

## ISLAMIC INFLUENCE ON JESUIT ORIGINS.

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**T**HE story of the origin of the religious confraternity known as the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits, is one that is generally overlooked in favor of the history of the developments of the Society, to which feature historians have always paid considerable attention.

In 1521 Ignatius was wounded in both legs when defending Pampeluna against the troops of Francis I. The reading of the *Flowers of the Saints* during his convalescence led to his conversion and he resolved to devote the remainder of his life to the service of God. His first idea was to become a kind of religious Don Quixote and make war against the Moors of Catalonia and Aragon, where, at that period, the Mohammedans were very numerous, commerce being in the hands of the Jews and Mussulmans. The Moors and Moriscos were not then assimilated with the Jews and placed under the surveillance of the Inquisition: they could meet together without fear of disturbance, provided they exercised prudence and tact. The incurable lameness of Ignatius, a permanent result of the conflict in which he had been engaged, rendered the accomplishment of this aim impossible and he then announced that he had received from God a special mission to undertake the conversion of the Mohammedan peoples and particularly those resident in the Holy Land. He was on his way to the Shrine of Our Lady at Montserrat to ask a blessing on his enterprise when he encountered a Saracen of lofty mien, one who had put on a thin mantle of Christian profession in order that he might remain unsuspected and unmolested in Spain. As the twain travelled together, the farther the Moor got from the town and the ears of inquisitive listeners the more pronounced became his expressed contempt for the Christian faith, until presently he uttered

an insult to the Virgin Mother of Christ. It was then that the warrior spirit in Ignatius was aroused and the Saracen, perceiving this, fled at a gallop. Ignatius, hand on sword, hesitated as to whether he should follow and slay the blasphemer, but left the decision to God and was taken on the road to Montserrat. It is asserted by some writers, although there is no proof, that the Saracen was a member of one or other of the Mussulman secret societies then in existence. It is, however, by no means improbable as the operations of these societies were very widespread and the membership in all countries where Mohammedans dwelt a very large and secret one.

At Montserrat Ignatius lighted upon a copy of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Garcia of Cioneros, a collection of mystical meditations and ascetic rules. This work, in combination with the rules and practices of various Islamic secret monastic societies, then in full swing, formed the basis of the more famous volume, the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. It was while he was at Manresa that he conceived the project of his Company or Society and that there germinated in his mind the idea of founding within the Catholic Church, conformably with its dogma and discipline, an association which, whether intentional or otherwise, was founded on the model of the Islamic societies, then a very powerful factor among the Mussulmans.

Points of resemblance between the Society of Jesus and the Sanusiyya Order have been noted, but it was impossible for the former to have been founded upon the latter, seeing that the Jesuits came into existence in 1540, whereas Sanusi, the founder of the Islamic Society which took his name was not born until 1791. There were, however, in existence in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries numerous Islamic congregations or societies, the majority of which are still in being, whose constitutions and rules bear, in many ways, a striking similarity to those adopted by Ignatius.

The Kuadryas, established in Asia Minor by Sid Abdel Quader, date from twelfth century. The descendants of the founder introduced the Order into Spain, where it made rapid progress. After the taking of Grenada, the majority of the Spanish members fled to Morocco. Nevertheless there remained some who crossed the peninsula until the Inquisition, in 1524, was charged by Charles V, with their pursuit. Then there were the Kadelyas, an Order founded by Sid-Abou-Median, who was born

in Seville and who distinguished himself as a professor in the Universities of Seville and Cordova. The third Sheikh of the Order, Sid-Abou-Hassan-Chadely, was a man venerated throughout Islam and particularly renowned throughout Spain and the north of Africa, in which countries were various groups more or less attached to the primitive organization.

The Qalenderis was an Order founded by Qalender Yusuf Endelusi, a Spanish Moslem, who died A. D. 1323. Nicholas Nicholay, who visited Constantinople in 1551, describes the Qalenderis as glorying in chastity and abstinence and living in little "churches" called Tekyes. Tekieh is, however, the Turkish name for the monasteries in which the Dervishes, or Islamic monks, live. There were twelve of these Orders originally, the earlier ones dating from the time of Mohammed and his immediate successors; to-day, in spite of the suppression and decay of many, they number thirty-three. Qalender required of his proselytes purity of heart, spirituality of mind, exemption from all worldly defilement, and that they should travel constantly teaching the tenets of the faith as they interpreted them, living wholly upon alms. They were also required to practice acts of severe austerity, in order that they might attain to heavenly favor and, more especially, to a state of ecstasy and illumination.

