

THE SOUL OF ISLAM

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THE study of comparative religion has taught us to appreciate the religions of other civilizations, and also has enabled us to understand the fuller meaning of it, so that, we of the Occident, no longer divide humanity into two classes: Christians and Heathens. We realize today, as we never did before that all religions are fundamentally one, each phase of it having developed along different lines. The writer of the Fourth Gospel sensed this when he wrote, "There was the true light, even the light which lighteth every man, coming into the world." This noted Christian writer and propagandist of the first century, coming face to face with the ancient religions of Rome, Greece, and Egypt, and other religions of the East, saw that all religions are like moons, which shine by reflected light, but back of them all is a common, central sun, the source of all religious truth. Hitherto, Christians of all sects have refused to recognize the spiritual and moral value of other religions, including Islam. This attitude of Christians towards Islam finds its fullest expression in the Collect for Good Friday as found in "The Book of Common Prayer," "O Merciful God, who hast made all men, and hatest nothing that thou hast made, nor desirest the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live; have mercy upon all Jews, Turks, infidels, and heretics; and take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt for thy Word." But such opinions have been changed, and for the good of all, due to a better knowledge of Religion as a whole. The modern missionary goes out to meet the followers of other religions with a nobler spirit than did the missionary of a generation ago. His purpose is not to save heathens, so-called, from a hell of fire, but to share with them the fruits of different civilizations. He knows that the representative of one civilization to another civi-

lization has something to receive as well as to give. This attitude is a healthier one, and brings about better results. It makes for union and harmony rather than for separation and dissention.

"Allah akbar, God is great," is the foundation and corner-stone of Islam. To the Moslem it means complete submission to Allah, for this world and for the next. The true Moslem would not find it difficult to understand the sentiments of Job when he said, after he lost his children, property, health, and the confidence of friends, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him." He believes that Allah knows what is best, and always does what is right. Allah must not be questioned. It is this that has made Islam a great power for the past thirteen hundred years. The chief place of interest in any Moslem city is the Mosque, with its minaret, and the Muezzin calling the faithful ones to prayer five times a day. It is a religion that cannot be despised by the student of religions. Its millions of faithful followers are more loyal to Mohammed than Jews are to Moses, or Christians to Jesus. Carlyle writes as follows of Islam and Mohammed. "Our current hypothesis about Mahomet, that his religion is a mere mass of quackery and fatuity, begins really to be now untenable to anyone. The lies, which well-meaning zeal has heaped round this man, are disgraceful to ourselves only. Islam is definable as a confused form of Christianity; had Christianity not been, neither had it been." And Renan states, "Islam is a version of Judaism adapted to the Arab taste." Carlyle calls attention to the fact that Moslems really believe in their religion. "No Christians, since the early days, except perhaps the English Puritans in modern times, have ever stood by their faith as the Moslems do by theirs. Allah akbar, Islam, sounds through the souls and the daily existence, of these dusky millions." All who have lived in Moslem lands know this to be so. The great problem confronting the ministers of Judaism and Christianity is to hold their own followers. This is not true of the leaders of Islam. The followers of Mohammed are extremely zealous of their religion, and no one dare speak disparagingly of it in their presence. The following incident will throw light on this zeal of Moslems for Islam.

I was sailing on a Lloyd Trestinto boat during the month of August from Haifa to Venice. We stopped for three days at Alexandria. This city was founded by Alexander the Great, and was for many years the leading city in the world, prominent in commerce, science, politics and religion, and is still a city of prominence.

It is the leading port of Egypt, and is really more European than African. One evening, as I was going ashore, accompanied by an Austrian, the Egyptian custom officer on the dock, searched us for dutable articles. The Austrian chanced to say something to this Egyptian Moslem that sounded to him as being derogatory to his faith. He stepped up, and looked at him, with fire in his eyes, and a voice trembling with rage, and said in Arabic, "Shoo?" "What?" I knew some Arabic, and it sounded to me as if the Austrian said something that no man should have said to a Moslem, in a Moslem land. I asked the Austrian what he said. The poor man did not know why the Egyptian looked so angry. I learned that the Austrian had said something to him in Italian, and that his words had nothing to do with religion. He wished him good luck. It did not take me long to explain to the Egyptian the meaning of the Italian words. His expression changed, his words were more gentle, and he said to me, "Any man who curses my faith dies." Needless to say, the Egyptian was not looking for trouble, and was glad to listen to my explanation. He took a few cigarettes we handed to him, and we parted as friends.

