

CROSS OR CRESCENT IN INDIA?

BY FREDERIC AUSTIN OGG.

TO those well-meaning folks who pay twenty-five cents, or some such conscience-soothing sum, a year into a missionary fund for the conversion of "the heathen" in India, it may seem little short of irreligion even so much as to raise the question which our title suggests. Yet the writer of these lines, a Christian and a member of the Methodist Church, has arrived at a different conclusion. Most of his friends think that *of course* India will be Christianised and that right speedily. In view of all the toil and sacrifice, the money and thought expended, and in a cause so eminently worthy, what possible chance can there be of failure? Do we not hear of the natives literally flocking to the missionaries to be baptised? And have we not often been assured that India would be Christian already were it not for the mere physical impossibility that the seven hundred or more missionaries in the peninsula come into touch with the nearly three hundred million natives?

And yet it is just possible that there are few whose condition approaches that of the old Scotch merchant of whom a recent writer has told a characteristic story. Being asked one day for a subscription for the support of the Society for the Conversion of the Jews, he with little hesitation acceded. Three months later he was asked for money for the same cause, and this time he gave rather more reluctantly. The third time he was approached on the subject, he could restrain himself no longer. "D—— it," he exclaimed, "are the Jews no' a' convertit yet?" and gave nothing. There are doubtless some who consider that it is high time the word should go forth that India is "a' convertit." But if there are any who feel so, it is only because they are utterly ignorant of the magnitude of the undertaking. To such it might be rather disconcerting to know that as a result of all the missionary effort that has thus far been put forth, only about two and a half millions out of

the nearly three hundred millions of natives are even nominal Christians,—a proportion equal to about that of a city of 64,000 inhabitants to the total population of the United States.

The present writer believes in the eventual triumph of Christianity in India. But he also believes several other things relative to the matter,—among them the following: (1) that many centuries of time will be necessary to accomplish the result; (2) that in the meantime the religion rapidly becoming dominant in the Orient, i. e., Mohammedanism, will have to be defeated on its own ground; (3) that this will necessitate the employment of very different means from those now in use; and (4) that when India shall be Christianised it will not be de-Orientalised and the Christianity that it takes will probably not accord at all with what is considered orthodox in the West.

To some such conclusions, it is believed, practically all who have knowledge at first hand regarding India and Indian affairs have arrived. They may not be altogether such as we could wish, but if they represent the facts, it cannot but be wholesome to face them squarely.

A word as to the religious status of India, numerically considered, at the present time. The latest available statistics, published in the *Statesman's Year Book* for 1902, are based on the census for 1891, and hence are not as recent as we should like. However, there is no reason to believe that the proportionate strength of the various religions has undergone great change since the time mentioned. A census in the United States is soon out of date, but one in the Orient remains approximately true for many generations. The table on page 740 shows the distribution of the population of India, according to religion, at the census of 1891:

A little examination of the table reveals several facts of interest. It shows, for instance, that the Hindoos constitute about 72 per cent. of the entire population, the Mohammedans about 20 per cent., the Buddhists about 2.5 per cent., and the Christians about .8 per cent. The vast majority of the Mohammedans are in Bengal, even as the vast majority of the Buddhists are in Burma and the Christians in Madras. Adherents of animistic faiths are more numerous even than the Buddhists, and the Christians do not greatly outnumber the relatively insignificant Sikhs and Jains. In no province do the Christians outnumber the Mohammedans, falling short by almost half in the most Christianised province of Madras. In no other considerable province, except Burma, do the Christians count a fourth of the adherents of Mohammedanism. In

Assam, Punjab, Bengal, Bombay, Kashmir, and the North-West Provinces, the Mohammedans vastly outnumber the Christians,

