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Methods and present state of Mohammedan missions

G R A D U A T I O N T H E S I S .

"Methods and Present State

Of

Mohammedan Missions"

Arthur Philip Keast .

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3. Haines, "Islam as a Missionary Religion".

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9. Gibbon, "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" Volume VI.

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12. The Koran.

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"Methods and Present State of Mohammedan Missions"

In its early stages, the religious instinct of mankind was exclusively nationalistic. Each nation and tribe had its own God, and desired to keep these for themselves. No people seem early inclined to share their inherited religion with strangers. Ancient Egypt developed, during its days of greatest national strength, a religion truly remarkable, but which remained within national limits. The forerunner of Christianity gives us another example of the nationalistic spirit in religion. Even in the time of Jesus we find it stated that "the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans!"[1] The Jews had been bidden to extirpate the Canaanites, and to a quite thorough degree they carried out the command, and looked upon all Gentiles as beyond the pale of Christianity.

If we take but a brief glance at the four chief religions, which, with Judaism, rank among the great faiths of the world,-- Brahmanism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity,-- we shall find religious conditions at their fullest development. Brahmanism is remarkable for both its age and the extent of its

1. John 4:9.

dominion, yet Hinduism, in any stage of its career cannot be called a missionary religion any more than could ancient Judaism. It admits proselytes, allowing them however, the lowest room, and barely considering them within its pale. And upon this admission no religious transformation seems to have been undergone.

Buddhism, on the other hand, comes nearer to being a real missionary religion. Buddha first proclaimed a religion which was to be world-wide in its reach. And though, some three centuries later, it seemed that Buddhism would become nationalistic, yet its missionary spirit did survive, and in the third century B.C. we see the rise and spread of Buddhism again taking place in Ceylon, China and Burma. Buddhism alone, of all the great religions, is like Christianity in possessing a belief that it is intended for all mankind, and of relying for the propogation of itself upon persuasion and not upon force.

Thus we see that all primitive religions were national. Judaism and Hinduism were of this kind. Then came the idea of a world-wide religion, independent of national characteristics, which should be offered to the world by reason of its inner ex-

cellence. Under this class come Buddhism and Christianity. One other variety of religious faith remains to be seen, -- one identified with a state, and spread, like temporal conquests, by the sword. It will be the endeavor in this paper to trace the rise and development of this latter type and to learn the methods by which this religion,--Islam,-- has forced itself upon almost half the nations of the old world.

How far this religion of Mohammed can be called a missionary religion, we shall attempt to see, but we must first make clear that by the term "missionary" we shall mean not simply those peaceful methods of conversion which are the characteristic feature of the spread of Christianity, but we shall, of necessity, consider that all the influences by which the borders of Islam have been enlarged, for various methods and diverse agencies have been used to ledd up to the declaration of the furmula, "There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his Prophet"

The life of Mohammed, the prophet of Islam, can be best divided into three periods. The first covers the time till he was forty years old, or the period of ordinary life as a citizen of Mecca, engaged in the ordinary pursuits of a shepherd and

trader. The second period of twelve years takes in his life at Mecca as prophet and preacher. The third period of six years includes his cereer at Madina as Prophet and King. At the end of the second period of his life, when he had been preaching for twelve years, we are told that Mohammed had gathered about him rather more than two hundred disciples at Mesca, and an unknown, perhaps larger, number at Medina."[1]

But no sooner do we find Mohammed gaining any considerable number of followers than we find his peaceful m ethods of preaching and teaching being superceded by the more forceful method of the sword. We also find that at a corresponding period in the career of Mohammed the peaceful injunction to his followers being superceded by those of a war-like character. In the place of that justly famous text in the Koran issued in early days, "Let there be no violence in religion", we find this, "Whosoever fighteth in the path of God, whether he be slain or victorious, we will in the end, give him a great reward."[2] One historian says that within six months of the flight from Mecca the prophet began to under- reprisals, and to engage in the "pious and profligate

1. Haines,-"Islam, as a Missionary Religion" 2. Sura C.76.

commission of despoiling the infidels."[1]

While historians are agreed upon the fact that the sword was used by Mohammed and his followers, they do not seem to be at all agreed as to the part this force played in the spread of their religion. Arnold[2] does not agree that force was used to compel the people who were conquered to submit to the acceptance of the new religion, but only to give allegiance in things political, while they were allowed absolute freedom in religion. He says,"The common hypothesis of the sword as the factor of conversion seems hardly satisfactory, and we are compelled to seek for other motives than that of persecution". On the other hand we find such men as Haines[3] and Gibbon who hold that force is the main argument used, and that in many cases extreme cruelty is resorted to, and even death. "Mohammed's kingdom was essentially of this world, and stoutly did his disciples fight for it. He loved to dwell upon the delights that await the strenuous fighter for Islam. 'Paradise', says a familiar proverb,'lies under the shadow of the swords'."[4] "The sword was the key of

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1.Gibbon.Vol.VI.314. 2."Preaching of Islam".
3."Islam as a Missionary Religion".
4. Haines,p.50.

