

CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN THE ORIENT.

BY STANWOOD COBB.

THERE are many charges to bring against the Christian missionary—that he takes a wrong standpoint in attacking religions which are dear to their followers; that he is apt to be narrow in his theology, a generation behind the times; that his motives are mistrusted by the natives he works among because he lives at so much higher a standard of living than they do that his position seems to them a sinecure—all these things can be brought against a missionary; yet, I should like to give my testimony to his general nobility of character and his self-sacrifice.

It is true, he enjoys the luxury of foreign travel, he is assured of a living, and his children are educated at the expense of the Board—but that is as far as the advantages of his profession go. When he leaves this country with all the comforts and pleasures of high civilization, he goes among people who are far below him in every way, and leads an isolated life among them. He is always giving out—there are no friends he can go to to take in inspiration. The terrible monotony of missionary life in a far away town of an interior, can hardly be realized by home-staying Americans. It is a monumental sacrifice for a person of culture to go and spend the best years of his life in an Armenian town. Only the inspiration of religion could make such a sacrifice possible or joyful.

Many a missionary has had to endure more than mere hardships and loneliness. They have seen their wives or children die as a result of unhygienic conditions and the absence of good medical aid. One missionary in the interior of Asia Minor lost four out of five children in one year. Who can say that this is not a life of sacrifice? Moreover, almost every missionary over-works as a result of immense opportunities for service and only limited resources. I was in one missionary station where four men were doing the

work of eight—not because they were directed by the Board, but because they could not bear to cut down the work.

There are some missionaries who are lazy and enjoy an easy berth; there are some who are small and mean and bigoted; but on the whole, the profession of the missionary is one of constant sacrifice, a life of devotion which must command respect from all men.

We may not believe in sending people over to attack the foreign religions; we may not believe in proselyting; and there are many who condemn the foreign missions altogether, saying we should confine our efforts to our own country. Yet the work that missionaries are doing in educating the people they go among, in lifting them up to higher standards of living, and bringing joy into weary lives beaten down by centuries of despair, is without parallel on the face of the globe.

All over Turkey are mission-schools, bringing education to those who would otherwise never get any. I wish our young men who are so surfeited with education and so athletically negligent of it, could see the spirit and enthusiasm with which the boys of the East tackle study. To them, education opens the golden doors of opportunity—and they work like the immigrants in our night-schools.

Last year into one of the leading American schools of Turkey, walked an Armenian from an interior town some five hundred miles away—walked, tramped it all the way, getting his living by charity as he went along, for he had no money. How could we turn him away? He would work, do anything, to earn his living. And he accepted one of the most menial, and in Oriental eyes most degrading, tasks, and carried it on cheerfully and manfully, while he picked up an education as fast as he could.

I know of no more noble work in the world, nor any service more inspiring, than that of carrying education to these backward peoples—opening up to them all the vast knowledge of the twentieth century, the accumulated wisdom of the ages. This is the work the missionaries are doing, and I am proud of them. If they would modify their efforts to proselyte, and confine themselves more to education, to social upliftment, and to Christian influence; if they would free their schools from perfunctory and useless Christian ritual which offends the non-Christian students; if they would become broader and more tolerant; if they would come into the field with thoroughly trained minds, and an intelligent sympathy for the religion and customs of the people they go among,—if they would do these things, they would be sure of a welcome into whatever country they enter, and would be able to take a glorious share in

bringing to pass that brotherhood of man which the founder of their religion visioned forth.

