

THE CALIPHATE*

THE Caliphate is the symbol of the traditionally and theoretically essential and necessary political unity of the Moslem world. The religious observances of Moslems—their daily worship, fasting in Ramadan, pilgrimage, etc.—may symbolize their religious unity; but the business of the Caliph is the administration of the affairs of their world in the widest sense, and the conception of his office looks back to a time in the remote past when these duties were really carried out and forward to a time in the millennial future when the carrying out of these duties will again be possible. At the present time, therefore, to call any one a Caliph means to assert his right to administer politically the affairs of the Moslem world. A Caliph, consequently, is to be sharply distinguished from a Pope, with whose office his is too often confused, in that he, first, is only an executive and has no right to develop or define what is of faith for Moslems—that is done by the Moslem people through their “agreement”—and, secondly, his executive functions cover all sides of life, political, legal, religious.† The interest, therefore, of the present situation lies in this question: Will the Caliph of the future continue to maintain this claim to the headship of a politically unified Islam, and will Islam continue to feel itself a political unity over against the non-Moslem world, or will the principle of nationality prevail among the Moslem peoples as it has elsewhere and their Caliphate become merely a

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†The theory of the Caliphate has been repeatedly treated by Moslem theologians and canonists. Two such treatments exist in translation. One of these is Léon Ostrorog's “*Traité de droit public musulman*” (Paris, 1901), a translation of the “*Ahkam as-sultaniya*” of Mawardi, Vol. I, pp. 89–195, and the other is De Slane's translation of “*Les Prolégomènes d'Ibn Khaldoun*” (Paris, 1863), Vol. I, pp. 384–444. These supplement one another very happily.

symbol of religious unity? Caliph is the title used here as the one most commonly known with us; but Moslems use in its place, as often as not, *Amīr al-mu'minīn*, "Commander of the Faithful," and even *Imām*, "Leader," taking that word in its highest sense. These three are practically interchangeable.

The status, duties, and rights of a Caliph are made most intelligible by the early historical development. The theory of the Caliphate, too, is based upon the precedents then established and upon a few sayings which, though put into the mouth of Mohammed, were really forged to support one political party or another. Mohammed at Medina had administered directly all the affairs of his people; he had been, like Moses and the Hebrew Judges, their individual and absolute ruler and judge. As Prophet, he had also been a first-hand source of faith and law; dogmas and legal rulings he could produce at need. This position of his was strictly in accordance with Arab, and indeed Semitic, ideas. To the authority, in a sense shading into *auctoritas*, of an Arab chief over his tribe he had added the infallibility of a prophet and the unifying and arousing force of a new idea—Islam. When he died, then, his position had to be filled, so far as that was possible. Of his four immediate "successors" (*Khalīfa*, Caliph, means "successor")—the only ones recognized by all Islam—the first, the third, and the fourth were chosen by elective councils and in rapidly increasing political turmoil, and the second was nominated by the first.

It was thus fixed for the Moslem world, at least for that large portion of it which is called Sunnite, that its head should be freely elected by the people or nominated by his predecessor, and then accepted by the people. In theory, therefore, the power is of the people functioning as a free democracy, but the people chooses to be governed by a single individual who is then given absolute power and is to be obeyed implicitly as long as he breaks no essential law of Islam; if he does, he may be recalled by the people which appointed him. He appears, externally, to be an autocrat, but is not, and the people always retains the sacred right of insurrection. It is a disputed point whether

tyranny and personal immorality are valid grounds for recall. One school of constitutional law so holds, but another teaches that so long as the Caliph is a Moslem and an effective ruler he must be obeyed. Into the further details as to whether tyranny or immorality deprives him of his office *ipso facto*, or whether he must be formally deposed, and again whether the people *must* depose him for these reasons, or only *may*, it is not necessary to enter.