PRESIDENCIES, PROVINCES, AND STATES	HINDUS	SIKHS	JAINS	BUD- DHISTS	PARSIS	MOHAM- MEDANS	CHRIS- TIANS	JEWS	ANTI- MISTIC	OTHERS	TOTAL
Ajmere.....	437,988	213	26,939	.....	198	74,265	2,683	71	.....	1	542,358
Assam.....	2,997,072	83	1,368	7,697	.....	1,483,974	16,844	5	969,765	25	5,476,833
Bengal.....	47,824,014	417	7,270	194,717	179	23,658,347	192,484	1,447	2,753,061	11,430	74,643,366
Berit.....	2,531,791	177	18,952	4	412	207,681	1,359	2	137,108	5	2,897,491
Bombay.....	21,440,991	912	555,209	698	76,774	4,390,995	170,009	13,547	311,259	27	26,960,421
Burma.....	171,577	3,164	.....	6,888,075	96	253,031	120,768	351	168,449	49	7,605,560
Central Provinces.....	10,489,620	173	49,212	325	781	309,479	13,368	176	2,081,721	10	12,944,805
Coor.....	156,845	.....	114	.....	39	12,665	3,392	.....	.....	.....	173,055
Madras.....	34,757,520	128	27,435	1,036	247	2,475,864	1,580,179	1,309	472,868	14,536	39,331,062
North-West Provinces.....	40,951,803	11,348	84,803	1,494	342	6,589,183	58,518	60	.....	25	47,697,576
Punjab.....	10,237,700	1,870,481	45,683	6,236	412	12,915,643	53,909	33	.....	30	25,130,127
Sueta, etc.....	11,699	1,129	.....	.....	39	11,368	3,008	23	.....	4	27,270
Andamans.....	9,433	390	3	1,290	.....	3,980	483	.....	24	1	15,609
Haridardid.....	10,237,249	4,637	27,845	.....	1,058	1,138,666	20,429	26	29,130	.....	11,537,040
Baroda.....	2,437,568	11	59,332	1	8,206	188,740	646	36	29,864	2	2,445,396
Mysore.....	4,639,127	29	13,278	5	35	252,973	38,135	21	.....	1	4,943,604
Kashmir.....	691,800	11,399	593	29,608	9	1,793,710	218	.....	.....	16,615	2,543,952
Rajputana.....	10,192,829	1,116	417,618	.....	238	991,351	1,855	15	411,078	2	12,016,102
Central India.....	7,735,246	1,825	89,984	.....	837	568,640	5,999	72	1,916,209	.....	10,318,812
Shah States.....	1,855	196	.....	175	2	609	154	.....	1	.....	2,992
Total.....	207,731,727	1,907,833	1,416,638	7,131,361	89,904	57,321,164	2,284,380	17,194	9,280,467	42,763	287,223,431

and it may be said that throughout the entire peninsula the numerical strength of Mohammedanism bears a much more steady pro-

portion to the total population than in the case of any other religion, not excepting Hindooism.

The exact manner in which Mohammedanism was brought into India is a matter of controversy. It was long supposed that invaders from the north, probably from Arabia, forced it upon the Hindoos at the point of the sword. The well-known character of early Mohammedan missionary enterprise made this supposition entirely reasonable. Nevertheless, there are certain considerations which go to disprove its validity. In the first place, if such had been the manner of its establishment, Mohammedanism would be the religion of all India to-day instead of that of but a fifth of the people. Or, if it be urged that the conquest was left incomplete, then it would seem that Islam would be localised in the districts subdued. Instead of this, as we have just observed, the Mohammedans are scattered quite proportionally throughout the whole empire.

Nor is the number of Mohammedans in India due, as some have supposed, to peaceful immigration. It has been estimated that less than ten per cent. of the fifty-one millions even claim to be descended from foreign peoples.

The conclusion is that Mohammedanism was propagated in India by preaching and persuasion, and that it was accepted by so large a proportion of the people because of conviction rather than compulsion. This fact is of real significance as indicating the fixed and permanent character of the religion in the peninsula.

The advance of Mohammedanism among the people of India has certainly not been rapid. The creed has been known in the country probably as much as nine hundred years, and yet only one-fifth of the population have embraced it. From this it might seem that there is no danger of Mohammedanism gaining the ascendancy in India. Of course, there *is* no immediate danger. But time in the Orient is counted not by days and years as with us, but by centuries and ages. When one considers the conservatism and inertia of the peoples of the East, it becomes apparent that after all Mohammedanism has made progress about as rapid as could be expected of any imported cult. And the rate of progress seems to be increasing. The magnitude of the conflict now on between Mohammedanism and Christianity in Asia, Africa, and the islands of the Eastern seas, is by no means realised by the majority of Western people. On all its boundaries Islam is steadily advancing. Moreover, as a recent writer has pointed out, it is constantly developing an internal cohesion which may in time bring the Moslems

in all the vast region from the Niger to the Ganges into a conscious unity of purpose. When this is accomplished, the world may look for some interesting developments. It is estimated that Islam's gains in India alone counterbalance its losses in all other parts of the world. In Bengal where a third of the population are already Mohammedans, the converts are numbered by the thousands annually. Conditions in India are so peculiar, that comparisons and contrasts with the spread of various religions elsewhere can be of but very slight value. That, for instance, it required only one-third as long to Christianise the Roman Empire as it has taken to make Mohammedans of one-fifth of the Indian people was due rather more to the broken-down condition of the Roman religion and the consequent readiness of the people to turn to something new than to the zeal and interest with which the faith was propagated by its adherents.

