

## THE DESIRE FOR HIGHER CIVILISATION AND THE SPREAD OF ISLAM IN JAVA

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THE desire for a higher development among the non-Christian nations of our day is due not only to political and social, but also to religious motives. The nations of Christendom who have made their confession a dead letter, may attempt to put social life outside the sphere of personal religious experience, but the heathen and the Mohammedan, not yet infected with the modern view of life, do not for a moment think of following this example. The precious jewel of religion among the non-Christian peoples has been robbed of its glory and beauty, but even in this degenerate form it remains for them the principal thing, so that their ascent to a higher degree of culture compels them to strengthen and renew their religious life.

This awakening of religious consciousness will not always yield the same results. The "nature peoples" as a rule will adopt the religion of the culture peoples with whom they are in the closest relation. The culture peoples of heathendom will attempt to strengthen their religion in face of the threatening power of Christendom and Mohammedanism, and the Moslem will be compelled to make a propaganda of his religious ideas against Christians and pagans. From the very nature of the case, the development of power in social and political spheres compels the Mohammedan to propagate his religious views; because the creed of Islam governs the whole life of the people, and is through and through theocratic in its character, it pretends to be the only true religion, and professes to aim at world-wide spiritual and temporal power. One may even question whether the religious factor is not the most important in its influence to-day among Mohammedan peoples. If we could fathom the hidden thought of Moslem leaders, it would doubtless become evident that the revival and extension of Christendom in the nineteenth century, no less than the progress of Western civilisation, was the cause of the awakening of the East.

But this does not apply in equal degree to all Moslem lands. There are countries where the Moslem creed has become the flesh and blood of their civilisation and where they would rather die than deny the faith, but there are also regions where Islam only moves on the surface of the life of the people. Where this is the case, the desire for higher culture may not immediately result in strengthening the propaganda of Islam, but it will nevertheless have that result in the end.

Among those regions which have been superficially converted to Islam is the larger part of Malaysia, especially Java. Not only geographically, but metaphorically, the distance is very great between Java and Mecca, the religious capital of Islam. It is true that there is a growing communication between Java and Arabia, and that there are among the Javanese, Moslems who are more faithful in fulfilling their religious duties than the dwellers in the desert, but this does not alter the fact that the great contrast between Islam and other religions is not felt by the Javanese as it is, for example, by the inhabitants of Arabia or North Africa. The antithesis between believer and unbeliever has not yet become an impassable chasm. The native population of Java is rapidly increasing, and already counts 30,000,000, but among them are only a few thousands of heathen. One may therefore say in all truth that Islam is *the* religion, and yet these 30,000,000 do not strive for the faith of Islam. The large majority call themselves Moslems, but are not yet taken captive by the Moslem ideal. For this there are many reasons.

It was rightly remarked at the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh that Islam in Java had not won the victory over the original Animism of the people (Volume IV, p. 122). One may add to this that Islam not only faced Animism but Hinduism in Java. Spirit and deva worship exist under the surface of the official religion. The national glory of the real Javanese is in the Hindu era, which preceded that of Islam, and his whole life is governed much more by fear of evil spirits than by the laws of the Koran, which he scarcely knows.

Another reason is the influence of the Dutch Government. The Moslem who lives under a Christian Government submits to the inevitable. He cannot propagate his faith in a fanatical way. "Not by might, nor by an army" is Islam allowed to spread. We must add to this that in general the Javanese profess indifference in regard to religion. They often say that all religions are equally good; that every one will be saved by his own faith, if he lives up to it. To show hatred to those who differ from him in religion is contrary to his nature, and it is remarkable how little open opposition there is to the preaching of the Gospel in Java. When the Gospel is proclaimed in their homes, they frequently praise Christianity; occasionally even the Moslem leaders express themselves in this way. The leader in a mosque told me that he had no objections whatever if a few Javanese became Christians, "because," said he, "there are also Christians who have become Mohammedans, and in little matters like this we should not disturb each other." Of course, I must add that this outward politeness does not mean a real sympathy with our message, but is often accompanied by secret opposition.

When a Mohammedan people like the Javanese is brought under the influence of Western civilisation, it will not immediately result in the strengthening of Islam. The conservative population of this great island is also awakening to the touch of Western civilisation, and this awakening does not have a special religious character, but is rather due to the peculiar economic and social conditions. Java is a rich country, but the Javanese are poor. Europeans know how to gather wealth by trade and agricultural industries, but one seldom meets a wealthy Javanese. The largest part of the population have only enough to live on, and the chief cause of this sad economic condition is the Javanese himself. He lacks both the skill and the energy necessary for social development. Recently there has been a desire for improvement, and the leaders in the movement have been the educated Javanese, who have tried through education to arouse the people. In regard to religion this movement is neutral in the sense that although it

does not abandon the religious idea, it does not specially concern itself with it. Many of the educated Javanese are convinced that education without religion is a mistake, but they do not feel themselves called upon, in their efforts for education, to favour either Christianity or Islam. In this respect, we may say that Islam has little to hope, and Christian missions have little to fear from the intellectual awakening in Java; and yet it will continually become evident that the propaganda of Islam has entered a new phase. If the Javanese develop on social and intellectual lines, their religion will undoubtedly reap the benefit.

We have already seen that the Javanese in general are not fanatical followers of the Prophet, but distributed among the people there is a class of whom this cannot be said. Millions of the people are only Moslems because they repeat the creed, but there are still hundreds of thousands who have made Islam the ideal of their life and are wholly swayed by its power. This army of the faithful consists of *hajjis* and *santris*. The former are those who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca; the latter are the graduates of Moslem schools. Both are engaged with remarkable success in spreading the knowledge of Islam and in deepening its influence.