Again, by the necessities of the case, the functions of this single ruler came in time to be discharged by a multitude of officials. The Caliphate was put into commission; but each official acted by delegated authority, and it is laid down as one of the responsibilities of the Caliph that he should personally satisfy himself that his deputies are doing their duty. Practically, the Caliph vanished behind a screen of administrative machinery and only at crises of the state did the people have any contact with him.

But though the successor of the Prophet, it is plain that the Caliph can only partially take the place of the Prophet. He cannot promulgate or define doctrines or laws; he can only defend and apply those already given forth and defined; in a word, he can only administer what is accepted as being of Islam. But that does not mean that the system of Islam is unchangeably fixed; it is quite the contrary. There are far greater possibilities of addition, development, and change inherent in the Moslem people than, for example, in the Pope, even when speaking *ex cathedra*. If that people agrees that any doctrine or law is of Islam, it is of Islam. This is the principle of the Agreement, and is crystallized in a saying put into the mouth of the Prophet: "My People will never agree in an error." Further, this Agreement is not reached by any specific decisions of councils. The Moslem people, rather, develops it, as it were, unconsciously through a process of gradual crystallizing of opinion. Individuals who by study and attainments have a right to have an opinion of their own on the point in question come to have the same opinion, and the thing is accomplished. This, of course, takes place everywhere in the formation of common opinion; but in

Islam it has been observed, analyzed, and established as a definitive source—and the final one—of theology and law.

So much it is necessary to state to clear away the prevalent view that the Caliph is a Pope. He is an executive and his business is to administer all the affairs of Islam, religious and secular, and to watch over the purity of its doctrine and usage. But it may well be asked how this theory can be brought into agreement with the historical facts, and, especially, with the existence of hereditary dynasties of Caliphs, such as the 'Abbāsids. The basis for these lies in the admitted right of the Caliph to nominate his successor; so Abū Bakr nominated 'Umar, and the nomination was accepted. On the detailed theoretical limitations with which the canonists have surrounded this right of nomination they themselves are in dispute, and a consideration of them would lead us too far; in practice they have been ignored. Apart from the hereditary dynasties, the most conspicuous case of nomination is that which passed on the Caliphate to the Ottoman House. In 1538 the last representative of the 'Abbāsids died in Egypt as a purely titular Caliph, and he nominated as his successor Suleimān the Great, the Sultan of the Ottoman Turks. Since then that sultan has received, at his accession, a double investiture. He is girded with the sword of 'Othmān as the Sultan of the Ottomans, and he is chosen by the Sheikh al-Islām, the official head of all the canonist-theologians of Turkey since that office was created in 1453, as the Caliph of the Prophet, the head of the Moslem world, and symbolic representative of its theoretical unity. This action of the Sheikh al-Islām is regarded as being that of the Moslem people; he, as it were, casts a ballot for them, a far more regular and legal proceeding than the violent scenes which so often took place in the stormy times of the later 'Abbāsids, when the mob of the capital, or even the palace guard, assumed the same function.

But it becomes plain how theoretical is that unity when we consider that it existed only for 138 years, and that since A.D. 755 the Moslem world has never acknowledged

allegiance to a single ruler. Somewhat later, in the tenth century, as Stanley Lane-Poole has picturesquely put it, "the Mediterranean washed the territories of three rival Caliphs." Indeed, if we take account of more fugitive and less important secessions, we might push the period of unity back to within thirty years of the death of the Prophet. So many Moslems have felt, and their position has been put in the form of a statement from Mohammed, "My Successorship will last thirty years; thereafter will come kings and princes."

This was one—a violent—method of evading the difficulty. Another was to develop the doctrine that when there were lands of Islam so far removed from the country of the Caliph that his influence and authority could not reach to them, it was allowable for the people of those lands to choose a Caliph of their own. This was upheld by canonists of the first rank in both east and west, and especially, apparently, in the west. Spain was too far from Bagdad for the 'Abbāsīd Caliph to be there more than a name. So, in 929, 'Abd ar-Rahmān III, the Umayyad of Cordova, took the title of Caliph with the approval of the canonists of his court who urged this theory.