Heaven and Hell; a drop of blood shed in the cause of God, a night spent in arms was of more avail than months of fasting and prayer!"[1]

Thus it seems,we are warranted in saying that the religion of the Mohammedans was propogated, not by either the one method or the other exclusively, but by both combined. Where peaceful methods would not avail, force was quickly resorted to. This then was the beginning of the spredd of Islam. In the early history conquest, then through persuasion to instill the principles of their religion, this seems to have been the method of proceedure.

But we are led to believe from a study of its history that Islam was not spread wholly by the sword, even though this weapon was used in its early days. Side by side with the use of force, have been at work other methods, operating with considerable energy. Haines tells us,[2] that from the earliest periods of its history, "Islam has been,in the restricted sense of the term, a missionary religion". Even in his early days of preaching, the ambition of Mohammed seems to have embraced the whole world. He claims to have been sent as a preacher to all creatures,[3] to mankind in general. Accordingly, those

1.Gibbon.VI.257. 2. p 81. 3.Sura 25:1; 34:27.

nations and peoples that were beyond his reach with the sword were to be reached by the peaceful efforts of his missionaries.

The most inportant of these early missionary endeavors was that which was sent out to reach China. We are indebted to a French Author[1] for the collection of all information that could be gained from inscriptions left in this region, and who is largely quoted by all writers on this period. Thiersant tells us that the first missionary to China was an uncle of the prophet Mohammed, who was most likely sent during the year 628 A.D. to carry presents to the ruler and to carry the new doctrines to China. This missionary visited the Emperor and obtained permission to preach in Canton, where before leaving in 630 he built the first Mohammedan Mosque in China. His work was very productive of fruit, for at the close of the Nineteenth Century we find a record of eight hundred Moslem families in that city alone.

But the real effective introduction of Islam into China was in the provinces of North-West China. Merchants, as usual led the way, and we hear of them as early as the year 755 A.D. In this year, we find upon good authority, the caliph sent an army of four

thousand soldiers into China to help the Emperor put down a rebellion, and that for their services they were allowed to establish themselves in Chinese territory, where they settled and intermarried. Less than a century later we hear of a massacre which took place in this region in which a hundred twenty thousand Moslems, Christians and Jews were put to death. Arnold says there could not have been a very large number of the two latter. Thus we see that Islam was established more or less peaceably in China. In part, this country owed its escape from the missionary sword of Islam to its distance. Yet Thiersant reports that once while advancing victoriously through Central Asia, an Arab commander sent word to China with the usual terms ,-- Islam, tribute or the sword. But pressing matters at home recalled him before he was able to enforce his demands.

Turning for a brief glance at the records of Islam in India, we find almost opposite conditions to prevail. Every point of contact between the Arabs and India seems to be with the sword. Haines says,(1) "The Arabs showed clearly in India that their object

1. "Islam as a Missionary Religion" p.89.

was not so much the conversion of idolaters and polytheists as the plunder of the temples, and the enlargement of the Moslem empire. We may search the record of bloodshed and spoliation in vain for any trace of a purely missionary effort to win over converts to Islam". Another authority says,(1) "The Military adventurers who founded dynasties in North India cared little for spiritual things; most of them had, indeed, no time for proselytizing, being continually engaged in conquest and in civil war".

If time and space permitted of a study of the establishment and growth of Islam in the continent of Africa, we should find that the record there would not be far different from that already seen in China and India. Islam has come to control a large part of Africa, especially the Northern part. This has been brought about largely by the use of force, but of late years, perhaps during the Nineteenth century, the jealousy of the Arabs has been aroused by the increased efforts and success of Christian missionaries, and where the Mohammedans are not strong enough to use force they are having recourse to persuasion and instruction.

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1. Wheeler, "History of India" vol.IV. p 16.

