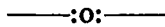


IS ISLAM IMPREGNABLE?



EVER since the World's Conference on Islam, held in Cairo in 1906, the Christian Churches have shown an increasing interest in the effort to evangelise the votaries of Islam. New missions have been created, and the older missionaries in Moslem lands have opened new stations and set apart some of the best men they have for this special service. Institutions have been established in Britain and Germany and in America for the teaching of the Arabic language and the preparation of missionaries for this work.

The question has been asked, Why has this work been so long delayed? In reply, it may be said that missionaries have been sent to Moslem lands almost since the beginning of the modern Foreign Missionary enterprise. Many things stood in their way. First, Christendom had lost its interest in missions, and was occupied in endless controversy on questions pertaining to Christian doctrine and policy; the non-Christian world was apparently shut in behind doors and bars or against Christian nations. The death penalty confronted the Christian man who should set foot upon a heathen shore.

By and by the doors were opened in the nearer East, and missionaries were sent to Syria, Turkey and Persia. The work naturally lay with the more or less corrupt Christian churches in those lands. This was especially necessary, because the chief stumbling block to the Moslem was these oriental churches of all names. Islam was never confronted by a pure Christianity until the nineteenth century. It was, therefore, most important to create truly Christian witnesses and Christian assem-

blies of true believers in order that the Gospel might be brought to the Mohammedan world in power.

This preparatory work has to some extent been done, and along with it has been the conversion of a number of noble witnesses among the Moslems themselves to show that even to these the Gospel of Christ is "the power of God unto salvation." This work has convinced the Christian churches that the neglect of the heathen in the centuries gone by forms one of the darkest blots upon the pages of the churches' history. That work has resulted not only in creating among Christians an attitude of indifference to the fate of the heathen, but has led the heathen world, and especially the Moslem world, to assume an attitude of contempt for the faith of the Christian.

When, therefore, the missionary spirit laid hold upon a Carey, a Henry Martyn, a Morrison, a Cnaan or a Judson, the mass of Christian laity and clergy alike were ready to denounce the foreign missionary as a fanatic or a fool. Nor has the lapse of time and the marvellous success of these men entirely eradicated this spirit. The majority of nominal Christian men, while perhaps commending the humanitarian side of the missionary's life and labour, yet regard his endeavour to proselytise men and women as a foolish endeavour, if not absolutely contemptible. And then as for the unbelieving among nominal Christians, they have no use for the missionary whatever. They may admire the man, but will frankly say, as one said the other day, "I like you, but for your work I have no interest whatever."

Such being the present conditions of many Christians in western Churches, what wonder that men are ready to listen to the confident assertion of non-Christian orientals or of nominal Christian Europeans, who have lived for years in eastern lands, that missions are a failure, and that the effort to Christianise Moslems is an idle dream. Such men are often, indeed, quite blind as to what the missionaries have done or of what they may be doing at the present time.

The *New York Times* in its Sunday issue, February 1st, devotes a whole page to an account of a series of

lectures of Professor Christian Snouk Hurgronge, who has spent thirty-five years in the Dutch East Indies, and whose lectures on Islam in America assure the American people that the conversion of Islam to Christianity is as hopeless as the question of converting the Jews.

If he is correctly reported, even this comparison is not without encouragement to the missionary to Moslems. The history of the church shows that notwithstanding the national unbelief of the Jews, there has been a constant stream of Jewish converts to the Christian ranks, and that there are more converts to-day than ever before. We have only to read the roll of the Protestant ministry to see how many have brought to the Christian churches the faith and devotion of the Hebrew teacher.

If we examine the literature of the Christian church we are surprised to see the contribution of profound works on history, theology, and philosophy from Jewish pens. So, too, when we examine the membership roll of many churches in India, Persia, Syria and Turkey, we thank God for those who have come out from Moslem circles to become members of the Christian church. Again, when we read the roll of the ministry here in India, we are glad to recognise the many names indicating Moslem descent. Islam is contributing to the Christian community an annual increment, small indeed, but large enough to belie the claim that a Moslem can never become a Christian.