In these days, there are Christian ministers who talk about making their churches, "Inclusive," rather than, "Exclusive." But Islam has been that more so than Christianity or Judaism. An Egyptian gentleman who had studied in one of the Mission schools of Egypt explained this to me. I met him while returning from the Gizeh Pyramids to Cairo. Our conversation drifted to religion. He said to me, "The Christians are intolerant and bigotted. Who has ever heard a Moslem speak unkindly either of Moses or Jesus, but one seldom hears Christians speak kindly of Mohammed. We recognize both Moses and Jesus as great teachers. They both have places of prominence in Islam, but Christians generally insult the memory of our prophet."

What this Moslem said came back to me with great force the following day when I was visiting the Alabaster or Citadel Mosque of Cairo. I was taken to this place by an Egyptian, formerly a member of the Coptic Church, and at this time a member of an American Mission. I was walking arm in arm with the caretaker of this wonderful building. He was pointing out to me the various interesting spots. In the course of our conversation I told him that I was not unfriendly towards Islam, and was not in sympathy with religious bigotry. I said, "Let us all be friendly, and respect

the religions of others. We all worship the same God, but in our own way. Let us try to surpass each other in good deeds, and thus let our conduct prove the real worth of our respective religions, as Jesus said, "By their fruits ye shall know them." When we departed my Christian friend was angry, and said to me, "You have not been true to our faith. You have conceded too much to this Mohammedan. He has a false religion. Ours is the only true religion."

This Christian spoke for the millions of Christendom, but one who knew spoke truer words when he said, "Call it not false; look not at the falsehood of it, look at the truth of it. For these twelve centuries, it has been the religion and life-guidance of the fifth part of the whole kindred of mankind. Arabia first became alive by means of it. A poor shepherd people roaming unnoticed in its deserts since the creation of the world: a hero-prophet was sent down to them with a word they could believe: see, the unnoticed became world-notable, the small has grown world-great: within a century afterwards, Arabia is at Granada on this hand, at Delhi on that—glancing in valor and splendor and the light of genius. Arabia shines through long ages over a great section of the world."

In actual practice there is more true democracy in worship in Islam than in the Christian churches of America. I saw it in this Mosque, and in all the Mosques I visited in Egypt, Syria, North Africa, Turkey, etc. If this Alabaster or Citadel Mosque of Cairo, or the Sancta Sophia, and Achmed Mosques of Constantinople, or the Dome of the Rock, also known as, the Mosque of Omar, of Jerusalem, were located in America they would be Cathedrals for the rich. The Citadel Mosque, like all Mosques, had no seats, but was beautifully carpeted, and all who entered, either to worship or to visit had to cover their shoes with sandals before entering. This applied to rich as poor. Having no seats it meant that within this House of God there were no reserved seats. The worshippers, rich and poor, knelt on the richly carpeted floor, and prayed to Allah, fully conscious that Allah was no respecter of persons. In his presence they all are equal. Within this House of God there was no evidence of pride of wealth or race. Not only do poor as well as rich feel at home here, but there is no color line drawn. In one of the choicest corners of this cathedral-like building I saw a poor, filthy Moslem beggar, clad in rags, kneeling and quietly worshipping Allah. He did not feel out of place there. It was his

spiritual home. Is it any wonder then that Islam has made such tremendous progress among the races of Asia and Africa, in the past, and also at the present time? It goes forth with the true spirit of brotherhood. Its success in its missionary efforts is most phenomenal. All Christian missionaries engaged in similar effort in Africa know that in Islam they encounter a most formidable rival. A French Protestant missionary, speaking of the missionary zeal and success of the Sennussi members said, "We see Islam on its march, sometimes slowed down but never stopped, toward the heart of Africa. Despite all obstacles encountered, it tirelessly pursues its way. It fears nothing. Even Christianity, its most serious rival, Islam regards without hate, so sure is it of victory. While Christians dream of the conquest of Africa, the Mohammedans do it." An English writer said, "Mohammedanism is making marvelous progress in the interior of Africa. It is crushing paganism out. Against it the Christian propaganda is a myth."

How are we to explain this? Islam both in theory and practice removes all racial barriers. This is true of Christianity only in theory, but not in practice. I have met hosts of Oriental converts to Christianity who feel that in Christianity they face a double-standard, and that Christianity,—the Christianity of the West fails to break down racial barriers. In many instances native churches have been denied self-government, and the native workers, no matter how efficient, have been denied a compensation for their services equal to that of the missionary from the West. I have known some who have gone into other callings, because they have refused to be considered inferior. In addition to this the only propagandists of the Christian faith have been paid missionaries, whereas every Moslem in pagan lands is a missionary. A writer on the subject said, "Islam, like any great faith, and insight into the essence of man, is a perfect equalizer of men: the soul of one believer outweighs all earthly kingships; all men, according to Islam too, are equal." It is a religion of compassion. Mohammed insists not on the propriety of giving alms, but on the necessity for it; he marks down by law how much you are to give, and it is at your peril if you neglect it. The tenth part of a man's annual income, whatever it may be, is the property of the poor, of those that are afflicted and need help.