We see, then, that so far as Africa is concerned Islam has been established by various and opposite methods. The purely missionary element has not been wholly lacking, but it has been of secondary importance. "Persuasion", says one writer, "may in some cases have inserted the thin edge of the wedge, but I am persuaded that force and persecution has, in every case, driven it home". This statement may be just a bit sweeping, but in the main it represents the position which is taken by most historians regarding the Moslems in Africa. Uganda, furnishes for us the only exception to the statement above, for it is here only that the true missionary method, learned from contact with Christianity, has been applied before our very eyes, and the success there has not been of a remarkable character, and by no means to be compared with the success of Christianity in the same quarter.

Islam entered Europe very early. In 648 A.D. the Arabs crossed into Spain; in 711 they established their rule, and their descendents remained there till 1502, when an edict of Ferdinand and Isabella forbade the exercise of the Mohammedan religion in Spain. Cyprus fell into the hands of the

Saracens in 648 A.D., while Constantinople was fruitlessly beseiged in 668, and again in 716. In 732 the Battle of Tours set a limit to the Saracen conquest, and rescued Europe from Islam. Rome was partially sacked in 846. In spite of their failure to take Rome, the Moslems gained a foothold in Southern Italy that they did not release till driven out in 1058. At the end of the thirteenth century Islam again attempted the conquest of Europe under the Ottoman Turks. "By the middle of the fourteenth century they had made good their footing in Europe. Thrace, Bulgaria and Servia were rapidly conquered, and in 1453 tha fall of Constantinople sealed the doom of the Eastern Empire. Seventy-six years later the unsuccessful seige of Vienna formed the high water mark of Moslem conquest in that direction."(1) From that day on Turkish rule and Moslem faith lost power in Europe.

While there does not seem to be any nation of Western Europe that has accepted Islam as a national religion, or which, to any considerable extent, went over to Islam, yet we are told that almost every nation of Europe did furnish renegades to the faith.

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1. Haines. "Islam" p 58.

Besides Spaniards and Greeks in large numbers, we hear of Italian, Austrian, German, French, English, Russian and Scotch Apostates.

Having now considered the spread of Islam through the nations with which its spread was in any marked degree, in Asia, in Africa, and in Europe, only one more continent remains for us to consider, and that only briefly, viz. The American continent.

About a decade previous to the close of the Nineteenth Century there was a wave of considerable proportions both of effort and interest on the part of devout Musselmans of the East to introduce the Islamic system into America. According to the report of one Alexander R. Webb,[1] once a prominent American editor, and appointed by President Cleveland as United States consul at Manilla in 1887, this American propaganda was to have been a purely educational effort. The attempt was to be made to teach Americans who and what Mohammed was, and what he taught. This was to be done through the establishment of a weekly journal devoted to Islam, and in this way to create a direct intercourse between the Mohammedan world and America. A free lecture-room was to be established in New York City,

1. "Islam in America"

open to the public, and a book publishing house, to be opened to publish and circulate Islamic books and pamphlets. All this propaganda was to be financed by wealthy and devout Mohammedans of India. However this plan does not seem to have progressed very far toward realization. Whether through a lack of interest on the part of Americans in the Islamic religion, through an abatement in the zeal of the American leader, Mr. Webb, or through a lack of financial support on the part of his Indian backers, we cannot say, but we are unable, at the present time, to find more than a trace of the carrying out of such a plan, and so far as I have been able to learn, there does not seem to be any American propaganda at the present time. Islam seems to have abandoned the attempt to gain a foothold in America, Tho there is still a circulation of Islamic literature to a very limited degree. It has been suggested, and it appears to have some credibility, that those who had planned to force upon America the Islamic religion, found,when once they had made the attempt that Americans were not to have thrust upon them a religion formed in a sixth century mold, and which has never outgrown that mold. America was not to be

retarded in its religious development in any such manner, and so turned a cold shoulder to the self-appointed reformers.

Thus far we have looked at the methods which have been used in the spread of Islam from its very beginning down to the present time. We have seen how in its inception it spread by the preaching and work of Mohammed, the prophet, not without persecution. Then as their numbers increased, force was often used, even resorting to the use of weapons, and entering upon periods of conquest. We have also seen that in its late years, both in England and America, the method preferred and attempted has been one of education, and although this has proven a much slower method of advance than did conquest, yet some progress has been and is still being made, especially in England, where two large Muslim Mosques exist even today. It now remains for us to ask, and to attempt a satisfactory answer to the question as to what are the attractive features in Islam which has made it appeal so strongly to men, and to lead them to an acceptance of Islam as a religion, to ask why Islam has attained to so considerable a degree of success as we find it to have done.