In the near East the missions have done a wonderful work in uplifting and educating the different subject races of the Turkish empire—Bulgarians, Armenians, Syrians, Copts; and in Persia, the Nestorian Christians. When the first missionaries were started in Constantinople and Smyrna, some fifty years ago, efforts were made to convert Mohammedans. The success was not large. I inquired of one missionary who had just finished a service of fifty years in Constantinople, how many Mohammedans had been converted there within his memory. He thought of one. This one later turned out to be a rascal—the missionaries were therefore not inclined to boast of him. When Abdul Hamid came to the throne in 1873, he pledged the missionaries not to attempt to proselyte among the Mohammedan population of his empire. Since that time, therefore, the work of the missionaries has been confined to the Christian sects, Armenian, Bulgarian and Greek. The pictures shown by missionaries of their students in the native schools, sitting cross-legged with red fezzes on, might lead one to thinking them Turks. They are not Turks, in spite of the red fez. All subjects of the Turkish empire may wear the fez, and you find it on the head of Greeks and Armenians, as well as of Turks. This same condition is true in other Mohammedan countries—the mission work is largely confined to the native Christian population. In Persia, the missionaries work mainly among the Nestorian and the Armenian Christians. Very little proselyting among the Mohammedans is attempted, although medical aid is given them. Such a thing as a Mohammedan becoming converted is very rare. In Syria the work is among the Syrian Christians. They need education and social upliftment. In Egypt, it is the Coptic Christians who receive the attention of the missionaries. Although this country has been under French and English rule for some time, and protection has been given the missionaries, very little success has been attained among the Mohammedans.

I was speaking with one of the older missionaries who has been in Egypt for fifty years. "How many converts from Mohammedanism have been made in Egypt during these fifty years?" I asked.

"About one hundred and fifty," he answered.

"In all Egypt?"

"Yes, and even then you are not sure."

"What do you mean?" I said: "That they become Christians for interested motives?"

"Yes," he answered. "Some do it in order to get aid, or Christian patronage for business." (I was also told by native Egyptians that such was the case, and that the Mohammedans who became converted to Christianity were men of no character.)

"Do you think then," I asked, "that there is any hope of all Mohammedans ever becoming converts to Christianity?"

"No," he said, "I am afraid not."

This is the verdict of a man who has worked fifty years among Mohammedans under the most favorable conditions. Such opinions, however, do not as a rule, reach the churches of this country.

I asked the same question of a missionary who was born and brought up in Turkey, and whose father was a missionary before him—both men of learning and authority in the missionary world.

"Do you believe the Mohammedans will ever be converted to Christianity?" I asked.

"No, and there is no need of it."

"You think the Mohammedans have a good religion of their own?"

"Certainly."

"You would limit the mission work to trying to correct the faults of Mohammedanism?"

"Yes. And even then, have we not faults of our own? Can Christians afford to throw stones? I believe the Mohammedans will reform their own religion, as we did ours."

Here is one of the broadest missionaries one could meet. If all were like him, there would be more chance of the Mohammedans being, if not converted, at least influenced by Christianity.

This man's position is not altogether exceptional. It is the position of many other missionaries in the near East—to such an extent that these may be said to form a division or school, opposed to which are the opinions of the old school missionaries who continue to load their blunderbusses up with Gospel Truth (meaning the dogmas of their own particular sect) and discharge them at Mohammedanism, hoping to bring down a few victims.

We see then, not only that little success has been met with in the Mohammedan world, and that the work there is mainly among native Christians, but also that the more progressive missionaries have given up the idea of conversion altogether. They do not believe in it. In the first place they feel it is too difficult, and in the second place that more can be done by influencing Mohammedanism itself—letting the progressive followers of that religion bring about

a reform from within, adopting anything in the Christian religion which appeals to them.

The missionaries who have lived among Mohammedans are usually broader and more tolerant than their lay supporters at home. The reason for this is that no one can live long among Mohammedans, especially the Turks, without coming to admire them, and to respect their religion. One is obliged to recognize that it is on the whole a good religion, influencing its followers for good—not an invention of the Devil, to pander to the lusts of man, as we are often told by earnest Christians.

Let any fair-minded person compare the worship in a Mohammedan mosque with that in a Greek or Armenian church, and he will recognize that there is much more of real religion in the former. I have never been in a mosque without feeling a spiritual uplift. On the other hand, I have never been uplifted by the tiresome and irreligious service of the Greeks.

Let not any one suppose that St. Sophia, once the head of the Greek churches, has suffered any on being converted into a Mohammedan mosque, save in the effacing of a few mosaics. The simplicity of its present interior is in pleasing contrast to the Greek churches, where idolatry stares one in the face at every side—pictures of the Virgin Mary which are kissed—images and candles everywhere.