Among the means to this end we put first, trade. It is generally known how this has co-operated in the spread of Islam throughout Malaysia.\* In Java also Islam owes a great debt to trade. Even before the Arabs came with the sword, the Indian Mohammedan merchants had already introduced the religion on the coast. In the nineteenth century thousands of Arabs from Hadramaut came as traders, and their influence was correspondingly great, for they understood not only how to sell their wares, but also how to press their religion upon the people. The Javanese are not given to trade, because the cultivation of rice is the chief industry, and they cannot compete in matters of trade with the Europeans, the Chinese or the Arabs. Among the *hajjis* and the *santris*, however, there are not a few who have become absorbed

\* G. Simon, "Islam und Christentum," p. 82.

in the spirit of commerce, and although they are only small traders, their business puts them in close contact with the people on every possible occasion. They cross the provinces in every direction, and are unconsciously propagandists of the faith, in their work of trading.

A more powerful influence for the establishment of Islam in Java has been religious instruction.\* Before the Government or missions had opened schools for the natives, Moslem schools were already in existence, both for the youth and for adults. These schools, which exist in every city and even in every important village, are of an exclusively religious character. None of the ordinary branches are taught, but the whole time is devoted to the study of the Koran. These schools are of two classes—the *langars* and the *pesantrens*. The former are for children, and sometimes also for adults, and the instruction consists in a knowledge of the Koran and of *tafsir* (commentaries) with some *nachwa* (Arabic grammar). The teaching in the *pesantrens* is of a similar character, but they are distinguished from the other schools in that they are boarding schools. The instruction may include also Moslem law (*fikh*) and dogma (*usul*). Some have professors of some note, and count hundreds of pupils. Those who graduate become leaders in the mosques or go to Mecca as pilgrims, to return as teachers.

The pilgrimage to Mecca is another strong influence for the spread of Islam in Java. Malaysia belongs to that group of Moslem lands which sends a large quota of pilgrims annually. In 1893 the total number of those in Java registered as returned pilgrims was 555,944.† Undoubtedly this number has been doubled since that date, for while during the last decennium from three to four thousand persons left Java annually for Mecca, the number has now risen to nearly eight thousand. The Government returns of 1910 give the figures for 1908 and 1909 respectively as 6,921 and 7,281. The pilgrimage to Mecca is a constant factor in strengthening Islam. The religious life of the returned pilgrim has received a

\* "Ency. Van Ned. Ind."; article, "Mohammedanism"; pp. 575-578.

† "Ency. Ned. Ind." Volume II, p. 26.

new impetus. He has become a holy man in his own eyes and in the eyes of his neighbours, who henceforward look up to him with respect. He has become conscious of a great difference between a believer and an unbeliever, and is proud to rank himself with the former. Compared with the total population of Java, the number of pilgrims is not large, nor is the increase in pilgrims so remarkable, and as the *Indische Gids* remarks (December, 1910), "Considering the increase in the number of pilgrims, we must remember that the native population of Java has certainly increased 30 per cent. within the last twenty years." Nevertheless, the returned pilgrims are powerful enough to lead the population of Java more and more in the direction which they themselves have chosen as regards Islam, and the very fact that the pilgrims are the religious leaders of the people is significant.

The question now arises, will the economic and intellectual development of Java strengthen Islam? That it will do so directly is not probable, since this movement finds its ideal not in Mecca but in Europe. Those who seek only Western culture are in grave danger of losing the religious life that they have. The Javanese have little to expect for the strengthening of their religious life from the bare intellectualism which rules the hearts of so many of the educated in Europe. It is therefore to be feared that many of the educated men who have no definite religious convictions will be driven into atheism by contact with Western culture, but the Moslem who is convinced will escape this evil. He will attempt to use the treasures of Europe to strengthen his religious position. That this is his aim is already evident from what has been done towards improving Islam, Moslem education and literature. It is a further proof of the awakening strength of Islam in Java that the establishment of schools by the Government and by missions has not supplanted the Moslem schools, but, on the contrary, has led to their multiplication and reorganisation. The Government itself is partly to blame for this revival. Formerly the Moslem schools were not under the direct control of government officials, and were therefore hotbeds of intrigue and fanaticism. To prevent

this evil, the Government thought wise to place all those who give instruction in Moslem schools under government direction. They must apply to the Government and pass an examination in the branches taught. The result has been that they have become better qualified, and unconsciously the Government has not only improved the religious instruction from a Moslem standpoint, but has given it public sanction.

Apart from governmental supervision there is also an effort to improve religious instruction by the spread of literature. A few years ago a school was established at Solo for theological education. One of the Moslem professors translated the Koran into Javanese. All sorts of Moslem books are published in the vernaculars of the people, as well as in Arabic script for the use of *hajjis* and *santris*. If we add to this the fact that the number of illiterates in Java is decreasing every day, we may expect that Islam will win its way through literature more rapidly than ever.

The awakening of Java is very recent, and is therefore still neutral in its character, but already Islam is reaping the benefit of the popularisation of Moslem theology and the spread of religious education. The further this movement extends, the more it will favour Islam. There are those who think the contrary. It has been said that Islam would lose much of its secret and sacred character by the translation of the Koran into the vernacular, and especially if its teachings were placed in contrast with those of the Gospel and of the Holy Scriptures, the people would choose Christianity rather than Islam. I do not share this view. It would be so if the Javanese had the same feelings towards both religions, but the fact is that they stand with their face towards Islam and with their back turned on Christianity; their hearts are open to Islam, but closed against the Gospel. Islam finds ready entrance into the natural heart of man. All this, however, should not discourage missionary effort. It also shares in the blessings of the new era. All things are in the hand of the Lord, Who will make economic and intellectual development work together for the furtherance of His Kingdom.

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