We of the Christian world are surprised not a little at first, when we learn that Islam has no regularly constructed Missionary societies, nor does it have any regularly ordained priesthood or clergy. We cannot but conceive it as one of the prime duties of Christians to propogate Christian teachings among unbelievers, and for this particular work have long had missionary societies. "But", says Arnold,[1] "in Islam the absence of any kind of priesthood or any ecclesiastical organization whatever, has caused the missionary zeal of the Muslims to exhibit itself in forms very different from those that appear in the history of Christian missions. Among Muslims there is very little continuity of effort." He then proceeds to show that whatever disadvantage this lack may be to the Muslim religion is amply compensated for in the added feeling of responsibility which is felt by each individual Muslim. This very absence of a priestly class, Arnold believes, makes the individual Muslim much more strict in the performance of his religious duties, and becoming deeply impressed with the importance of these duties himself, is much more likely

1. "Preaching of Islam" p.332.

to become an exponent of his creed in the presence of unbelievers.

This explanation offered by Arnold for the religious zeal of the individual Muslim, may account for, at least in a limited measure, the fact, which has been so often mentioned, that each good Mohammedan is a missionary."Thus it is", he says, "that, side by side with the professional propagandists,-- the religious teachers who have devoted all their time and energy to the missionary work,-- the annals of the propogation of the Muslim faith contain the record of men and women of all ranks of society, from the sovereign to the peasant, of all trades and professions, who have labored for the spread of the faith, a- the Muslim trader, unlike his Christian brother, showing himself especially active in such work". Sorely as we dislike to admit the truth of the indictment, we cannot but agree with Haines, that Christian traders have not done much to spread Christianity in the various lands they have discovered and exploited, but the Arab traders and merchants have won for Islam some of its most favored and fairest provinces. It is very certain that this universality of missionary effort

and energy amongbthe Muslims constitutes at once both the most effective method of spreading the Islamic religion, and one of the most attractive features in its observance.

It is true that wherever Muslim traders are found there are also found propogators of the Muslim religion, not in the person of professional propagandists, but in the person of the same traders. The merchants carry the same Koran wherever they carry their marchandise. No sooner do they open a waysdde shop than the wayside mosque appears by its side. And incongruous as it may seemto us, yet it stands as a remarkable proof of the earnestness and faithfulness to their religion, that, in spite of the horrors of the traffic, the very slave routes become highways for Islam, over which the religion of Mohammed is carried to the negroes. The shopkeeper and the camel-driver are ashamed neither of their creed nor of their prophet and his book. They are never without the Koran, though eighty percent of the Moslem world is illiterate. If they cannot read it they can kiss it, or wear it as an amulet. By this incessant, spontaneous and almost fanatic parading, preaching and pushing of their

faith by the mass of believers, Islam grew to its gigantic proportions.

Such being the missionary zeal of the Muslim that he is ready to speak of his religion in season and out of season, let us now look at two of the causes that have and are contributing largely to the success of the missionary propoganda.

In addition to the one great cause already discussed, viz., the fact that Mohammedan missionary work has been so largely in the hands of the traders, must be mentioned another attractive feature of Islam, the simplicity of the Muslim creed, --"There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is His Prophet". Assent to these two simple doctrines is all that is demanded of the convert, and no trace is found of an attempt to force on the mass of Moslem converts any creed couched in more elaborate and complex terms. This simple creed demands no great trial of faith, arouses as a rule no particular intellectual difficulties, and is within the compass of the least intelligence. The first half of it expresses a doctrine which is already almost universally accepted, though perhaps not in exactly that word. But it

seems not to be difficult to all classes of people to believe that there is one supreme God. The second half of the Muslim creed is based upon the theory that at intervals in man's history God grants some revelation of himself to men through the medium of inspired prophets. Arnold quotes from Professor Montet on this point as follows,(1) "The simplicity and clearness of the Muslim teaching are certainly among the most obvious forces at work in the religion and the missionary activity of Islam". A creed so precise, so stripped of all theological complexities, and so accessible to the ordinary understanding, might be expected to possess, and does indeed possess, a marvellous power of winning its way into the consciences of men. Zwemer says,(2) "Surely this diligent, constant, and almost fanatic use of their short creed as a public confession has been not only a strength to Islam, but one of the chief factors in its rapid spread. The impetuosity and frequency of its repetition has often persuaded ignorant men of its truth by the impetus of its proclamation. It is the watchword of Islam".

