

THE REPENTANCE OF NUSSOOH (TAUBAT-AL-NASUH): THE TALE OF A MUSLIM FAMILY OF A HUNDRED YEARS AGO. By NAZIR AHMAD. Translated from the Urdu by M. Kempson and edited By C. M. NAIM. pp. xvi, 140. Delhi, Permanent Black, 2004.

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Nazir Ahmad was a major figure in the Aligarh Movement, the modernist reform movement amongst Muslims of late-nineteenth century India. Born in 1819, he was educated in the stimulating and forward-looking atmosphere of Delhi College. Like so many he suffered in the Mutiny uprising of 1857. But, soon after, his talents were recognised, first by the British under whom he rose to become a Deputy Collector, and then by the government of Hyderabad State for whom he served in high office for seven years, before returning early to Delhi where he devoted himself to literary pursuits. Thus, Nazir Ahmad's prime claim to fame was as the author of thirty-one books, some of which were very popular. His prose writing falls into two groups, one, scholarly and religious, and the second, socially concerned and fictional. *The Repentance of Nussooh*, described by Naim as the first major novel in Urdu, falls into the second category, being one of three novels which Nazir Ahmad submitted with success for the annual prize offered by M. Kempson, the Director of Public Instruction for the North-Western Provinces, in the early 1870s "for meritorious treatises in the vernacular".

The model for Nazir Ahmad's book was Defoe's *The Family Instructor*, but, as the editor suggests, it goes far beyond its model in bringing alive a crisis of values amongst an elite Muslim family of Delhi. Recovering from cholera, Nussooh, the father of the family, has a dream in which he sees his father, who had died in the outbreak, undergoing God's judgement, and has a vivid understanding that, because his existence has been heedless of God's guidance, he will be judged harshly when his own time comes. The book goes on to demonstrate how Nussooh reformed himself and then sets out to reform his whole family. After encountering much opposition, he succeeds in reforming them all, discovering that the older the child the greater the difficulty in achieving reform. Unlike Defoe, Nazir Ahmad's purpose was not primarily salvation, but to demonstrate that the fulfilment of religious obligations by parents brought about successful lives in this world for children. Indeed, it would help to fashion a better and more successful Muslim society as a whole.

Naim's skilful and deeply knowledgeable editing gives us all of the Kempson edition, including its somewhat obnoxious introduction by Kempson's father-in-law, the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Provinces, Sir William Muir, in which he declares "it is only in a country under Christian influences, like those which are happily seen and felt in India, that such a book would present itself to the Moslem mind". But Naim also brings important information about text and context, which adds much value to the book. We learn more about Kempson, an immensely influential Director of Public Instruction; we discover that the Kempson translation has left out passages which Naim now translates "to provide the reader with a better sense of the original's scope, language and range of styles"; and we benefit from an excellent afterword which brings Nazir Ahmad and his novels to life. This is a first-class edition which will enable a new audience to engage with the *sharif* world of post-Mutiny Delhi and the purposes of the great Muslim reform movement that in large part emanated from that city.

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