

THE MOSLEM WORLD

A quarterly review of current events, literature, and thought among Mohammedans, and the progress of Christian Missions in Moslem lands.

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EDITORIAL

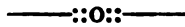
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ORIENTAL studies are generally considered to be very far from popular in Europe at the present time. It is undoubtedly the fact that this branch of knowledge is not cultivated as extensively as it ought to be. This applies especially perhaps to the Arabic, Persian and Turkish languages. Those who devote themselves thereto are far fewer than might be expected, when we consider the many matters of interest connected with such studies. Each of these three great languages contains a literature of considerable extent, both in poetry and in prose, and their study is necessary in order to acquire a worthy knowledge of the great religious, social and political events associated with Islâm.

Although these studies are not popular in the sense of being widespread, yet our own age has produced scholars of very great renown and ability who have devoted themselves to them with very considerable success. We are fortunate in being able to give our readers, in the present number of *THE MOSLEM WORLD*, portraits of a few of the living leaders in the world of thought which is concerned with the history and religion of Islâm. To deal with all such would be impossible in the space at our disposal, though we hope to continue the subject in a future issue.

The first among our portraits is that of Dr. Ignaz Goldziher, the famous Hungarian Orientalist. He is of Jewish descent, was born in 1850, and studied at Buda-Pest, Berlin and Leipsic, taking his Ph.D. degree at the latter University in 1870. The University of Cambridge conferred the honorary degree of Litt.D. on him in 1904, and he became Hon. LL.D. of Aberdeen in 1906. He is

THE INFLUENCE OF A MOHAMMEDAN ENVIRONMENT ON THE MISSIONARY



A DISCUSSION of this topic, into which the subjective element must necessarily enter, is not an easy task to perform faithfully. Along with personal experience, other available sources are observation of the influence and general effect on character produced by residence in Moslem countries, and the history of those Christian bodies that have lived for centuries in the midst of Islam. It is always difficult to distinguish characteristics that belong to a particular race or nation or religion from those that are common to all. Thus we who live in the Orient are in danger of charging on the Oriental in particular the failings that are human. Still, we have all felt the influence of the Moslem environment, and have wished we might escape it. It is a real thing, though it may seem to be indefinable; and it may be of value to us to try to define the elements that enter into it, and to mark the dangers that are about us.

Islam is a religion of compromise. The puzzle of the life of its founder results from the conflicting elements in his character: religious zeal and political ambition, enthusiasm for righteousness and the use of immoral means in carrying out his purposes, scorn of evil and personal indulgence. Contradictory elements are found in the life of every man—save One; but in the life of Mohammed their presence results not in a life-long conflict but in a truce. In accepting Mohammed as the moral of their religion, Mohammedans are forced into a permanent, moral compromise, with the consequent lowering of their moral standards. Similarly in theology the authority of the Jewish and Christian scriptures is theoretically confirmed, but in practice it is entirely

disregarded. It has been discussed in the pages of this Review whether the Book that Mohammed had in view was the canonical Scriptures or not; and there is no evidence whatever that Mohammed ever tried to find out the contents of the Book to which he appealed. He was satisfied with a general endorsement and with the claim of its support. The later theory, so generally held by Mohammedans, of the corruption or loss of the original New Testament, is only another example of the same tendency to compromise by accepting the form while giving up the substance. Another striking illustration of great importance is the attitude to Our Lord Himself. Practically, this tendency works out into a readiness on the part of Moslems to profess belief without real consideration of what is involved in the profession. It is not meant that these same things are not found outside Islam, but that in Islam they are embedded in the foundations of the faith. Shi'a moralists carry this characteristic a step further, and justify dissimulation in religion as proper in the face of compulsion, differing among themselves as to the amount of compulsion required to justify dissimulation. The result is a pervading unreality in religious profession and discussion. Men beat the air, for there is no intention of carrying to their logical or practical conclusions the principles upheld in discussion. On such terms discussion becomes as easy and as ineffectual as a sham battle with blank cartridges. The difficulty is to give reality to such discussions, and the temptation is to satisfy oneself with the appearance. One is in danger of compromising with duty, of soothing the conscience with the opiate of talk, and of being very busy without accomplishing anything. Probably every missionary in a Moslem land has listened to, and probably taken part in, discussions on morals that on the part of some of those engaged in them were utterly hypocritical, oppressive rulers discoursing on justice, grasping liars praising honesty and uprightness, heartless and cruel extortioners talking about mercy. This light handling of serious and precious things is dangerous. The frequent use of pious phrases is not altogether bad nor insincere, and yet there is in it a real

danger against which the missionary needs to be on the guard.

Moral and intellectual integrity are inseparably connected, and one is puzzled to know how much of the proverbial mendacity of the Orient is attributable to the one and how much to the other. Looseness in argument and inaccuracy in statement are characteristic. Analogy and imagination take the place of proof and testimony. While one should adapt his methods of argument, and while analogy and imagination are most important in the vivid presentation of truth, there is a very real danger of falling into loose methods of thinking and into inaccuracy in statement, which have their moral and spiritual effect. To consciously use an argument which is not cogent, to modify or to exaggerate statements of fact or of truth in order to meet the exigencies of discussion, is to impair one's intellectual integrity, and to inflict moral injury on oneself. In the easy judgment passed by the people on the breach of such virtues as promptness in appointments and faithfulness to promises, which are related to strict integrity of character, there is a call for special watchfulness. No reputation is more valuable in the East than the reputation for strict integrity, and none is easier to lose by mere carelessness. Kipling's advice to the new recruit is apropos :

Keep away from dirtiness, keep away from mess,
Don't get to doin' things rather more-or-less !
Let's ha' done with *abby nay*, *kul*, or *hazar ho*,
Mind you keep your rifle and yourself jus' so.