After recognizing the impossibility of becoming an active warrior in the cause of the Catholic Church against the Mohammedans, Ignatius devoted all his energies to the furtherance of his spiritual mission in the Holy Land and the cause of the early hostility to the Society which he afterwards founded, was the settlement of its members in countries other than Palestine. Father Genelli, in his *Life of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, says that:

"Everything tends to show that Ignatius, in making the journey to Jerusalem, had no other object than to take up his abode near the sepulchre of our Lord, and there labour to extend the Kingdom of Christ and to make war upon His enemies. It was not then a simple pilgrimage that he was making, for the East had been his first thought after his conversion. He had the idea of at once establishing, on the spot sanctified by the presence of our Lord in the flesh, a Society of Jesus, composed of apostolic evangelical labourers, whose spiritual welfare in the midst of the children of Mohammed should pave the way to new triumphs of the Catholic Church. This was, without doubt, a noble conception, which the swords of the Christian chivalry of Europe had not



been able to realize by the efforts of Catholicism of centuries. That this was the real design of St. Ignatius is proved by the pains he took to gain a footing in Palestine. . . . To the last years of his life he thought seriously of securing at last an entrance for the Society in Jerusalem."

When Ignatius left Manresa in 1523 he undertook a voyage which is passed over by many historians of the Society. It was to Palestine in general and to Jerusalem in particular. Father Dominic Bonhours, in his *Life of St. Ignatius*, tells us that in the early days of his conversion he did not desire to make this pilgrimage to do honour to the places consecrated by the presence and blood of Jesus Christ, but that "he undertook it at the time (doubtless after contact with Moors or Moriscos at Manresa) with the desire of working for the salvation of infidels".

These "infidels" were, of course, the followers of the creed of Mohammed. During the two months of his sojourn in Palestine he endeavoured to approach the Mussulmans and even ventured into the secret meetings of the Islamic confraternities, open only to the initiated. Henin de Cuvilliers says that he was nearly murdered. At any rate, his zeal for proselytising was so untimely that the Franciscans, the guardians of the holy tomb, called upon him, under pain of excommunication, to renounce an enterprise which aroused the fury of the Mussulman societies against the Christians, and to return to Europe.

Ignatius obeyed and returned to Spain. He went to the University of Alcalá, which Cardinal Ximenes had founded for the Moriscos and for the instruction of missionaries who were to labour for the conversion of the Moors. The Inquisitors by this time, however, had concentrated attention upon Ignatius and, having surveyed his apostolate, they suspected him of being a "Mahometiser". They demanded his arrest, which they secured, and he was detained for several days in the dungeons of the Inquisition. On his release, Ignatius decided that he would go to Salamanca, which he did, but new suspicions arose and for the second time he was arrested at the instigation of the Inquisitors. His close connection with the Moors, his unusual interest in the Islamic faith and in Mohammedans generally had made him suspected once again of Mahomedanism. This time he was detained for twenty-five days and it is not known on what terms he was able to secure his release on this occasion, but immediately

on attaining his freedom he went to Paris and at Montmartre he definitely founded the Company of Jesus.

Ignatius did not abandon his project for the conversion of the Mohammedans. Don Pedro de Zacata de Bermeo, the commander of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, endeavoured to promote the interests of Catholicism in the Holy Land, and particularly those of Ignatius and his followers. He addressed himself to Pope Julius III, from whom he obtained, in 1554, a Bull authorizing him to found in the name of the Society of Jesus, three colleges in the East, which should belong to that Society—one at Jerusalem, one at Constantinople, and the third at Cyprus. In anticipation of the Bull, Ignatius, in 1553, had sent Simon Rodriguez with a companion to Jerusalem, to wait there until a favourable opportunity presented itself for establishing the proposed college. Rodriguez went no further than Venice where he fell so sick that he was utterly unable to continue the voyage. The provisions of the Bull were never acted upon and the scheme fell through. Although Ignatius continued to speak of the conversion of the Mohammedans as his chief mission, his actions now began to suggest the growth of a wider alternative.

It is in the organization and rules governing the Society of Jesus that the influence of the Islamic confraternities is seen. One of these societies is known as the Order of the Kheloua, a word which means "retreat" and the members make this devotional act a special feature of the Order. Before initiation into any of the Islamic societies in existence at the time of Ignatius, however, a retreat of from thirty to forty days had to be undertaken by every candidate. Concerning this M. A. le Chatelier writes:

"Mussulman doctors compare the initiation and the Keloua to a poison, deadly if it is taken in too strong doses at the beginning, but which can be assimilated by progressive usage. The Keloua, which, at the beginning, lasts for one day only, is, by degrees, prolonged through weeks. The initiate ought then, in order to isolate himself, to remain in one room of his dwelling, or in the cell of a zawiyah, or in a cavern, or in the depth of a forest. Whatever, however, may be the place of his retreat, he ought to speak to no one during his retreat, except to the Sheikh, or Moquaddim, the representative of the Sheikh. If he wants anything he will make demands by signs or in writing. His abstinence during the day must be absolute, but may be broken at night, though only in order to take the quantity of nourishment



strictly necessary. The hours of sleep are rigorously limited. Vocal prayer—the repetition of the same formulæ up to one or two thousand times—and meditation ought exclusively to occupy the adept, to whom, in certain approved cases, the reading of certain books may be permitted as an assistance, as a means to the desired end. Outside the time devoted to reading the candidate ought to ‘close his eyes in order to illumine his heart.’”