It is a man's, as well as a woman's, religion. The Christian clergy of every sect know how difficult it is to command the deep-

est interest and fullest cooperation of their men. How many Christian churches would cease to exist if the women did not take a commanding part to keep them alive. Not so with Islam. At every regular service the men are present in large numbers. Men are the backbone of Islam. Christian leaders of every sect are telling us that the American Protestant Church is in danger of disintegration because of the spirit of indifference on the part of the majority of its followers. That religion has been banished from the homes, and that the Bible is not read, and that millions of children are not receiving instruction in the Christian religion. But Mohammedans cannot be accused of having lost interest in their religion.

Where is Allah? The Moslem would have no difficulty to understand the meaning of the words of Jesus to the woman of Samaria. This woman was a typical modern denominationalist, confining God into sectarian spaces, and within prescribed creeds. Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father. God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth." To Moslems God is a spirit in reality, present everywhere, and when the stated hour for worship comes, not only on Sunday, but five times a day, they go down on the knees and worship Allah. He is neither afraid nor ashamed to do it in the presence of others. They do it on the sandy and desolate desert, in the crowded market place, on the deck of steamers and on running trains.

I was one of a party travelling on a special train from Asswan to Luxor. The weather was terribly hot, sultry, and dusty, and we were all more or less exhausted. The cars with special colored glass windows to keep out the blinding glare of sand and sun. Large quantities of iced-drinks were consumed, and none of us were in conversational moods. About three o'clock in the afternoon, I stepped out for a moment on the rear platform of our car, and there I saw a sight that thrilled me. One of the dining car waiters, a Moslem, was saying his afternoon prayer. Totally oblivious to everybody and everything, he was kneeling, rising, and stretching out his hands, and praying very quietly. But this was not an uncommon sight. It is such zeal that makes Islam the mightiest religion of today.

Couple this zeal with its spirit of brotherhood, and one can

easily understand the secret of its power. A Christian missionary writes of the spirit of brotherhood in Islam, "The bond of Brotherhood is more real in the world of Islam than in the world of Christianity." An Englishman writes, "The bonds of unity and brotherliness bind together different races in Mohammedanism. Islam is today closer knit together than Christendom was even in the times of the medieval crusades." Stoddart writes, "The bond between Moslem and Moslem is today much stronger than between Christian and Christian. There has been no single instance where a people, once became Moslem, has ever abandoned its faith."

Contrast this spirit of brotherliness in the Mohammedan world with the terrible world-wide race prejudice of the Christian world. Christendom is like a house divided against itself; divided by race, class, creed, and nationality. A Moslem's country is the whole of Islam. Wherever Allah is worshipped there he is at home, regardless of race, class, or nationality. Whereas in Christendom nationality is the great barrier dividing Christians. A Protestant, or a Roman Catholic, is a foreigner everywhere when he is away from his native land.

It is a simple religion, not primarily a religion for theologians. Like Judaism, it is strictly a Monotheistic faith, but surpassing Judaism in its catholicity. All of the conflicting Christian theologies are totally alien to its spirit. It has none of the thousand and one theories and dogmas which have obscured the character and mission of the founder of Christianity, and turned Christendom into warring camps, hating and slaughtering one another because of different theologies. Islam has both suppressed and destroyed many worthless idolatries and quarreling Christians sects of the East. Carlyle says, "Mahomet's creed, if we look at the wild rapt earnestness with which it was believed and laid to heart, I should say a better kind than that of those miserable Syrian sects, with their vain janglings about homoiousion and homoousion, the head full of worthless noise, the heart empty and dead! Islam devoured all these vain juggling sects; and I think had right to do so." H. G. Wells calls attention to this aspect of Islam as contrasted with what is generally known as Christianity. "Islam from the outset was fairly proof against the theological elaborations that have perplexed and divided Christianity and smothered the spirit of Jesus. It was not simply a new faith, a purely prophetic religion, as the religion of Jesus was in the time of Jesus, or the religion of Gautama in the

lifetime of Gautama, but it was so states as to remain so. Islam to this day has learned doctors, teachers, and preachers; but it has no priests. All sacrifice was barred to the faithful; no loophole was left for the sacrificial priest of the old dispensation to come back into the new faith. Without any ambiguous symbolism, without any darkening of altars of chanting priests. Mohammed had brought home those attractive doctrines to the hearts of mankind."