But one topic remains for us to discuss in the scope of this paper, namely, the recent re-

1. "Preaching of Islam" 337. 2. "Islam, a Challenge to Faith".

vival of activity among Muslims. This movement has taken the form of a Pan-Islamism, or a binding together of all peoples who unite in the worship of the religion of Mohammed. The term is used by Moslems themselves to describe the political and social combination of all Moslems throughout the world to defy and to resist the socalled encroachments of the Christian powers. The attempt is being made to bind all nations of the Muslim world in a common bond of sympathy around the world Sultan of Turkey as the spiritual head of the faithful. This trend of thought gives a powerful stimulus to their missionary efforts. The effort to realize in actual life the ideal of Muslim brotherhood among all believers of the faith, and the sense of a vast unity and of a common life running throughout the nations, inspirits the hearts of the faithful and makes them bold to speak in the presence of unbelievers. Associations bearing the name Pan-Islamic are said to exist in London, in Paris, in Geneva, in the United States, and in other foreign lands. How far these are developed, or to what extent their activity extends, it is impossible for us to know.

Pan-Islamism represents the attempt to regenerate Islam on Islamic lines,-- in other words, to revivify and stereotype in the twentieth century the principles laid down more than a thousand years ago for the guidance of a primitive society. These principles involve a recognition of slavery, and laws regulating the relations of the sexes which clash with modern ideas, and,which is more important perhaps than all, that crystallization of the civil, criminal and canonical law into one immutable whole, which has so largely contributed to arrest the progress of those countries whose populations have embraced the faith. To verify this statement we have but to look into the position which is held today by the women of Muslim lands, and we find that this is little better than it was at the time of the occupation of these lands by the Mohammedan faith. While at the same time in Christian lands there has been a very marked improvement of the conditions of womankind. The Muslim religion serves to stereotype the progress of whatever lands in which its acceptance is,in any degree general. It is the attempt to fasten upon the twentieth century the yoke of the Eighth century.

To sum up the results of this study, we find that the methods used by Islam to spread its faith have been, the preaching of its early days, then came the sword supplemented, if not supplanted, the preaching; then the era dawned when along the peaceful paths of commerce travelled hand in hand with the trader, the preacher and the evangelizer of the Muslim religion. These are the methods, the latter of which has doubtless proved the most effective for permanent conquest, and the only method at all compatible with modern methods and thought. Islam was slow to learn the lessons and methods of peaceful progress in religion, but at present they seem to have learned well this lesson as well as others from the progress of Christianity in places where the two religions have come into contact.

The facts and figures regarding the present state of Mohammedanism, and its rapid and world-wide spread cannot be better stated than in Dr. Zwemer's recent book,[1] and these will be amazing to one not familiar with its development. "At this moment," says Dr. Zwemer, "there are more than two hundred millions of Mohammedans in the world. Of

1. "Mohammed or Christ"

these sixty millions are of the animist heathen type, and only two to four millions belong to the newer school. The Moslems in Europe carry on an active propaganda, working mainly along the press. Russian Moslems are conspicuously active along this direction, and one of the new movements among them has taken the shape of the creation of a new Islamic language, which can already boast of a literature, including a translation of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'. The recent history of Islam in South Africa is instructive. Thirty seven conversions of Europeans -- English, Dutch and German -- are known in that district, and altogether the vigorous and daring Moslem Propoganda, not only among heathen peoples but at the very heart of Christendom, should arouse the church to the imperative of a counter-assault".

Thus we are led to believe from our study of Islam and its development and its present rapid strides, that while Islam is a distinctly Missionary religion, and in the appeal which it makes to men and nations, has some valuable contributions to make, that so far as making any strong appeal to the intelligences on men, Islam, is, as Haines

points out, a declining cause. Yet the problem and the peril of Islam constitutes for Christianity a challenge to faith, and not a cause for discouragement. Those who stand today on the firing line between Mohammedanism and Christianity call for advancement and not for retreat. They realize, as we must come to realize, that they have nothing to fear in the conflict. The love of Christ, manifested in schools, hospitals, and in tactful preaching of a living and loving Gospel will irresistably win Moslems as it wins all others, and will disarm all their fanaticism. John R. Mott, in an address to the Student Volunteer Convention at Nashville, in 1906, utters these words; "We should lay seige to the Port Arthurs of the non-Christian world with the undiscourageable purpose to capture them. We should not shrink or falter before such apparently impregnable fortresses as the Mohammedan world." And Robert E. Speer, gives this call to the Christian church. "The Church must awake to her duties to Islam. Who will wake her unless it be those that have heard the challenge of Islam, and who, going out against her, have found her armour decayed, her weapons antiquated, and her children still unhappy."