

ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY IN MALAYSIA

THE Queen of Holland governs more Mohammedans than Christians, for the population of the Netherlands consists of five and a half millions, but the population of its colonies in Asia is estimated at forty-two millions, of which thirty-five millions profess the religion of Islam. Between twenty-two and twenty-four millions of these Moslems live in the Islands of Java and Madura of the Malaysian group. Islam won a way for itself to these islands in the fifteenth century. In 1416 Atjeh and Deli, the northern part of Sumatra, were entirely won over for Islam, and from here it penetrated into regions beyond. About the year 1500 it reached Java. It was not a conquest by the sword, but peaceable propoganda by preaching, and especially by the influence of social ascendancy. The leading part was taken by merchants, who, on their journeys, had come in contact with Islam and adopted it. Every merchant is a propagandist. He adopts the tongue and the customs of the people among whom he trades, wins their hearts by marriage with the daughters of the land, makes an impression by his superior knowledge and civilisation, and by the purchase of slaves increases his own importance. The people among whom he labours become envious of his position and soon imitate him. This process goes on everywhere in the heathen districts, and unless the Gospel reaches them, they will be won for Islam.

In recent years this menace has been recognised, especially since the long war in Atjeh and the continual rebellions in the hinterland of Padang, Sumatra. As a result, Islam has become more and more an object of study in the Netherlands. I need only mention the name of Dr. C. Snouck Hurgronje, at present professor at the University of Leyden, one of the few non-Moslems

who have penetrated into Mecca. He has given us a full and living description of what he heard and saw, in his work "Mekka" (two volumes, The Hague, 1888-1889) and in other important books from his pen. Missionaries also have made a study of the subject. It is impossible to enumerate them here. I mention the names of Coolsma ("De Zendingseeuw," Utrecht, 1901); Poensen ("Brieven over den Islam," Leyden, 1886); and lastly the Rev. G. Simon of the Rhenish Mission in Sumatra, who has collected invaluable material in his "Islam und Christentum im Kampf um die Eroberung der Animistischen Heidenwelt," not to mention the study text-book by Rev. W. H. T. Gairdner, "The Reproach of Islam," which has been translated into Dutch and augmented by important information on the Dutch colonies by Miss Jacq. Rutgers.

Mr. Simon calls attention to the fact that colonial government rule and European culture have been co-operating factors in the spread of Islam. The position of a colonial government with regard to the religion of the conquered nation is extremely difficult. Because of religious liberty, the government affects to be neutral, but strict neutrality is impossible. In attempting to reform cruel customs, *e.g.*, to prohibit human sacrifice, mutilation and cannibalism, it directly attacks animistic religion. Nobody can blame it, but nevertheless the heathen sees his own religion menaced and doomed by this policy. The Mohammedan, on the contrary, is not attacked. This religion is therefore, in his eyes, the religion which the government desires him to adopt. In no small degree the rapid progress of Islam has been due to this cause. We must add to this that the Dutch government formerly favoured Islam. All that could irritate the Moslem or awaken his fanaticism was carefully avoided, and therefore missionary work was opposed. Because many of the government officials are Moslems, the people think Islam is still favoured by the government. The schools started by the Dutch government teach Malay, which is a Moslem language, and these also, therefore, help on the propaganda of Islam. Mr. Simon shows how European

culture in spite of itself paved the way for Islam. It is a matter of course that those nations which have almost no culture, fling themselves into the arms of those from whom they expect help in the struggle for existence. This Islam professes to give them. It awakens in them the hope that some time they may be freed from European rule.

The most fanatical Mohammedans are found in Sumatra. Islam in Java is of a more peaceable character, yet even here there are distinctions. The Soendanese in West Java have more religious zeal than the true Javanese of the central provinces and of the east. The Javanese cannot be compared, of course, with the Moslems of Arabia. Islam is largely a veneer covering a great deal of heathen superstition and animistic belief, and even of later Hinduism, but Mohammedanism gains ground more and more, and penetrates as well as spreads. The increasing number of pilgrims to Mecca is evidence of this, especially when we remember the expense of such a pilgrim journey, which is estimated at no less than Fl. 438 (£36 1s. 2d.). In Celebes, New Guinea, and other islands which are still heathen, the struggle between Islam and Christianity is intense. Animism is breaking up; it gives no satisfaction. The natives are awake and ask for instruction. If Christian missions do not give it to them, they all fall victims to Islam. This is the serious character of the problem, and the situation calls for urgency. What are Protestant missions doing to meet the situation?

When the Dutch established themselves in Malaysia at the beginning of the seventeenth century, they combined the interests of the Christian religion with trade. The natives, who under the Portuguese had become Roman Catholics, were compelled to adopt the reformed religion. The spiritual needs of the traders and other settlers were met as far as possible, and some work was done, not without result, among the natives with whom they came into contact. This was the case especially in the Moluccas. Missionary work among Moslems did not begin for some time. The Netherlands Missionary Society was founded at Rotterdam in 1797. It is the

oldest, and was for a long time the only missionary society in Holland. Because the country was then under French rule, it could only send out its first missionaries through the London Missionary Society. They went out to the East Indies in 1814, and were soon appointed clergymen of the East Indian State Church. In Java they laboured only on the coast and chiefly among Europeans, but the Moluccas (Ambon, Minahassa and Northern Celebes) received more attention. The government did not allow work in the interior because they feared Mohammedan uprisings, but the thoughts of God are not the thoughts of men. When the Rev. Mr. Von Rhijn, inspector of the Netherlands Missionary Society, visited Java in 1848 with the missionary Jellesma, he found Christian congregations springing up everywhere, and therefore secured permission to begin missionary work. Jellesma remained and laboured in East Java with such results that his memory is held in veneration, and he is called the "apostle of Java."