Mohammed refused to claim for himself the power to work miracles. He says of himself, "I can work no miracles. I? I am a public preacher; appointed to preach this doctrine to all creatures." What is it? Monotheism pure and simple, the destruction of idolatry, purity of life, compassion, etc. In a word, simple doctrines which the most illiterate can understand. On the other hand, to Mohammed, the whole of nature, and every manifestation of nature is one continuous miracle. He sees the hand of God in the earth, the clouds, the seas, the animals that minister to the comforts of man, every stage of life, from the cradle to the grave, and the nobler emotions of the heart. He does not claim to differ from other men. He is simply a preacher of great fundamental truths.

Its fraternal spirit is also seen in all of its social relations. The deep chasms which separate the classes in Christendom do not exist in Moslem circles. I am referring especially to the relationships that exist in Mohammedan homes between masters and servants. In the vast majority of homes in America, or for that matter in Christian Europe there exists an almost unbridgeable gulf between masters and servants. In America it is next to impossible to get Americans to enter this line of service, because they do not wish to be treated merely as menials. American young women prefer the factory and store to service in homes, in spite of the fact that the latter form of work offers better remuneration. The same is true of American men. The servants in the wealthy homes, from the butler to the chore boy, are generally of European birth. But in the average Mohammedan homes this line of cleavage between masters and servants does not exist. In the Mohammedan homes, not only do we find a spirit of rare politeness on the part of servants, but it is very noticeable that these servants do not consider themselves merely as servants, but as members of the household. They expect to be treated with courtesy. The master is in reality the father of the entire household. In my journeys through the East I have always found the servants obliging, courteous, and never

too subservient. They are never too familiar, never overstep the bounds of propriety, and always appreciate generous treatment at the hands of Occidentals. The following will throw some light on this matter.

Three of us, all Americans, started on a trip through central Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. Two Arabs accompanied us to look after our material needs, and two donkeys to carry our equipment. We made the trip on foot. It was our plan to see Palestine, on and off, but especially off the beaten paths. It took us about eight days to make the trip from Jerusalem to the Plain of Esdraelon, and during the whole time we never had occasion to reprimand these Arabs. They were always the last to go to bed, and the first to rise in the morning, trying in all ways even to anticipate our wishes and needs. During this trip they were our comrades rather than servants, and always delighted with any courtesy shown them. I still remember two incidents of that trip. One of our objectives was a monastery, situated on one of the highest spots on Mount Carmel. It was the el-Muhraka, or the Place of Burning, where the prophet Elijah is supposed to have had his famous contest with the priests and prophets of Baal.

We reached this spot towards evening after a very strenuous climb, and when the sun sank, as it were in the depth of the blue waters of the Mediterranean, a strong cold breeze swept over the mountain. Like Pilgrims, we knocked at the door of the monastery for the night's shelter, and we were instantly admitted. But our servants were refused admittance. They were assigned a place in the stable with the donkeys. A few minutes later they knocked at our window, and told us that they were practically shelterless, and cold. They had no protection from the cold wind. We were in a dilemma for a moment. We did not feel free to ask the father-superior to give them a room, because he had already shut them out, and we did not have the heart to let them stay out all night in the cold. We took them into our room. The five of us slept that night on the floor. But they always fared better when we camped for the night at Moslem places.

It was at Taanach, overlooking the great Plain of Galilee. Here the sheikh welcomed us into his own home, placing at our disposal the guest chamber. We, including our servants, were given places of honor, and served with food, such as olives, cheese, sweet and soured milk, and native bread. All this was served not only for the

Americans, but also for the servants. We ate from the same dishes, and when the time came to go to bed, beds were made for all. Our servants were their guests just as we were.

The spirit of hospitality. This spirit is very strong with Moslems. The rich give of their abundance, and the poor give of their little. But it is free and spontaneous, asking nothing in return, save a kind word.

The typical American village, as contrasted with the typical Moslem village is cold and repellant. To the stranger, especially without means it offers neither food nor shelter. In these Moslem villages, food and shelter are offered to all, with or without means, to the foreigner as well as to the native. Every village throughout Syria and Palestine has the regular native guest chamber, known as *te Medafeh*. It is generally a part of the sheikh's home. This room is also a rallying place for the men of the village. Here they spend their spare hours. These rooms are equipped with bedding for strangers. It is next to impossible to pass through one of these villages without being urged by the men to stop for a chat, a smoke, and a cup of coffee. On several occasions our party planned to remain in the open all night, and if it happened to be near a village, the men came out, and compelled us to accept their hospitality. They considered it an insult not to take advantage of their guest chamber, and such food as they had to give. On parting, a little money was generally left with the sheikh, which was not considered compensation for services given, but as a little present for the poorer members of the community. But no money was ever asked for. In offering this hospitality they never enquired one's creed or race.

