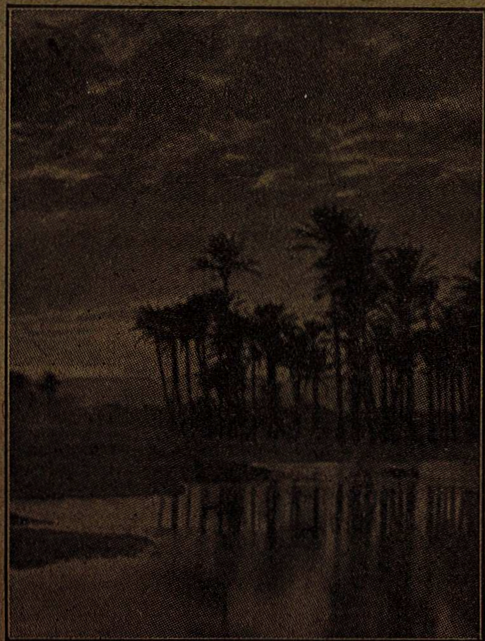


REMARKABLE TESTIMONY FROM EGYPT



"The Entrance of Thy Word
Giveth Light"

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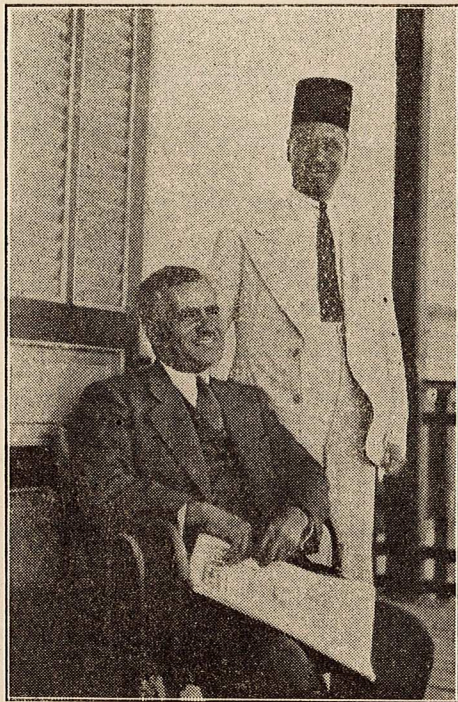
A Testimony from an Egyptian

Marcus Abd-el-Masih

"Mark, a Bond-slave of Christ."



MOORE COLLEGE
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Pastor Marcus (sitting), with Girgis Effendi.

"The Entrance of Thy Word Giveth Light"

The Testimony of Pastor Marcus Abd-el-Masih.

I was born in a village about 150 miles south of Cairo. Both my parents were uneducated. My own mother is from the south of Upper Egypt, whose people are nearly black, and resemble the Nubians, and though my father had five wives, he lived mostly with her. He had no children by his other wives, and for this reason he kept my mother and divorced all the others but one, who was younger than the rest. I was the eldest child, and when I was five years old my father sent me to the village school. The programme at this Moslem school consisted simply in memorising the Koran, the sacred book of the Moslems, and I learnt about three-quarters of it off by heart. I was always a lover of religion. When I was only seven years old I began to perform my Moslem prayers five times a day, and when I was about nine I fasted some days during the fast month of Ramadan.

One day, on my way to school, I found a copy of the Gospel of St. Matthew lying in the street, so I picked it up and took it with

me. My schoolfellows, on seeing it, inquired about the strange book I had in my hand, and, nothing loth, I opened it and began to read aloud from it. I had not gone far in my reading when our blind schoolmaster, hearing my voice, asked what I was doing. I told him, and he demanded that I should give him the book. He took it and tore it into pieces, ordering one of his two sons, who were our teachers, to burn it. Then he asked for water, washed his hands, and commanded all who had touched this vile book to do the same, as the handling of it had brought such defilement.

For some reason my father took me away from this school and sent me to a Christian one. I was given a list of books I should require for my studies, and, to my horror, I discovered that one of them was St. Matthew's Gospel—the book I had been told defiled those who touched it. I told my father of my difficulty, and said I refused to go to that school. My father's threatenings and coaxings alike failed to convince me that St. Matthew's Gospel held no danger for me, and at last he and some of his friends interviewed the headmaster, who was quite willing for me to enter school without a copy of St. Matthew's Gospel. This school had morning and evening prayers, and I tried to get my father to get exemption for me from these, but he refused to do so. I then went to the teacher, and begged him to allow me to absent myself during prayers, but he would not hear of it. So I had to content myself with sitting on the last bench of the

little church and stuffing my fingers into my ears lest I should hear any word of the singing or prayers. There were two other Moslems at the school, and we agreed together against all the other boys. We made a fight, which we called "a religious war," in which some of the nominally Christian boys joined us because of fear, and also other Moslem boys from the village, whom we called in for this purpose. This state of affairs continued for about a year and a half.