The truth is that none of the great religions has ever been spread with the enthusiasm that has marked the Mohammedan advance from its very beginning. And this enthusiasm has been not merely of the militant type. In fact, it is fervor of speech rather than the power of the sword that is now winning the African and Asiatic peoples so rapidly to the Mohammedan fold. Even the Saracen found that force is not the strongest of arguments, or at any rate the most permanently effective. Every believer in Islam is a missionary in the sense that we frequently hear Christians exhorted to be but in which we know they but rarely are. That is, every Mussulman is constantly watching an opportunity to make a convert. He makes use of his trade relations, his social intercourse, his travels, in fact his entire round of experiences, to win men to his faith, in a manner very similar to that employed by the Jesuits in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It cannot be said that his motives are purely religious. While by gaining converts he by so much increases his own chance of paradise, he thereby also adds to his faction, his tribe, his army, his nation, and increases the power to conquer and rule which is the pride of nearly all Oriental peoples and which the Mohammedan regards as his divine right. "All the emotions," says Mr. Meredith Townsend in his *Asia and Europe*, "which impel a Christian to proselytise are in a Mussulman strengthened by all the motives which impel a political leader and all the motives which sway a recruiting sergeant, until proselytism has become a passion which, whenever success seems practicable and especially success on a large scale, develops in the quietest Mussulman a fury of ardor which induces him to

break down every obstacle, his own strongest prejudices included, rather than stand for an instant in a neophyte's way."

The result of this is that there are few people in India who do not at least have an opportunity to hear the tenets of Islam proclaimed. And of course the greater the number of Mohammedans in a given district, the more rapidly are converts made. In Bengal, containing 74,713,020 inhabitants, a third of whom are Mohammedans and only two-tenths of one per cent. of whom are Christians, the greatest progress in proselytism is under way. Mohammedanism is not advancing in India with the rapidity which characterises Western religious movements. But considering the rigid conservatism to be overcome and the exclusively peaceful means employed, the results must be quite satisfactory to men of the Asiatic turn of mind.

It is not difficult to assign reasons for the progress of Islam among the Indian people. In the first place, it should be remembered that religion fills a greater part in the life and thought of the Oriental than of the Westerner. Nowhere in the world is more attention given to the problems of the unseen than in India. The land is the home of philosophy and abstract thought. The mysteries and perplexities of life and death, of the soul and the hereafter, have long been the commonplaces of speculation and research. It is right at this point that so many people utterly fail to comprehend the situation in India. They persist in thinking of the inhabitants as mere "heathen." Just because they are not Christians, they are thrown indiscriminately into a general class of the unredeemed along with the Hottentots and South Sea Islanders to whom the term "heathen" may perhaps quite properly be applied. That India is a vast empire made up of a congeries of races and peoples having ancient and highly respectable civilisations, with laws, governments, literatures, religions, art, and a finely elaborated social system, is generally quite ignored. The people of India are not aborigines without a history. They are, for the most part, descendents of races whose civilisations far antedate anything Christian,—even anything European. And they not merely have this great past; they glory in it. They are therefore disposed to deliberate long and well before breaking with it in any important particular.

And yet the Hindu can never quite be satisfied with the religion he has inherited. When its message has been completely delivered, life and death and eternity are still left great question marks. All is vagueness and uncertainty,—wild, indeterminate

longings with only the most equivocal promises for the future. Nothing goes so far toward reducing chaos to order in philosophy and religion as the monotheistic conception of deity. All phenomena, all the orderings of human experience, can be explained by referring them to the one Supreme Being. Mohammedanism is of course monotheistic, and it was through its adherents that the Hindoos, groping blindly after the light, first felt the comforting and illuminating force of belief in a single God. This fact in itself is sufficient to explain the grasp which Islam has acquired in India. The Koran adds the quality of certainty and finality to the questionings and falterings of the Hindoo belief.

