



A Program For Mesopotamia

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You cannot make a dead man alive by warming him. In fact you thus only hasten the process of putrefaction. You cannot make a corpse much more attractive by dressing it up in fine clothes, though you may be sure of spoiling the clothes. The Paris Conference cannot regenerate Mesopotamia. I am just as sanguine of what will be done there for Arabia as any man, and will be as loyal to any scheme of British mandate as John Bull himself. But no program can remake the Arab himself save a program which brings him into touch with the source of life. Such a program lies before me. It is a humble document, nine inches by four, which I typed myself. Yet if I can keep myself rigidly to that program, amid many distractions, I shall have done more for Mesopotamia than any man in Paris.

The document contains the schedule of the Boys' School, drawn up in ten columns, covering the branches taught in a ten-year course. However, of these ten columns only the sixth is really important. It outlines the process by which the pupil is brought face to face with Jesus Christ and is kept facing Him until his eyes are filled with Him and his head understands that His wisdom is the highest wisdom. The smallest boys receive a half-hour daily in Bible stories, beginning with the Old Testament. It is interesting to hear the eight-year-old son of a Bedouin sheikh give the story of Abraham's life. When he told of Ishmael's mocking the new-born heir he went into detail and improvised the exact terms in which Ishmael mocked. Some of the language was not chaste but it certainly was Ishmaelitic. David before Goliath also appeals to their imagination and the language with which the giant cursed David is more picturesque than edifying. It throws new light on the Bible to hear these truths after they have passed through the brain of these who are also sons of Abraham.

When they have thoroughly assimilated the idea of God, of His covenant relationship with man and of man's pitiable failure to live up to that covenant, they are introduced to the story as found in Matthew. Matthew is chosen for various reasons: first, because it was written specifically for the sons of Shem and is thus most easily grasped; second, because it contains so much that Islam recognizes with the added spiritual implications which Islam totally lacks, as for example, divorce, uncleanness, alms, prayer and fasting; third, because it contains the Beatitudes in a form most easily learned, as well as the Lord's Prayer. The study is intensive, and by means of maps and drawings the geography and terminology of the Gospel are thoroughly learned. Then follows a study of the Life of Christ in a series of two hundred and fifty questions with references to all the gospels. The whole object of this course is to present the whole Christ—an appallingly difficult task—not my idea of Christ, or my interpretation of Christ, or the theological implications of Christ, but Christ Himself. Try it yourself. Imagine yourself before a person

who knows nothing of the true Christ, or has at best a rudimentary acquaintance with Him. Then strip yourself of all theological formulæ, all doctrinal preferences, all controversial impulse, and center your efforts on presenting the Christ as He was, what He did, what He said, what the result was. I think you will find yourself tempted to use a large amount of Pauline terminology, and forget the fact that Paul was converted by a vision of Christ Himself, and only after his conversion did he write his epistles. I find that a convert reads Paul's epistles with relish and is edified thereby, but I have no experience here of a Moslem being thus brought to Christ. I have little experience in the American pulpit, but it is fair to assume that the naked soul of man is the same everywhere. It has brought me up standing to see how hard it is for me to present Christ Himself.

With Christ thus presented as the fit focus and fulfillment of revelation, the next step is an outline study of the whole Bible. The opening question is, "What cannot be learned about God from nature?" and the final answer elicited shows, what sin is and how to be saved therefrom. The Old Testament books are then studied in outline, and the unity in purpose of all, the Old Testament characters are reviewed and the life of Christ resurveyed, followed by a course in the Acts and a history of the spread of Christianity. The last course is in the Principles of Jesus, based on Speer's book, the object being the personal appeal to each boy.

How do the Moslems take all this? The answer thereto is the fact that the schools are fuller than ever before. A Moslem is quick to realize that the religious motive is the highest motive which can actuate a man. Though our activities are so unalterably anti-Islam, yet they recognize the cogency of the motive and respect us for our loyalty thereto. In fact, as they say, "Men khan Allah khan abdullah" (He who betrays God will betray man).

As a practical example of how Moslems think, the following incident is enlightening. During the last year of the Turkish régime we had our annual prize-giving. All the leading officials were present, from the governor and the commander of the troops down, also sheikhs, tribal and religious. In the speech winding up the ceremonies I said: "There is one thought in the minds of you all, 'If only these Americans would eliminate their persistent Gospel effort.' But," I added, "the day we cease to teach the Bible in our schools that day I would advise you to take out your children, for that day we have become traitors to God and to what we have been taught to regard as the highest and holiest in life." And the sentiment was applauded to the echo. In a land like this to be religious is good politics as well as good religion.

To sum it all up. Therein lies the hope for the regeneration of Mesopotamia, to hold up Jesus Christ so that the Arabs shall see Him. Good roads, telegraphs, strict justice, education, social service, these are all necessary, but after all they are only incidental inasmuch as they touch only symptoms or are only symptomatic. The christianizing of this land may take centuries, but then a Christian has the right to think in centuries. In fact he is the only one who has that right.

Life, Language and Religion

MRS. DIRK DYKSTRA.

There are some expressions which the missionary in Arabia hears daily. These are like high walls behind which the Moslems take refuge from all that is unpleasant and unpalatable in their own religion, from all those experiences in life, physical and spiritual, which are perplexing and which they cannot and are afraid to explain. And behind these high walls they put at rest their consciences and say, "Peace, peace." It must be admitted that almost all of these expressions contain some element of truth and that the origin of most of them is in God's own Word. And because of this it is most difficult to get the Moslems to see the fallacy of their own statements, for here too your missionary finds that,

"A lie which is half a truth is ever the greatest of lies,
Since a lie which is all a lie may be met and fought outright,
But a lie which is part a truth is a harder matter to fight."

Perhaps more than any other expression is heard, "In sha allah," "If God wills." The phrase very often means little more than "maybe," "all right," "by and by," used to evade responsibility, or as a polite, easy, and indisputable way to escape doing what is not agreeable, or possible, or intended. You ask a Moslem to come to a meeting, to do a piece of work, to visit you, to consult the physician, and invariably the answer is, "In sha allah!" You try to point to purity and truth, you urge them to observe God's precepts, to awaken a desire to live a higher, holier life, and there is that non-committal answer. Do you remonstrate, being convinced that these are only excuses, evading of responsibilities, do you try to tell them that God wills the doing of one's duty, of right, of seeking Him and walking in His ways, there is still that same imperturbable, persistent answer.

Directly connected with this expression is, "Keteb allah aleina," "God decreed it over us." While for the Christian predestination does not relieve man of his responsibility, for the Moslem it becomes a means of disclaiming all responsibility. "In sha allah" prefaces an action, "Keteb allah aleina" explains it after it has happened. A three-year-old child played with matches and was burned to death. It is God who decreed it so and as good Moslems they must submit. A woman had ophthalmia. Her own daughter had become blind through neglect and she was urged the more earnestly to go for treatment while there was still a chance to help her. She gave the usual answer, "If God wills," but she did not come. Now the eye is gone and she says unabashed, "God wrote it over me." How could a Moslem be expected to question that statement, how could he accomplish anything against that! Ignorance, neglect, bitter fanaticism, dumb resignation, fierce pride in everything Moslem, all help the people to continue to use this phrase which is only partly true and mostly a lie.