Then from this school I passed on to one in a town. This was connected with the Evangelical Church of Egypt, and I lived with a Christian chemist, Hindy Eff. Butros, who was a friend of my father and a member of the Church. He conducted family prayers each day, and during prayer time I always used to escape from the house. Later on I was attracted by the singing, and was gripped by the words of the 23rd, 41st, 73rd and 91st Psalms. I learned the words and began to hum them—and this was my first step towards Christianity.

After I had been in this family for a year, the father of Hindy Eff. died, and after his burial many came to sit with and comfort the family, as is our custom in Egypt. The pastor of the Evangelical Church came, and during his visit he opened his little New Testament, announcing his intention of reading a portion from the Gospel according to St. Matthew. I was horrified, in fact all my body trembled. I anxiously glanced round the room for some

way of escape, but I could neither leave the room nor close my ears, and, in spite of my desire not to hear, I listened to the pastor reading. The words were wonderful, but I did not believe this could come from St. Matthew or from any other Christian literature. Had I not been told that this book defiled hearers and readers?

One Saturday, when I was alone, I started searching for St. Matthew's Gospel in the big family Bible in this home. I did not know where to find it, and started at the beginning, at Genesis, and searched through the books till I found St. Matthew. I began reading from the first chapter, and continued until I found the portion I had heard read in chapter 5. I could not help comparing it with the teaching of the Koran. I contrasted verse 39, "Resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn unto him the other also," with the injunction, "Whosoever offereth violence, offer ye like violence to him." Also verse 44, "Love your enemies," etc., with "Kill them wherever you find them," "Kill all the unbelievers." The teaching was so striking that I decided to read the whole Bible. Seeing my eagerness, my host bought me a Bible and gave it to me, and during the next two years I read it through three times, but in secret.

The result of this was that I became much concerned about my own soul. I felt my guilt before God and conviction of sin. I could neither sleep nor work at school. I could not ask anybody lest my father should hear. What

happened after that? I threw my Bible from my hand and uttered these words: "There is no God but God, and Mohammed is the Apostle of God. O God, make me to live a Moslem and die a Moslem. Thou art the Omnipotent."

I began to read the Koran, and pray the Moslem prayers, that I might find relief, but I grew worse. I dared then to ask a Moslem friend, "How could I be saved from my sins?" He replied, "Have you become a Christian? Take care lest these infidels lead you astray from the right way." On hearing this I kept quiet for a long time.

Again, I asked another who did not know my father, the same question. He gave me the same answer, and added, "What sins do you commit?" I told him. He said, "These are nothing." Then he brought a book of traditions which Moslems esteem very highly, and showed me a passage from it which says, "It is related of Abu Zarr that he said, 'I came to the Prophet Mohammed, who had on a white garment and was sleeping. When he felt me he awoke and said, 'Whoever says there is no God but God, and dies, will enter Paradise.' Then I (Abu Zarr) said, 'Even if he commit such sins as murder?' The Prophet answered, 'Even if he commit such sins as murder.' Abu Zarr said again, 'Even if he commit such sins as murder, in spite of you, Abu Zarr.' This was repeated a third time." Then my friend added, "Don't bother yourself, only say, 'There is no God but God, and

Mohammed is the Apostle of God,' and you will be safe." This I did for two weeks.

Then I went and told him that I was still unsatisfied and could not rest, as no change had taken place in my life. He inquired what I meant by that. I told him I was still living in sin and did not get rid of it. He was very astonished, and said, "Nobody can stop sinning, save the Prophets. Only say what I told you about before, and God will forgive you your sins." But I said, "I want to get rid of my habits, which cause me weariness and trouble. I want to have rest, and I know there is a connection between sin and weariness of soul." He became very angry, and asked me to leave, and said, "You are a Christian, you are an infidel; leave me at once, lest you convert me to become an infidel like yourself." I explained to him that I was a Moslem like himself, and I wanted only to know the doctrines of my religion.

After he was quieted I asked him whether he was sure of life eternal or not. At that moment his wrath kindled, and he said, "How often have I told you to leave me and never come to me again!" After a long discussion, his reply was that nobody could be sure of eternal life, as the tradition says, "When God created man, He took some grains of dust in His right hand, threw them behind His back, and said, 'You are appointed for Paradise, and I do not care.' Then He took some in His left hand, threw them behind His back, and said, 'You are appointed for hell fire,

and I do not care.' Then God looked into hell and said, 'Are you full?' Hell answered, 'I can hold some more.'"

