MOHAMMEDANISM IN CAPETOWN

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As early as 1812 Colebrook wrote, "Mohammedanism is said to be gaining ground among the slaves and free people of colour at Cape Town—*i.e.*, more converts among blacks of every description are made from Paganism to the Mohammedan religion than to Christianity, notwithstanding the zealous exertions of pious missionaries. One cause of this perversion is asserted to be the marked disinclination of slave owners to allow their slaves to be baptised, arising from some erroneous notions or overcharged apprehension of the rights which a baptised slave acquires. Slaves are certainly impressed with the idea that such a disinclination subsists, and it is not an infrequent answer of a slave when asked his motives for becoming Mohammedan, "that some religion he must have, and he is not allowed to become a Christian." Prejudice in this respect is wearing out, and more encouragement is given to the conversion of slaves than heretofore. Masters, it is affirmed, begin to find out that their slaves serve not the worse for instruction received in religious duties. Missionaries who devote themselves specially to the religious instruction of slaves, and there is one in each of the principal towns, have increasing congregations, and hope their labours are not unfruitful, but the Moslem priest with less exertion has a greater flock."

And in the early records of the Society of the Propagation of the Gospel we read, "Every day the number of proselytes to Mohammedanism is increasing . . . Noble examples of giving freedom to the slaves of this persuasion have always been sanctioned by law. By far the greater number of those liberated on December 1st next will also become professed Mohammedans. No desire has been shown, generally speaking, on the part of professing

Christians for the conversion of the coloured population. The slaves oppressed by their heavy yoke are excluded from partaking of the privileges and comforts of our holy religion, torn from their children, cruelly beaten, badly treated, have in return no predilection for their faith."

A Civil servant of the Colony said in 1822, "It must be owned with shame and sorrow that Mohammedanism makes great progress among the lower orders of the Cape."

So early is the evidence as to the spread of Islam in South Africa. The Church of England did not enter the field till 1848, when Bishop Gray concerned himself to secure a worker among the Malays. Dr. Camilleri, a Maltese, arrived in that year and stayed till 1854. In this latter year the Bishop found that Sir George Gray had been approached to prevent missions among the Malays, but nothing was done till 1871, when Father Benson, of the S.S.J.E., was approached in vain. Dr. Arnold arrived in 1875, after working in India and Batavia, but that work also stopped with his death. In 1881 the Bishop remarked that people in England were cold and dead to the appeal, and contributed only one thousand six hundred and seventy pounds towards a capital fund for the stipends of the Malay workers, though it was the plainest and most evident pathway for Mission work which God was opening out at that time. "Something is stirring their hearts." In 1887 a priest volunteered, but went on to work among the lepers on Robbin Island. In 1890 Miss Pellat worked as lady doctor, from 1896 to 1903, when she retired, having lost the sight of both eyes. This was a most valuable work, the cessation of which was particularly disastrous.

In 1820 the Malays are said to have been three thousand. In 1858 the Moslem population of Cape Town was five thousand—*i.e.*, a fifth of the population. In the last census but one they had grown to thirteen thousand odd in Cape Colony, and in 1911 the Mohammedan population of Cape Colony was about twenty-seven thousand, the greater bulk of them living in Cape Town as before. The present total population of Cape

Town is about one hundred and sixty-one thousand, of which seventy-four thousand are coloured, not Bantu; this would make the Malay population something over a third of the coloured population, but the number of fezes seen in the streets show that the statistics may not be correct. The whole Cape Colony now numbers twenty-four thousand one hundred and eighty-nine Mohammedans, and Transvaal 8,198, of whom thirty-one are returned as whites. Against this I can testify by computation with another missionary, to *forty* white Mohammedans in Cape Town alone, showing that they naturally shrink from returning themselves as such in the census.

As early as 1850 Archdeacon Lightfoot stated, "Bishop Gray was horrified at five European women immigrants becoming Mohammedan. About the year 1900 Archdeacon Lightfoot said that very rarely do whites become Mohammedan, and that some Mohammedans tended to become Christians; now, unfortunately, the tendency is very much the opposite." A great turn in the history of the Cape Mohammedans took place in 1870. A European member of the Legislative Council applied to the Sultan of Constantinople for the more perfect teaching of their religion to the Mohammedans of Cape Town. The result was to separate the Mohammedans much more definitely from the coloured population in dress, customs, and spirit, and to connect them much more closely with Arab lands, the opening up of steam connections with Zanzibar, making pilgrimage to Mecca more easy, also occurred about the same time. An illustration in this connection has recently been before us in Cape Town in the much advertised arrival of four so-called "bishops," representing "the high bishop of Mecca and Zanzibar." The coming of Indian Mohammedans and religious deputations from India have formed a second bond with Mohammedan lands, and so the foreign influence is no longer tentative, but established, and propaganda in this country is proportionately widespread. At Port Elizabeth, East London, Bloemfontein, Kimberly, Pretoria, Mafeking, Natal, Baira, as far as Zululand, and the principal towns in the Union on the