There is but one safe rule of integrity and truthfulness, and that is in Kipling's phrase, "Keep yourself jus' so," without allowance or compromise. I believe that the maintenance of habits of clear and correct thinking and careful speech is an important means to this end.

The history of the Christian Church in Moslem lands enforces another danger, that of the loss of evangelistic zeal. The great martyr period of the Nestorian Church was under the Zoroastrian rule of the Sassanian kings, and not under the Moslem rule of the Arabs. The missionary activity of that church, previous to the rise of Islam, made no compromises and recognised no limits.

Islam offered the Church the position of a tolerated religion with accompanying privileges and restrictions, and the offer was accepted. Henceforth, missionary activity was directed towards non-Islamic peoples, who were numerous in the early centuries of Mohammedanism. The missionary spirit was gradually extinguished, and with its loss came a decline in spiritual life. The temptation comes to the missionary now in insidious ways. One source of temptation is the large use of methods of work not directly evangelistic, such as schools and hospitals. These are justifiable in themselves as expressions of the spirit of Christ ; but, while true expressions, taken alone they are inadequate and incomplete. The mistake is not in taking school and medical work as essential and necessary parts of missionary work, but in taking them as the whole of the work. The fact that they are the agencies that are most acceptable increases the danger. Further, many of us feel the need of defining the line between proselytism and true evangelistic zeal. The distinction is, doubtless, rather in the aim and the spirit of the worker than in the method ; and the danger is that in avoiding the first we lose also the second, and so cease to become missionaries in the truest sense. Similarly, there is danger of shifting the objective. The chief point of attack in Christian work is not wrong belief but wrong life. The Mohammedan seldom looks on religion as a power for personal righteousness, and there is danger of our insensibly falling into his point of view. The Moslem attitude of security, the feeling that change on their part is an impossibility, strengthened by the inherited belief that Christianity is a beaten religion, unconsciously deadens the zeal of the missionary and takes the life out of faith.

Closely connected with the temptation just mentioned is the danger of relying on unspiritual means for the propagation of the faith. It is hardly necessary to argue that a characteristic of Islam is the use not only of force in the propagation of religion, but also of social pressure in the attraction of gain and of power, and of relief from oppression. The constant influence that for centuries has been exerted to induce Oriental Christians to

deny Christ has been tremendous. The result has been the desire on the part of the Christians to meet Islam with its own weapons, an impossible course, or else with the universal refuge of the weak—cowardly intrigue. The missionary record of the Near East, especially that of the Roman and Russian churches, is not free from the use of unspiritual means. The missionary to Moslems has a very difficult question before him in the support of converts, who, by the desertion of Islam, cut themselves off from the ordinary means of self-support; and inquirers, whether sincere or not, are only too ready to expect and, perhaps, demand financial help. The use of the appeal to the superior wealth or power of European nations as a proof of the truth of Christianity may be an insidious form of the same temptation. Apparent failure, the sense of the unyielding inertia of Islam, and the necessity of patient and long-continued labour, tempt one to lose the conquering faith that truth has the inherent power to fight its own battles, and that the Word of the Gospel has in itself the assurance of victory.

Another point of danger may be found in the attitude of the missionary to Islam. If he is intolerant, or if he assumes not only that in Christ he has the sum of saving truth and the power of individual and social regeneration, but that all he has is true, and that he has nothing to learn from Mohammedans, the effect is harshness and irresponsiveness to the leadings of truth. On the other hand, a sympathetic attitude of open-mindedness and readiness to learn as well as to teach, brings with it the danger of giving up truth and of compromising with error. The very effort to examine fairly the foundations of belief, which is necessary in discussion, has its dangers. I cannot conceive of a missionary honestly and sympathetically meeting Moslems in religious discussion without subjecting his own theology to an overhauling which cannot be without its risk. There is reason in all this for carefulness without timidity.

It would be easy to lengthen the list of dangers and temptations, but it may not be worth the time. A personal habit that gives temptation an opportunity is the habit of excusing oneself instead of judging oneself

strictly. Oriental flattery and sycophancy are at hand to strengthen any such habit, and hence it is doubly necessary to keep strict guard of oneself and to beware of indulging too lenient judgments. Sound intellectual habits and patient, careful thinking things out, the maintenance of a broad outlook on the world, and accurate knowledge of Islam itself, are needed in order to avoid those prejudices and mistaken judgments that not only hamper one's usefulness, but re-act on one's spiritual health. But all of these are subsidiary. The way to withstand deteriorating influences is to maintain spiritual strength. This is not the place to discuss the means for the maintenance of spiritual life at a high level. The importance of this cannot be over-estimated, and one suggestion may be made with special reference to Islam. The differences between Christianity and Islam are in Christ Himself. Islam has taken over the name, but not the teachings of Jesus nor His spirit. Contact with Christ Himself is the universal condition to Christian life ; and in avoiding the dangers that come to one from Islam, the special way of safety is to hold close to Him, who has been superseded in the belief of Moslems by the prophet of Arabia.

It would be wrong in an article on this subject to stop with the difficulties and temptations. The privileges and victories are greater still, and every temptation may be a triumph. The vision of a great opportunity and the courage of a great task are ours. We see the signs of crumbling in Islam, and sometimes we fear lest it mean the loss of all faith in many to whom Islam has been the guarantee of faith in God ; and yet we must rejoice in the coming release from the bondage of the untrue and imperfect. As we live in the atmosphere of Islam, we rejoice more truly in the freedom of Christ ; we understand better the reason for the form of our religion ; we glory in the Gospel of Christ, and we offer Him an undivided allegiance.

W. A. SHEDD.