In the Society of Jesus a retreat of from thirty to forty days is similarly demanded. The novice ought, according to the *Exercises of St. Ignatius*, to employ the first week in the purification of the mind. During this week he is deprived entirely of the light of day, save for reading and eating. He is prohibited from indulging in laughter or in any conversation which tends to laughter. He sees only his director and speaks only to him, who fixes for him his fasts and labours. For four hours in the day and one hour in the middle of the night he is absorbed in meditations on death and hell. The same formula of prayer is repeated innumerable times until a condition of vague unconsciousness is reached—the same as happens with the Mohammedan initiate.

Attention is directed in both the Mohammedan and the Ignatian societies as to the posture of the body during prayer and meditation and the gaze has to be directed to and kept fixed upon a certain point.

St. Ignatius prescribed a special method of prayer, which he set out in the following words:

“The third method of prayer is that with each breath or respiration one is to pray mentally, saying one word of ‘Our Father’ or of any other prayer that is being recited, so that one word only is said between one breath and another; and in the length of time between one breath and another, one is to look chiefly on the meaning of such word, or to the person to whom one recites it, or to one’s lowly estate, or to the difference between such high estate and such reliance of man.”

This practice was known to the Moslems of the ninth century. The Kadriyas, in particular, had the practice laid down in their rituals of praying “in measure” or “in time”, that is to say, of giving to each respiration or breath one of the names of Allah, or one of the attributes of God, forcing themselves to hold the breath for as long time as possible on the name or attribute and the great care is never to have more than one name or attribute uttered between two breaths.

In the *Exercises of St. Ignatius* great attention is paid to what is called "the application of the senses". The first point is to see the person with the sight of the imagination, meditating and studying in particular their circumstances and gathering some fruit from the sight. The second is to hear with the ear of imagination the things that they say, or may say, and reflect upon them, then wisely to gather some profit. The third is to smell and taste the infinite fragrance and sweetness of the Godhead of the soul and its virtues, reflecting inwardly and gathering thence some profit. The fourth is to touch with the touch of imagination, to embrace and kiss the place where such persons tread, always contriving to gather profit thence.

This was a practice with both Gnostics and Mussulmans, who sought "to see, touch, hear, feel, and taste the object of their meditations", for example, "Paradise, the place of eternal delights, which God has prepared for prophets and believers" or "the torments of Gehenna, or Hell". Thus Ignatius said: "In the first place I see with the eyes of imagination those immense fires and the reprobate souls enclosed within the body of fire. In the second place I hear by the aid of imagination the groanings, the cries, the blasphemies against Jesus Christ, our Saviour, and against all the saints. In the third place I imagine to myself that I inhale the fumes, the sulphur, the stench of a sink of vice, and of putrefying matter. In the fourth place I imagine myself to taste bitter things, such as tears, sadness, the raging sea of conscience. In the fifth place I touch these avenging flames and force myself lively to comprehend how they surround and burn the souls of the reprobate."

The Kadriyas had, and have, five tests for every initiate after emerging from the retreat. They were: 1, serving the poor in imitation of the "saint" who founded the Order, who walked along the streets carrying a leathern bottle filled with fresh water and offering a drink to the poor people and weary travellers; 2, making a pilgrimage to Mecca or to the tomb of a Sheikh venerated in the Order; 3, performing domestic duties for a period; 4, teaching the Koran to the people; 5, serving as preacher for a stated period. The Jesuits have precisely the same tests after the candidate has been accepted and when he has passed satisfactorily through the retreat. He has: 1, to serve the sick poor for a month, in memory of the sojourn of St. Ignatius at Manresa, where he tended the infirm and pilgrims; 2, to make a pilgrimage



to some sanctuary selected for him; 3, to engage in menial work allotted to him at the seminary; 4, to teach children; 5, to preach as directed.