How was it possible that these Christian congregations already existed? It was due to two remarkable persons: the first, Collen, the owner of a large estate, the son of a Russian father and a Javanese mother, who had come under the influence of the Gospel and desired to preach it. This he did in his own peculiar way. Because the Javanese put a high value on what they call *ilmu*, or magic learning, and the repetition of words not understood by the common people, by which they are supposed to get riches, health, and long life, Collen told them: "The true *ilmu* which you do not possess, I have and will tell you. It consists in learning the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed. It also requires the abstinence from opium, from dancing feasts, gambling, and other popular sins." His effort to put the Gospel into a Javanese dress was praiseworthy, but he went too far, perhaps because he himself was not well instructed. Nevertheless, his adherents were many, and there were remarkable conversions.

About the same time a simple watchmaker, Father Embde, preached the Gospel at Soerabaja. He was a pious man, who went to the other extreme, and insisted

in his preaching and in his conduct that Javanese who became Christians must give up not only their old religion, but all their former customs and accept European civilisation, even to the cut of the hair and the dress.

Then Jellesma came and, with quick discernment, acknowledged the good in both methods, preaching the pure Gospel, and becoming a Javanese to the Javanese in the right way. After some difficulty he obtained permission to settle in the interior, where he founded the well-known and flourishing mission station, Modjowarno. As the government allows the Javanese considerable liberty in the establishment of their villages (*dessas*), Jellesma took charge of it and gathered the Christians in Modjowarno into a Christian village, based on the principles of the Gospel. Gambling, the use of opium, immorality, and dancing girls were prohibited; at the same time rules were made for Sunday rest, etc. He took great care in the training of native workers, and it is unfortunate that his life was cut short so early. He laboured in Java from 1851–1859. Since then the work has progressed.

The Netherlands Missionary Society has in East Java forty-one stations with about twelve thousand Christians. These stations are of three kinds: the largest, like Modjowarno with established village rule on Gospel principles, so that even the Moslems who live there must conform to the rules of the village; but the opportunity to start such *dessas* is not so great as it once was, because of the increase of population. When the missionary buys a piece of land instead of using the primeval forest, the danger is that he becomes a landowner, with its obvious difficulties. This is the case in the second kind of station. The third class of stations comprises those where the Christians are in the minority among the Moslem population. Here they must struggle against opposition from the side of Islam, but in some cases it happens that a Christian is chosen head of the village. Generally, however, the Christian influence in these latter stations is small.

The Netherlands Missionary Society has seven workers in Java, and the number of Church members

in its forty-one congregations is about twelve thousand. They have 3,100 pupils in their schools. At Modjowarno there is a large hospital (203 beds) with two European physicians, one Javanese physician; two European nurses and thirty-three Javanese nurses; one Javanese clergyman, and two dispensers. At the same station there is a seminary for the training of teachers. This society has smaller hospitals and three industrial schools. They also have work among the Battaks in Sumatra, and among the animistic heathen in Posso, Celebes. The Netherlands Missionary Union, founded 1858, works in West Java where Islam is more fanatical. The methods here are similar. They have a seminary for the training of native teachers and have a fruitful work among the Chinese. Their missionaries number eleven, with twenty-four stations, 2,500 Church members, and 1,900 pupils in the schools. The Mission of the Reformed Church, founded 1859, and organised after the separation of 1886, labours in Central Java. It has a large hospital, twenty-eight stations, 1,100 Church members and 900 pupils in their schools. The Salatiga Mission works in the same field, with a medical mission at Poerwodadi; thirty-eight stations, 1,500 Church members, and 1,200 pupils in the schools. Among the smaller societies we mention the Mennonite Mission, continuing the work of the English Baptists, with six missionaries, eleven stations, 950 Church members, 500 pupils, and a medical mission for lepers; the Java Comité, with two missionaries, seven stations, 800 Church members, and 125 pupils; the Salvation Army in Java; and lastly, the Methodist Episcopal Church, U.S.A., of whose statistics I have no accurate information.

In Java altogether we have 19,000 Christians won from Islam. It is not so easy to give exact information about the other islands. Many missionary societies are at work, but not as directly among the Moslems as is the case in Java. In Sumatra, for example, is the important work of the Rhenish Mission. This mission keeps in touch with Islam in the border stations, but not sufficiently to determine the character of its work. There is no mission, however, among the heathen in Malaysia,

which does not come in contact with Islam. The Edinburgh Conference Report rightly says: "The next ten years will, in all probability, constitute a turning-point in human history, and may be of more critical importance in determining the spiritual evolution of mankind than many centuries of ordinary experience. If these years are wasted, havoc may be wrought that centuries are not able to repair. On the other hand, if they are rightly used, they may be among the most glorious in Christian history."

All this is specially true of the Dutch East Indies. The issue is clear, and the battle between Islam and Christianity must be fought to a finish. The need is for more workers and a more vigorous policy.

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