Rand one can find keen propagators of Mohammedanism. At Krugersdorp, in one location, religion is represented by a large mosque alone, and a lady discovered that her coachman had been to Mecca and is now preparing four white men for reception into Mohammedanism. The influence of Al Azhar is felt in Cape Town. A mosque and a school are called by its name here, and an Egyptian Imam is at the head of it. The leading men of the Cape Mohammedans have studied a considerable number of years in Cairo at the Azhar, and the influence of Cairo will be greater when the Cape to Cairo railway is established. Unfortunately, this connection with the East does not necessarily stand for enlightenment. The moral condition of the chief city of Islam is notorious, and it is found to-day in Africa that the very witch doctors who practise Malay trickery, victimise Christians, both white and coloured, more especially women, qualifying themselves for this work by pilgrimage to Mecca, when they receive the title of "Hadji," so that unmentionable immorality is practised religiously by the very leaders of religion. Not a few of these cases have been tried and heavily punished in court, but from the nature of the cases they cannot be set down here.

On the other hand, they have bettered their instruction and borrowed from somewhere a rite similar to that used in some Bantu tribes and known as circumcision of girls, regarded as initiating irrevocably Christian girls into their religion, while they assume rites already known to Islam, and Christian rites, and call them by Christian names, so that they may say, "We have the same Bible, bishop, priest, Holy Communion, baptism, etc., as you have!"

Socially, the Mohammedans are getting complete control of certain trades, such as tailoring, building, fruit and vegetable selling, driving, fishing, etc.

As regards marriage, while the law takes no account of Mohammedan marriage as being polygamous, custom makes it positively easier to have a Christian wife in this country than a Mohammedan, because among themselves a dowry has to be paid, but the Christian girl is put off with two and sixpence to fulfil the letter of the Koran,

while the man can always say, "I have not legally married," if the girl is found under age. Very seldom, if ever, do these unfortunate girls come back to their former faith, but stay on as Mohammedans. To-day there are no less than four hundred and fifty Christian children under seven years of age being brought up by Mohammedans. These figures are obtained from the Child Life Protection Society and the Government registers. A large number of adults also, white and coloured, English and Dutch, of all denominations, are through intermarrying, swelling the number.

S. GARABEDIAN.

II.

Nearly three years ago I ventured to quote a statement from what I considered a good authority, to the effect that at the lowest one-third of the Malay population at Cape Town was recruited from among Christians. A South African magazine challenged those who knew Cape Town better than myself to deny this statement. Alas ! no one did so, and alas ! again, the expert missionary among Moslems, whom the Diocese of the Cape had brought out, declares that my figure is below the mark. I venture, however, with more confidence, to submit my personal experience of this work.

Let me say at once, that my own bent of mind is toward "breadth of mind and toleration." I would like the customs of all nations to be swept into the Catholic Church, with a minimum of pruning. I have no objection to turning into the Jewish synagogue for worship, and I remember a very interesting visit to a Cape Town mosque, when I was hospitably offered tea and *kompot*. But since I have realised what the local Mohammedanism means to the Christian life of the place, I am more careful.

It is picturesque enough to see the coloured people, Christian and Malay, parade the streets in dresses of the seventeenth century at New Year, or to walk in Plain Street and watch the varied mingling of *doekje* and *fez* on a Saturday night ; but when one realises that this proximity of Christian and Mohammedan means a steady stream from the former to the latter, it does indeed give one food for thought.

The coloured people of Cape Town are, to an incredible extent, victimised by the Malay, and the same is true of an increasing number of whites ; while among Christians, coloured and white, there is too much content to acquiesce in the lukewarmness of our Christianity over against the keenness of the Mohammedan, largely, as one would fain hope, through ignorance of the enormous progress of the latter. But let me give incidents from my own experience.