It would be vain in the space possible here to work through the history of the Caliphate; but the resultant present situation can be put quite shortly. Moslems to-day look to, roughly, six different supreme rulers. By far the largest number render an allegiance, often dubious, to the Ottoman Sultan. On a basis of strict canon law his claim to that allegiance is shaky; for almost all Islam accepts as valid a statement put into the mouth of Mohammed that the Caliph must be of the tribe of Quraish, that of the Prophet himself. 'Abd al-Hamīd, the late deposed Sultan, felt the force of this so strongly that the tradition in question had to be omitted in collections of traditions printed at Constantinople. The true basis of the Ottoman claim is really pragmatic. That Sultan is undoubtedly the greatest independent ruler in the Moslem world, and to him, therefore, the headship belongs by right. This basis would, of course, vanish with the vanishing or considerable curtailment of Turkey.

Afghanistan is probably the next greatest independent Moslem country. But its origin is comparatively modern dating from about the middle of the eighteenth century, and its Amīr, although in treaties he is now a "majesty," is debarred by treaty from external political relationships, and has never been associated with aspiration to the Caliphate.

The second of the six is the Invisible Imām of the Twelver sect of Shī'ites. All Shī'ites believe that 'Alī the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet and the fourth Caliph of the Sunnites, was his divinely appointed immediate successor and was wrongfully kept from his rights by his three predecessors; further, that his children had an equally divine right to succession after him. This is one of the legitimist parties in Islam, as opposed to the Sunnite or democratic party, and Shī'ism has sometimes run perilously close to deifying the line of 'Alī. All Persia believes that the twelfth in descent from 'Alī was removed by Allah from the sight of men and is now being preserved alive in retirement until his time to reappear shall come. This withdrawal happened about A.D. 874, and still, for Persians, after more than a thousand years, he is al-Muntazar, "the awaited one," and the real head of their government, and for them the Shāh is only a *locum tenens* to keep public order and no successor of the Prophet. This Invisible Imām is believed also to control the destinies of his people by mysterious channels. Thus his headship is statedly maintained in the recent Persian Constitution, and the success of the revolution, now become so problematical, is ascribed to his influence. Another division of Shī'ites took up the fortunes of another vanished Imām, Ismā'il, the seventh from Alī. These founded the Fātimid dynasty in north Africa, which has long gone its way, but has left behind it two still existing, if minor and partly secret sects. One of these is the Druzes, now in revolt and holding their Mountain against the Turkish-German control of Syria. They worship, as a divine incarnation, al-Hākim, the tenth Fātimid, who vanished in the Muqattam hills on the night of February 13, 1021 A.D., and left a mystery unread to this day. The other sect is the

Ismā'ilites, the Assassins of the Crusaders, who knew their head as the Old Man of the Mountain. Their present head is the Āgā Khān, a peaceful Indian gentleman to whom has been granted a sovereign salute of guns by the English Government and who is well known in London drawing-rooms. There it would be hard to realize that his revenues are derived from the hereditary devotion of the Assassins, whose secret remnants in Syria still worship him as divine. He is said to have dreams of the Caliphate; so John of Leyden might have dreamed of being elected Pope.