Professor Hurgronge, while positive in his opinion that Islam will never yield to Christianity, might have maintained that Islam in the Dutch Indies has yielded some thirty thousand converts to the Christian faith. He admits that Islam is bound to undergo many changes when it comes more fully under the influence of modern Western civilisation. He foresees the concessions which will oblige the abolition of the veil and the restoration to modern Moslem womanhood the rights which Christian women exercise. He sees a modern spirit of liberty already invading the Moslem mind. Surely all this is very encouraging. The question naturally arises as to the source from which this powerful solvent of Moslem

bigotry proceeds. Is this not due to the Spirit of God, who through the Christian church has given to the world a civilisation which strikes off the shackles of the slave, brings help to the oppressed and healing to the sick and dying ? Do we not see non-Christian peoples, long segregated, now boldly and gladly incorporating into their ancient systems of moral, social and political governments, the teaching of Christian nations ?

What is it that differentiates between old and new Japan, old and new China, old and new Turkey ? What is it that has already increased the value of the individual in all these lands ? What has infused the desire for female education ? Whence the growing interest in social service ? Surely the leaven of the Gospel is leavening the mass of humanity, the many earnest endeavours to reform non-Christian faiths are characterised without exception by the adaptation of their faiths to the Christian ideals. New wine is being poured into old bottles, with the result that the old are destroyed. Islam is no exception to this rule. Many a Moslem convert has testified to the fact that a sincere endeavour to find the ideals of the Gospel in the Koran had resulted in failure, and that he then found himself confronted with the alternative of becoming a Christian or of adopting an atheistic stand while upholding the social system of his fathers.

Christian men frequently lose faith in the work of missions to Moslems and Hindus and Buddhists by reason of their want of faith in God. They look at the difficulties which confront the missionary. Like the ten unbelieving spies whom Moses sent to spy out and report upon the inhabitants of Canaan, their vision of the promised land was obscured by the sight of mighty men and their impregnable defences. The faith of Joshua and Caleb was strong and confident because they had God within their vision, and, therefore, saw the crumbling walls and stricken giants and conquered Canaan, and themselves in possession of the promised land.

This illustration fits in exactly with the Christian endeavour to conquer the world. They have gone forth with the great commission, "Go ye into all the world

and disciple all nations." They hear the command, "Preach, baptise and teach"; but alas! how often do they forget the promise, "Lo, I am with you always." Many are discouraged and are unable to go on, solely because they realise that in mere human strength they cannot overcome. Others, trusting in Him who has all power in heaven and earth, go on in the faith of Joshua, and they "do the impossible."

The missionary problems are being solved in this way. All failures are due to unbelief. All success is due to the power of God through the Holy Spirit operating through faithful men.

The Moslem world is just beginning to realise the powerful influences which are pressing upon Islam in all parts of the world. The power of the Hierarchy has been broken. The power of the Sultan with his death sentence for all apostates and for the Christian who would dare to convert a Moslem to his faith, has been weakened. The mass of the Moslem peoples are enjoying the liberty of their Christian rulers. Many are using this freedom to investigate for themselves, and are losing their faith, or some at least are finding a better faith in sacred scriptures so constantly attested by the Koran as the Word of God. When the Moslem peoples have secured religious freedom and have acquired that knowledge of the Koran which will enable them readily to compare its teaching with that of the Bible, we shall see a rapid defection from a faith which has held them in spiritual bondage for so long.

The many converts from Islam in various Moslem lands, small indeed in contrast with the 200,000,000 Moslems in the world, are nevertheless an earnest of what shall be. The character of Moslems as we know them after forty-six years experience, assures me that they will not be satisfied to live for ever in subjection to teachings of MUYTOHIDEN of centuries gone by. The independence of mind, which has led the mass of educated Moslems away from the Koran, tradition, agnosticism and infidelity, will yet, under Christian influences, lead them to Christ as their Saviour.

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