But it may be asked, why does not Christianity, also a monotheistic religion, meet with the same ready response? The reasons are numerous. In the first place, it may be supposed that owing to the priority and greater universality of Mohammedan propaganda in the peninsula those of the people who were most susceptible to the monotheistic argument were reached first by the bearers of the crescent. Another consideration of much weight is that Mohammedanism was brought to the Hindoos by Asiatics like themselves, not by Europeans or other Westerners, as was Christianity. Explain it as we may, there is an intellectual and spiritual barrier between the Asiatic and the European which no amount of effort has ever yet been able to break down. Due to the ignorance of the Westerners and the self-sufficiency of the Orientals, this barrier is rather raised to loftier heights whenever the two peoples come in contact with each other. Until Christianity shall be preached widely by natives rather than by foreigners, its hold upon India will continue but feeble.

Moreover the rule of life prescribed by Mohammedanism is essentially Asiatic, while that of Christianity is not at all so. This is manifest particularly in reference to the caste system upon which the whole social order of India is built. While Christianity proclaims the natural rights and equality of men, and by so doing strikes a death-blow at the caste system, Mohammedanism merely asks the Hindoo to change caste by entering the great brotherhood of the faithful. No caste in India is more exclusive or more sacredly regarded by its members than is the fold of Islam. Thus the aristocratic concept at the bottom of the caste system is fostered by the Mohammedan Church, and the people to whom caste is everything are on this account the more readily won over.

It is easy enough to say that the caste system is an evil and ought to be eradicated. Few people realise the beneficent restraints

which it imposes upon society. A man's caste is his safeguard. If he can rarely raise his estate, he can just as rarely fall from it. The whole system belongs to an order of things far from modern, but it is at least one method by which a society devoid of modern political appliances can protect itself against its own internal destroyers. To become a Christian in India to-day means to break caste; and to break caste means ostracism, failure in business, and life-long ignomy. Until the whole system shall be uprooted—and this will be in the no wise immediate future—the breaking away from it in individual cases must always be attended by many hardships and sacrifices.

Among numerous other reasons for the slow advance of Christianity in India the following are of chief importance: (1) The ease with which Hindoos accept and believe things deemed by Western people quite contradictory. "A Hindoo," says Mr. Townsend, "will state with perfect honesty that Christianity is true, that Mohammedanism is true, and that his own special variety of Brahmanism is true, and that he believes them all three implicitly." Thus Christianity gains many "converts" who cannot properly be called Christians. It is almost inconceivably difficult to deal with a people whose metaphysical subtleties enable them to believe all that the missionaries tell them and yet with quite as much sincerity believe things exactly the opposite. (2) The life and character of Christ do not appeal to the Hindoos as to most other peoples. His earthly career and quasi human character render him if anything too tangible and not sufficiently mysterious to please the fancy of the Hindoo lovers of the occult. His gentleness and humility are accounted to him for weakness. Why the Son of God should not have availed himself of all the glories and powers of the universe is quite incomprehensible. It is the majestic—the outwardly and visibly majestic—that appeals to the Hindoo. Therefore he is more impressed with the Mohammedan motives of sovereignty and conquest than with the Christian ideals of meekness and social helpfulness. (3) The method of proselytism by the Christian missionaries needs to undergo modification. In the first place, the conscious effort to "civilise" the natives should cease. If it is necessary to make Europeans or Americans of them before, or even while, making Christians of them, not another dollar should be spent or another missionary be sent out. In the second place, and along the same line, just as large a proportion of the preachers and teachers should be native Hindoos as possible. Only in this way can the past mistake of approaching the people as if they were

barbarians of the most primitive type be remedied. Christian proselytism, if it is to be permanently successful, must leave the people Asiatics still, just as does Mohammedan proselytism.

Thus the battle is on. How it will result, no one can foretell. One thing is sure,—India will be neither Mohammedan nor Christian for many centuries to come. But even the early stages of the contest with which we are contemporary are by no means lacking in interest and importance. All history would go to indicate that the prosperity, and even the very life, of India hangs on the outcome. Mohammedanism has thus far invariably ended in stagnation and death. Christianity, we fondly believe, is fraught with the elements of life and growth. Unlimited patience and discriminating effort may secure to India the heritage of the cross. But if so, it may not unlikely prove to be because the Christian went to school to the Mohammedan and learned of him the avenue of approach to the Hindoo mind and heart.