themselves—a special appointment to discuss school work, a walk outside the city, a social cup of tea in your own rooms with a pile of photographs afterwards, or some service sought by you like a letter written in Persian, or a bit of translation. Conversation does not always lead up to vital themes and sometimes it is hard to make the necessary break, but the direct method is not without its advantages. A few questions may provoke a spirit of inquiry, like—“Just what is your religious belief? You have a good mind; now that you have studied the Bible, don’t you see that either you or I must be mistaken? Have you honestly asked the Holy Spirit to guide you into the Truth?” Or, “You are doing well in your studies, but you know these are not the supreme thing in life. A new heart is what we need most.” Or again, “You are my *friend*, I want to share my best with you.” It is not very difficult to say, “Are you willing we should pray together before you go?” Sometimes appeal can be made through a frank confession of one’s own sin and failure, of one’s own struggles to overcome and of help received and victory won through Jesus Christ. If you think it is a little too much to ask a missionary to confess his faults to an insignificant school boy or an indifferent Moslem girl, try it and see if it doesn’t bring a blessing, at least to your own heart. There is danger that a missionary may,

all unconsciously, build a little throne of self-esteem, where he sits and deals out the Bread of Life in loaves of his own fashioning. We need to get down on the floor of a common need and not give but *share* the Bread that has satisfied our own soul-hunger. Perhaps it hurts "to take our hearts in our hands," but there can never be any great harvest of souls in Persia, till you and I are ready to pour out all that we have and are, boundlessly, lavishly, regardless of the cost.

The great thing about personal work is *to do it*. Undoubtedly we shall make some mistakes, but we shall lose less through mistakes than through inaction. I do not believe any word spoken frankly and lovingly is absolutely lost. Can we say we have done our whole duty until we have personally invited every scholar in our schools to be a Christian?

Perhaps someone asks, "*Dare we do it?*" O friends, with God's guidance we dare do *anything* He bids! I believe more and more in being absolutely straightforward with Moslems. Not every place enjoys the same measure of religious toleration as we have in Teheran, and yet a few years ago should we have dared to say as we often say now, "Khanum, you know that we teach the Bible in this school. Aren't you afraid that if you place your daughter with us she will become a Christian?" Or, "You know that in this school we teach that the way of life is in Jesus Christ. If you are not willing that your child should become a Christian, you had better not send her." Or again, "I tell you frankly that it is my hope and prayer that all these girls may become Christians." A few years ago a missionary in Resht was called before the magistrate. "We hear that you have been inviting Moslems to become Christians," said the official. "It is true," said the missionary. "Whom do you invite?" asked the official. "I invite you, Sir," was the prompt reply, and the official gave no more trouble. It is my deep conviction that whenever it is possible (and it is more often possible than we think) a frank statement of our purpose instead of creating prejudice, kills prejudice.

5. *The Moslem Convert in School.*

The Mission schools of many countries are primarily for Christian students or the children of converts, with a view to training Christian workers and leaders. As there is no Christian Persian community in this country, it is impossible for our schools to take this position at present. They must, therefore, be, primarily, evangelistic agencies for reaching Moslems and winning them to Christ. The Girls' School in Ispahan is the only one I know of which started with a nucleus of Christian Persian Girls, and these were orphans, taken in infancy. Our Christian teachers, Armenian and Persian, must be trained to do evangelistic work among the pupils. We must seek to deepen the spiritual life of our Armenian pupils, if we have any, and to awaken in them a sense of responsibility toward their Moslem school-mates. But let no one lose sight of the fact that when we have Christian Persian pupils, converts from Islam, there is nothing so important or imperative as the training of these young men and women, for *they* are to be the great evangelistic agency in winning Persia to Christ. Suppose there is just one convert in the school: first, unless we have some definite reason for doubting his sincerity, let us *believe* in him! It is possible to get into the fatal attitude of not believing in the sincerity of any native, "on general principles," so to speak. But isn't it better to be deceived a few times than perpetually to weaken our work by a lack of faith? Secondly, let us give our one Christian the most perfect fellowship we can, give him all the love and help and training in our power. There isn't any danger of "spoiling" a native, if spiritual things are kept uppermost in all our relationships.

And, finally, let us set our one convert to work. He must try to win another. When there are two there must be a real fellowship between them and regular times for meeting and instruction. As others are admitted and the fellowship widens, it must also deepen, and these young Christians must be encouraged to witness for Christ at home and in school and to try to win others to Him. They must have a meeting, wisely and lovingly directed, in which they can talk over their difficulties and pray

together for those they are seeking to win. No effort should be spared to ground them thoroughly in the faith. In Teheran, in the Girls' School this spring, the Christian Persian girls, some of whom were unable to attend a similar Sunday class, asked for a weekly meeting after school, where they might discuss the fundamentals of Christian belief and become better able to give a reason for the faith that is in them. A similar meeting was held for Teheran boys with great profit. We look forward to developing these meetings into training classes for Christian workers.

When our Christian students leave school we must follow them up and keep in touch with them definitely and systematically.

All these methods, however, are futile without the Holy Spirit. Our whole work, from start to finish, is dependent on Him for true success, and perhaps the great condition of His coming and working is preparation through *prayer*. Every bit of this great educational undertaking in Persia must rest on prayer, and day by day in every detail be laid before the Lord in prayer before we can expect His blessing. Have we failed to give time to this all-important part of our work? Have we given prayer the chief place in our efforts, making all else centre around it?

Our schools in Persia have been an influence for good in this country far greater than can ever be known or estimated. But we have not yet demonstrated that our educational work *is* a powerful *evangelistic* agency. The opportunity is ours; with the help of God we must use it. Let us rise and claim next year, not a few of those thousand students, but hundreds of them for Jesus Christ.

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