Another legitimist party in Islam limits the right to the Caliphate to the descendants of the Prophet, who are called Sharifs, Nobles. This party differs from the one above in that it is mostly Sunnite in theology and law, and while some sections of it ascribe hereditary saintship to the prophetic line with a power of working miracles, there is no taint among them of incarnation doctrines. Their attitude is a development of the general Moslem respect for the family of Mohammed, which enjoys, indeed the only exception of prestige of birth in the democracy of Islam. In the Yemen there are the Zaidites, tending towards the Shī'ites in law and theology and obeying an Imām of their own who traces his descent from a certain Zaid, a great-great-grandson of the Prophet. In Morocco, too, the present reigning house, which, under the French protectorate, reigns but does not rule, is of the blood of the Prophet, and has for almost four centuries claimed the title of Commander of the Faithful. To them the summons of the Ottoman Sultan to come to the assistance of their Caliph can have had no meaning. At Mecca there are at least two Sharif families which have for centuries enjoyed the highest respect from all the Moslem world. They have never ventured openly to claim the Caliphate, because they have always been under control from without and were until their recent revolt under that of the Ottoman Turks. But with the Turkish garrison now removed, there is little question that they will sooner or later, elect a Caliph of their own; they may, therefore, well be entered here.

The last group of claimants of independent sovereignty may be described as puritan and nonconformist. Their descent is to be traced from primitive Moslems who seceded from the general body of Islam because of its decadence from the democratic simplicity and theological rigidity of the first generations. In consequence they are completely outside of that general body; they regard other Moslems as renegades and worse than unbelievers, and the other Moslems regard them as stranger and less of kin to themselves than even Christians or Jews. These have never recognized any fundamental need of a Caliph. A head, for them, is allowable and useful, but is not the centre of the organization of the whole state as in the rest of Islam. Their ideal, rather, goes back to the primitive tribe of the desert, with its rulers who possess only influence over a democracy of individuals. Naturally, they are not found except in out-of-the-way corners of the Moslem world. The Ibādites have had their Imāms at 'Omān, at the entrance of the Persian Gulf, since 751 A.D., and a branch from there has been long settled at Zanzibar and ruled by Sultans. They have smaller settlements, too, in southern Algeria. Somewhat akin to these primitive seceders, but of a later origin by reform, accepted within the unity of Islam, are the Wahhābites of central Arabia. Here, too, may perhaps be entered the Senūssite fraternity of dervishes, for its policy has been to hold itself independent of control on the part of the governments of the countries in which it exists. For this reason it has steadily withdrawn its central organization deeper and deeper into the deserts of the Sahara, until it is now seated on the northern shore of Lake Chad. It is thus an *imperium in imperio* in the Moslem world. It avoids, too, all entangling contacts with unbelievers, and the story runs that its head formally "excommunicated" 'Abd al-Hamīd for his too much such trafficking. This probably means that he threw off allegiance to him as Caliph. By this time he has probably heartily repented his recent union with the Turks and has fallen back again into his solitude and independence.

These, then, are the elements, great and small, in the problem of the future of the Caliphate. The ill success

which has attended the summons addressed to the Moslem world by the Ottoman Sultan-Caliph has shown that the principle of unity in Islam is fast yielding to that of nationality. And that means that Islam is becoming more of a simple religion and less of a political system. But the indications are that this religious unity, also, for the great mass of Sunnites at least, will tend to express itself symbolically through an individual figure. The legitimists, Shi'ite and Sunnite, and the primitive Moslems, being already provided with heads or rejecting such headship as unessential, will, of course, have nothing to do with any such attempt. Further, this will be a matter for Moslems to work out for themselves by agreement and disagreement. They will certainly, however, desire that such a head shall be independent of external entanglements, especially with non-Moslems. It is, therefore, not surprising that one of the drifts of Moslem thought is towards setting apart Mecca and Medina, with their surrounding territory, as a kind of Estates of the Church, neutral and inviolable, and towards choosing as Caliph the head of the Sharif families there. Certainly, if a purely spiritual Caliph is to reside at any one point, it should be at Mecca, the religious centre of Islam. And it would be only natural that he should be chosen from among the descendants of the founder of that faith. To gain such a position the new King of the Hijāz must demonstrate that he is strong enough to maintain standing as an independent monarch—any suspicion of being "protected" would be fatal—and that he can keep such order as to make the pilgrimage to Mecca and the visit to Medina safe for all Moslems. Then the Moslem world on pragmatic grounds might accept his legally perfect claim to the Caliphate.

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