What a great difference between this and John 3: 16—"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." I thanked my friend and left him. I said to myself, "What is the use of a religion which will neither save me from my sins in this world nor give me the assurance of eternal life in the world to come?"

I began to read the Bible again, and asked God to lead me to the true religion. One Saturday morning in January, 1905, I took my Bible and went away into a solitary place. I made up my mind that I would find rest for my troubled soul or die in that lonely place. At length I opened my Bible at Matt. 11: 28, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." I prayed saying, "Jesus, if Thou wilt give me this promised rest, I will follow Thee at any cost."

It was about midnight when the burden of sin on my heart suddenly rolled away. I felt that Heaven had come down to earth, and my heart was filled with His rest and peace. Speaking to the Lord, I said, "Jesus, Thou hast now proved to me that Thou art the Son of God, very God Himself, for no one can forgive sins but God only. Thou hast granted forgiveness of sin, and given me this wonderful rest. I can now say with Thomas, 'My Lord and my God.'" Continuing, I said, "Thou Lord knowest that I have never attended any Chris-

tian service. I promise to go to church to-morrow, and confess that Jesus is my personal Saviour." Then I begged the Lord to make me an evangelist, that I might tell others of the love He had given to me.

When I began to attend meetings after my conversion, my father heard and my family persecuted me. They immediately removed me from school, and some of them declared they would not pray the Friday prayer unless they should first kill and bury me. I was saved from that. I was, however, put in a dark store-room for several weeks, and given a daily portion of bread and water. Often I was beaten, and sometimes fainted from pain. After some time, when I was again given my freedom, the children in the streets used to clap their hands on seeing me and chant, "Here comes the infidel!" Often they threw stones and dust at me, whilst men in the streets spat in my face or struck me on the head with their fists. At intervals I was allowed to return to the school, and during those times I approached both the Coptic priest and also the Presbyterian pastor in my district and asked them to baptise me. They both refused, telling me it would be better for me to go to a missionary, as he would have power to protect both himself and me. These persecutions continued for about eighteen months.

In the summer of 1906 I chanced to meet Girgis Eff., a Christian teacher, who was at home on holiday in my village. He was employed by the Egypt General Mission, and

worked at Tel-el-Kebeer. He told me that, if I could get to him, he would put me in touch with the missionaries—but, alas, how could I reach Cairo, let alone Tel-el-Kebeer? However, the Lord worked, and the impossible happened.

One night my parents told me I must pack up my belongings, as I was to travel to Cairo next day, in order to enter a school there. I was so excited—here was the first step towards Tel-el-Kebeer and the missionaries. My mother and brother accompanied me to Cairo and left me. Five days after my arrival I went to Cairo railway station, purchased my ticket and travelled to Tel-el-Kebeer. There I met my friend Girgis Effendi again, and he took me to Bilbeis to see Mr. Logan, the missionary in charge. He welcomed me as a father would his son, and I stayed with him in Bilbeis for some months.

Whilst I was there Mr. Logan called me one night and said, "I do not know why, but the Lord has told me to take you away from Bilbeis as soon as possible. We will travel to Alexandria on the train leaving here at 10.30 to-morrow morning. There you will be baptised." I was delighted to hear that my desire for baptism was to be granted, and we set off for Alexandria. After a few days we received an explanation of the Lord's guidance to Mr. Logan. Exactly an hour and a half after we had left Bilbeis my father, with others, arrived searching for me. They had been to Tel-el-Kebeer, tracked me to Bilbeis, and finally fol-

lowed me to Alexandria. But the Lord hid me, and they were not able to find where I was.

On Sunday, 13th January, 1907, exactly two years after my conversion, I was baptised, taking the name of Marcus Abd-el-Masih (Mark, the bondslave of Christ), to be known henceforth by all as a Christian. The Egypt General Mission provided for my education at college and at the Theological Seminary in Cairo, and in 1919 I became an evangelist—the Lord had answered my boyish prayer. In 1922 I became an ordained pastor of the Evangelical Church of Egypt, and enjoyed a happy time of ministry until 1928. It was then I heard the Lord's call to a wider sphere of service not only in my Church in Zeitoun, but all over Egypt, Palestine, Syria and the Sudan. Since then I have been enabled to speak at Conferences in all these countries, and always the Lord's hand has been upon me for good.

This is my story, and I pray that God may use it to the salvation of every unsaved reader, young and old. It is the story of God's leading out of the darkness of Islam into the light of Christianity—not brought about by hearing sermons, or by the persuasive power of man's eloquence, but by reading God's own precious Word. Verily, "The entrance of Thy Word giveth Light."

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