In the Islamic Orders promotion is at the will of the Sheikh; in the Society of Jesus it is at the will of the General or his representative. The General can retain a member of the Society for any period he wills in any class, or reduce him to any position, even the lowest, he has already passed through, or he may promote him to the highest grade. In Mussulman confraternities the authority of the Sheikh is absolute. As guide he takes the place of Mohammed and the candidate takes an oath that he will obey the Sheikh as he would obey God. The rule is absolute despotism. By the constitutions of the Society of Jesus the same despotic principle prevails. The General must be obeyed as God would or should be obeyed. The candidate for admission into Islamic Orders in existence in Ignatius's day, when he was accepted, handed over to the Sheikh all flocks, goods, and property that he possessed. Likewise all that the Jesuit owns passes, on his admission, into the exchequer of the Society. The Mussulman in the hands of his Sheikh is told to be as a body in the hands of the washer of the dead. The Jesuit is told that he must permit himself to be moved and directed by his superiors just as if he were a corpse.

In this adoption, or adaptation, of the Islamic monastic constitutions by St. Ignatius a criterion was set for what became, in after years, a not uncommon practice of Jesuit priests engaged in missionary labours. In the work issued under the initials "B. N." entitled *The Jesuits, their Foundation and History*, published by Burns and Oates), we read (p. 371, vol. 1):

"The Jesuits, as has been seen, had made an attentive study of the peculiar character of the Chinese, had come to the conclusion that the chief obstacle preventing them from embracing Christianity was an intense attachment to certain national customs. . . . They . . . finally adopted a rule, which has since been given by the Holy See to Vicars-Apostolic in foreign missions, that the missionaries were not to oblige the people to change their ceremonies, customs, or manners unless these were contrary to religion or morality."

Then there is the case of Father Robert de Nobili, an Italian of Roman birth and a nephew of Bellarmine, who is described as "one of the greatest of Jesuit missionaries", whose career cer-



tainly is of singular interest. The following description of the methods he adopted for the conversion of the Brahmins is taken from the work quoted above:

“He resolved to become a Brahmin himself, and to renounce all intercourse with Europeans and with members of the lower castes. By this means alone could he hope to gain an influence with those whose welfare he had at heart. . . . He announced himself to be a Roman Rajah, or noble, and a Saniassi, or one who had renounced the pleasures of the world, two perfectly accurate statements. He separated entirely from the other Jesuits, who, by mingling with the Pariahs, had lost caste in the eyes of the higher classes; and having adopted the language, costume, and manners of a Brahmin, he retired to a hut built of turf, and surrounded himself with a mysterious prestige well calculated to excite curiosity and interest. One of the chief crimes of the Europeans, in the opinion of the Brahmins, was their use of meat and strong liquors, and Fr. de Nobili conformed himself strictly to the mode of life observed by the native doctors: rice, herbs, and water were his only food once in twenty-four hours; his solitude was only broken by visits from the Brahmins; prayer and study were his constant occupations. By degrees his patience was rewarded. Attracted at first by his retired and mortified life, the Brahmins were fascinated by his learning and especially by his perfect knowledge of their Vedas or sacred books. Gradually he led them to the clear understanding of the Catholic faith and conversions became numerous among the class in which the truth had hitherto encountered insuperable opposition.”

Nobili was afterwards authorized by a Bull from Pope Gregory XV, dated 31st January, 1623, to pursue the course he had hitherto followed, which Bull justified him in all that he had done. One of the chief accusations against him had been that he allowed his disciples to paint a mark on their foreheads, made of a certain paste called sandal, and to wear cords or girdles composed of 800 yellow threads. The Bull decided that both those customs, being regarded merely as distinctive marks of nobility, might be allowed to the Christian Brahmins, on condition that the cords should be blessed by a priest and received from his hands. The Pope, after careful examination, was convinced that to abolish these practices, puerile in appearance, but in the eyes of the natives invested with extraordinary importance, would have been to render their conversion well nigh impossible.

This imposture continued throughout the seventeenth century and on the death of Fr. de Nobili in 1656 it was claimed that he had made 100,000 high caste converts and that one of his colleagues had made 30,000 converts. Benedict XIV, by his Bull of 12th September, 1744, authorized the Jesuits to have two classes of missionaries, one for the nobles and one for the pariahs.

Then there is the case of the Norwegian Jesuit Nicolai, who presented himself to the Protestant clergy at Stockholm and said that having spent some years at southern universities, he would like a place as professor in the new college they were forming. He asked them to recommend him to the king, which in time they did and he secured the appointment. He had been sent from Rome with instructions to act as he did. He seems to have held the chair of Lutheran theology for a considerable time until, eventually, he became rector of the college.

Not only is the historical connection between Islamic monasticism and the Society of Jesus demonstrated by their likeness one to another, but their actual relationships are such as to prove the filiation possible, and, further, the hypothesis fits in with all the ascertained relevant facts.