This spirit of hospitality is not only to be found in the villages, but also in the cities. Every Moslem home incarnates it. About ten of us made a special visit to the home of a Moslem squire in northern Galilee. He was a man of much wealth and had many wives. He seemed really a patriarchal character. The day before we arrived his place was attacked by a band of robbers from Syria. The four native policemen he had with him ran away, but he rallied his sons and servants and defeated these robbers. His place was a Garden of Eden. Everything was well arranged, with shaded gardens and waters flowing through the midst of them. In one such bower there were tables, all for the benefit of friends and passing visitors. When we arrived this spacious spot was placed at our disposal. In the midst of this bower was a channel of flow-

ing water. Here we spent a most delightful afternoon. Our host gave us olives, oranges, grapes, and coffee. Later in the afternoon the ladies of our party were asked to visit his wives. One of our party, an Englishman said, "Imagine an English squire of his wealth and standing opening his home to a band of passing strangers!"

I have been entertained at the homes of those prominent in governmental, educational, and religious circles, and in the homes of the poorer people, and everywhere the same spirit of courtesy, refinement and real hospitality prevailed. This is why those from the Occident who have had intimate contact with life in the East are usually free from the prejudice which is part and parcel of those who have never had the good fortune to travel in these lands. The occidentals who live there as missionaries, teachers, and business man, and those in the service of their governments are also free from this prejudice. These beautiful touches of hospitality have captured their hearts.

Temperance. Every Christian land, every Christian community, large and small, has its battle with the liquor problem. So far Christian communities have not discovered the key to the temperance problem. Not so with Islamic lands. Islam is the greatest temperance society on earth. It is a part of their creed to leave liquor alone. And it is strictly lived up to, with the few exceptions of such who live in cities like Algiers, Cairo, Alexandria, and Constantinople, where the influence of vast numbers of Christians is not always of the best. Away from Christian contacts there are no liquor establishments and no drunkenness of any description.

The following lines are from a prominent American Christian magazine, "Because of its historic Moslem attitude against intoxicating drink, and because practically the entire liquor business in Constantinople is in the hands of non-Moslems, or "Christians" as they are officially classed, it is quite natural that drink should be the principal target against which Turkish reform activities are directed. And drink is the vulnerable point that is open to attack by the Turk. In a survey made of Constantinople under the direction of Clarence Richard Johnson, professor of sociology of Robert College, and published by the Macmillan company, the following facts were given as regards the liquor problem of that city. Of the 1413 liquor places, 1,169 were Greek, 97 Turkish, 57 Armenian, 44 Russian, and 17 Jewish."

This investigator also reported the social vice of Constantinople,

and here again we see that Islam has had ennobling influences. He reported that of the 175 houses of vice, 79 were Greek, 45 Jewish, 35 Armenian, and 11 Turkish. Of the inmates of these places actually canvassed by the investigators, 386 were Greeks, 125 Jewish, 91 Armenians, and 43 Russian. But no Moslem women were among these. Of the 2,177 women of this class registered at the Central Sanitary Bureau, 1,367 registered as Christians and Jews, and only 358 Moslems. In view of this fact we can understand why the work of Christian missionaries in Moslem lands like Egypt, Syria, and Turkey is largely among native Christians.

We will take a glance into an Egyptian city, far removed from Occidental contacts, save with the highest class of tourists, and that for only four or five months of the year. I am referring to Asswan in Upper Egypt. The town has a population of about eighteen thousand, and is of interest to tourists because of its proximity to the Great Asswan Dam. I was walking one evening with a native of this town, and I noticed that the town was strangely quiet and orderly. He told me that this town was noted for its orderly spirit. He took me to the police station and prison, and showed me that the prison was totally empty, and that it was generally that way.

Islam has a great past, and it also has a great future. Islamic nations are coming to life again, and demanding for themselves places in the sun. Turkey has already freed herself, and become master of her own household, and is making progress in western ways of living. Other Moslem nations in Asia and Africa are demanding the same for themselves. The People of the West, calling themselves Christian, might as well realize the folly of trying to meet these nations in any other way save of real honesty, justice and truth. The West had tried the sword and questionable methods of diplomacy, and failed to build for itself a lasting foundation. The old adage, that honesty is the best policy, will certainly hold good in all relations between the Christian and Moslem. Let Christians try to approach Moslems with the spirit of Jesus, and we are sure they will make greater progress in international good will, justice and peace.