A second point in which I wish to correct impressions which seem to prevail in America, is in regard to the recent Turkish revolution.

It has been announced in sermons, in missionary books, and even in thoughtful magazines, that the chief cause of the freeing of Turkey from the tyranny of Abdul Hamid, was the influence of the missionaries who have been working for years in Turkey. Such a flagrant violation of fact staggers one who knows anything about this revolution. It is a statement which, unfortunately, is a proof of the small interest taken by Americans in Eastern affairs and of their entirely superficial knowledge in this direction.

A clergyman, a graduate from Harvard, Ph. D., preaching in one of the most cultured suburbs of Boston, remarked from his pulpit shortly after the revolution, that he had no doubt that Robert College had as much to do with the revolution as any one thing. Now as only one Turk ever graduated from the college, his statement is rather unfounded. Strangely enough, I find that this idea is held by many people of wide culture and education.

The fact is, neither Robert College nor any of the missionary

schools contributed one iota toward freeing Turkey from the rule of Abdul Hamid. The revolution was entirely a military affair, planned and brought to pass by Mohammedan soldiers and officers, few of whom had probably ever met a missionary, much less been influenced by him. It was planned in Paris, by exiled Turks, who, far from being influenced by American missionaries in Turkey, have been for the most part followers of the French materialism. It was carried out by soldiers who were faithful Mohammedans. It cannot even be claimed that the revolution was made possible by the *general* influence of the missionaries in uplifting the people—for their work has been wholly confined to the Armenians who had nothing to do with the affair. It was the army which did the thing.

If any zealous Christian still doubts about this matter, let him read the words of Prof. E. C. Moore, of Harvard in *Religious Education*, October, 1909. In speaking of the Turkish revolution he says: "Those are all abroad who have been hastily asserting that the work of modernization was the result of a changing attitude in Turkey toward Christianity, due to the permeation of the body of Young Turks with Christian ideas, or to the direct effect upon these men themselves of Christian education. The effect of Western education offered in Turkey by the collegiate institutions which grew out of the Protestant missions, the most distinguished of which is Robert College, has no doubt been great. But the effect has been the effect of education *qua* Western, and not *qua* Christian. The early Christian missions never influenced anybody but the constituency of the Oriental churches (Greek, Armenian, Syrian, etc.). The old colleges practically never touched the Mohammedan youth at all."

These are the words of a man who had just been traveling around the world studying missions, and is competent by learning and position, to give an opinion. He has analyzed the conditions perfectly. It is not the Christian religion, but the civilization of Christendom which has been influencing both Turkey and Persia to progress. *They are ashamed to stay behind the rest of the world.*

Let the Christians claim the credit, then, for the civilization of Christendom if they will, but let them remember that this civilization contains many elements which are not Christian in origin. Its intellectual culture it owes to the Greeks; its laws to the Romans; its love of liberty to the Teutonic spirit. Just to what height the modern world would have risen if the Carpenter of Nazareth had not appeared upon the scenes of history two thousand years ago, no one

can say. But surely, no one supposes we would all be barbarians still—Teutons wandering in the woods for game.

From what we have seen of missionary success in the near East, it does not look as if the Mohammedan world were to be converted soon to Christianity. The missionaries themselves have given up this hope, and seek to influence rather than to directly proselyte. The war cry "The World for Christ in one generation" does not seem possible of fulfilment in the far East either, in spite of a very considerable success in the past and present.

In Japan, Christianity has had as good opportunity as it could ask for—doors finally thrown open, a people looking for a new religion. Yet, in spite of the fact that many converts have been made, Japan as a whole has not accepted Christianity, and is less inclined to do so now than it was some years ago. It is a fact that at one time the leaders of Japan got together and discussed the advisability of selecting Christianity as a national religion, but decided that it was too narrow—too much wrapped up in theology and dogma—and so dismissed it from further official consideration.