The number of mosques to-day is given in the press as forty in Cape Town district, a much larger number than that of our churches. We one day passed seven in a half-mile walk, but I was told that behind the houses there were eight within a quarter of a mile. One of the mosques was surrounded by churches—Anglican, Lutheran, Dutch Reformed, and Wesleyan. My guide explained that the influence of the mosque was by no means hemmed in but rather was a cancer in the midst of the Christian congregations ; and passing so many Christian and Mohammedan houses standing cheek by jowl, one could well imagine it would be so, and how intermarriages come about by children playing together. He pointed out some of the more recent cases which had been Christian and were now Mohammedans. At one corner was a fine house inhabited by a polygamist. Further on we passed a mosque with an English patron, related to a dignitary of the church, it is said, but married to an Imam's daughter. My guide also related the case of a Hertfordshire man, whose wife, during his absence at Johannesburg as a mine officer, had called in a Malay witch doctor for her child, and spent a pile of money.

A walk through Cape Town will convince one with any knowledge of its history that, as a Devonshire girl, one of many victims, said the other day, "The Malays want to whiten their race." One sees so large a proportion of European eyes and faces under a *fez* or *doek*. The names, too, of any list of Malays, will have a large proportion of European names. Among the so-called churchwardens of a mosque at Paarl one finds the names of du Toit, Domingo, de Vos, Groenewald (note both Latin and Teutonic elements), while an original Malay here has always a Mohammedan name.

We went to see another victim of superstition in one of the suburbs of Cape Town, the son of a German and a slightly coloured woman, who was suffering from hip disease. He passed for a white man, having been in the volunteers. He had been in the hospital, but both he and his mother were persuaded to consult a Malay doctor, the mother giving him a horse and cart and clothing for his services, although she was very poor and hardly able to afford this. The boy, who said he was educated at St. Michael's Convent, was mercilessly chaffed in the Court at the trial, for his avowal of belief at that time in the Mohammedan sorcerer, whose paraphernalia, including a skull, and so on, were produced in Court. This shows what good reason the victims, as well as victimisers, have to dread publicity. Had I seen the lad without hearing his story and reading the press report of the case, I could not have believed that he could have been entangled, even unwittingly, in so much superstition.

We went on to visit the Malay college of nearly fifty students at Mowbery flats, a very quiet suburb. Another college had recently been opened with much pomp near Bishops court, where the Moslem high priest of Claremont stands over against His Grace the Archbishop. This is the third college opened recently, the others being at Constantia and between Zonnebloem College and St. Phillip's, to which latter mosque school Dr. Abdurrahman says three hundred pounds were contributed by Europeans. On the way we passed the shop where a girl organist lives with an Indian Mohammedan, opposite the chapel where she played before.

After leaving the Mohammedan College with its large mosque on the plan of the Dome of the Rock at Jerusalem, a conversation between a police sergeant and my guide revealed a weird amount of crime in connection with the place, affecting Christians, not only coloured but white. We proceeded to call on one such case, an English painter, a minister's son, and his Colonial wife. The story cannot be repeated here. Suffice it to say that the affidavit, of which I have read a copy, reveals treatment by half a dozen Malays, nearly all being holy men (Hajis, etc.), costing ten pounds odd, without the

husband's knowledge, and ending with repeated assaults. The man was given a term of hard labour. It is only by great perseverance that our missionary has been able to bring such cases to light. It is evident that Christians so deceived, especially Europeans, shrink from such matters becoming public property. This last case came to light by a Malay woman suggesting to the bereaved mother that a second death in the family was due to Malay trickery, which, therefore, required a Malay witch doctor to stop it. It is very painful to have to record these cases, but we are dealing with an evil which cannot and must not be hidden. Although I have done all I can to avoid shocking my readers, I have quite failed to give adequate expression to the sordidness of the case. I need only say that my guide obviously commanded the confidence of the C.I.D. and Police, but I am only dealing with cases which came under my observation, and I saw quite enough to convince me that the Mohammedan danger to our Christian people, both coloured and white, was immensely graver than I had ever realised, and that the work of combating it needs urgent and whole-hearted support. It is good to know that there is at hand an honorary worker, a priest full of zeal, with such an extraordinary measure of common sense and acuteness as would do credit to a first-class detective expert, and the additional advantage of speaking fluently both Arabic and Hindustani, so that he can meet on their own ground both the Malay Imams and also the Indian Mohammedan.

I might add that not only the Archbishop's Advisory Committee for the work, but also many English ladies in Cape Town are watching and helping with great interest and keenness, and I am assured that Mr. Garabedian does not move without security of able counsel as to the legal points in each case.

The *Church Times* has done well to draw attention in a recent appreciative article to this wonderful and most necessary work.

“A CHURCHMAN.”