In China, Christianity has had a longer history than most people realize. It reached that country as early as the eighth century A. D., carried there by the Nestorian Christians from Persia, and for a time prospered. Here too, it had full opportunity to spread as it was looked on with tolerance by the rulers, and met with little persecution. Yet, when the Catholic missionaries came in the sixteenth century, they found no trace of this early Christianity. If our religion had been adapted to the Celestials, why did it not spread as it did among the Gothic and Slavic races of Europe? Again, with the entrance of the Catholic missionaries in 1555, Christianity had another chance to spread and by 1664 there were nearly 270,000 converts, yet when persecutions arose and these missionaries were later driven out the native Christians died away, and upon the reopening of the field in the nineteenth century, the work had to be done all over again.

To-day, the missionary work of China is kept up chiefly by outside stimulus. If all missionaries should withdraw from China, would the native Christians lapse into their former national belief again as they did two centuries ago?

In India, we have an excellent field for missionary work. Here is a vast population of 300,000,000 tied down by foreign government, so to speak, and unable to resent the establishment of Christianity. How have the missionaries succeeded there? They have established many excellent schools, have converted thousands of

Hindus, and can even hold large conventions of Hindu native pastors and lay converts. They have done, and are doing, a noble work in uplifting women, in teaching more hygienic habits, and in raising their converts to a higher standard of living. But are there any signs that within forty years India's 300,000,000 souls will be Christian?

If we look into the facts we shall find that the converts are mostly from the lowest class of the population, the outcasts who have no caste at all, and have for centuries been spurned as clay under the feet of the high-caste Hindus. Is it a wonder that they are attracted by the attention of the missionaries, and that they are won by kindness and the readiness to serve? Beautiful as is this influence, it is not a proof of the ultimate success of Christianity.

Suppose the Brahmins should send missionaries among our negroes of the South—and by their kindness and willingness to live and mingle with them, should win them over to Brahmanism? Is it probable that the rest of the country would also be converts? Could that in any way be considered an entering wedge? Would our highly cultured, thinking white population be induced to become Brahmins because their colored brethren were?

In the East, even more than in the West, people follow the leaders. Whole villages take the religion of their chiefs. If you can win over some of the intellectual leaders, then the masses will follow. But the success among the masses is not likely to influence the higher castes. Christians have been made by the thousands, it is true, but what is the ratio of these thousands to the millions of India? Taking into account the vastness of the population, the length of time our religion has been among them, and the opportunities it has had for free play, the outlook is not very encouraging.

Here too, the native Christians have to be continually propped up by foreign missionaries. If all foreign aid were withdrawn the native Christians of India would tend to be reassimilated to the religion of their country. I doubt very much whether they could stand out against the environment.

We must remember that Christianity had an earlier chance in India—as in China—in the sixth century, when the Nestorian Christians came that way; and again in the sixteenth century under the Mogul emperors. Why did it not flourish there as it did in the Isles of the West?

In fact, the success of a missionary in converting a few people to his religion is no proof of the validity of that religion, or of its chances to predominate. Zeal and patience are all that is required in order to make converts. We have only to look about us in order

to see dozens of peculiar causes which win followers, hold meetings, and acquire some measure of success. It is a psychological fact that if a man be on fire with a belief he will set other people on fire with it. Let any man, with any belief whatsoever, settle in one locality and preach there for fifty years earnestly and steadfastly, and he will make dozens of followers.

A great religion is known by its *durability* and its rapid powers of assimilation. The great world religions after passing through their persecutions and their first struggle for existence, have swept like wildfire over certain races to which they seem adapted. Christianity spread thus through all Europe, but has never made any impression on Asia. Buddhism had a rapid growth in India and China. Islam swept over the brown races of the East—and is now having great success in Africa, where it is making a hundred converts to Christianity's one.

This historical fact would lead one to see a principle of adaptation in religion, as in all other forms of life. Why did China choose to follow Confucius rather than Lao-tze? Why did Christianity never spread east of the birthplace of its founder? Why has not Islam led captive the white races?

One who is interested in this aim—the world for Christ in one generation—should ask himself these questions, and then ponder whether it be possible to superimpose Christianity with all its Occidental trend, upon peoples whose religions have for hundreds of years grown to be a part of their racial life.