

## THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE EAST AND THE WEST.

BY STANWOOD COBB.

IS the East more spiritual than the West? There is no doubt that it is more religious. The effect of education and scientific progress in the West has seemed to be skepticism and, what is worse, indifference toward religion. Our churches are empty, our clergy at their wits' ends, and men of affairs too often content to get along without any definite religion. One man, a scientist, remarked to me that science had produced more of benefit to the world in the last hundred years than religion had in all the centuries preceding. It is not hard to see where the interest of the West lies. Practical things absorb its attention. In so far as religion is practical it appeals, otherwise not.

The East is different. It has not yet awakened to this pure intellectualism. It is still medieval, and religion is the most dominant motive in the lives of its people—the chief control over their actions.

This influence amounts to a superstition. Be careful how you admire the pretty baby of a Turkish mother. Admiration brings on the jealousy of Allah and the child may die. Any praise you may give it is met with an apprehensive *Mashallah*, "God forbid!" Even looking at it too fixedly will give it the evil eye. To ward off such influences it wears a blue stone about its neck, or a magic formula of some kind.

Even in business the fear of God is stronger than the dollar. Two Turkish merchants are bargaining together. The seller wants a larger price. The other replies, "I will give it—but may Allah turn it bad for you." This curse, pronounced not on the seller but on the extra money he demands, is usually enough to give him cold feet and make him content with the lesser price. The Greek merchant, however, takes a thrifty advantage of this way of bargaining

with the Turk, for he does not fear the curse and is quite willing to accept this tainted money.

No plans are made for the future without the added *Inshallah*, "God willing." A story illustrates this. There was a woman who was very pious, and never made a promise without the humble *Inshallah*. Her husband becoming tired of this, ordered her to stop it, or he would beat her. One morning as he was leaving for business he asked her what time they would have supper. "At seven o'clock—God willing." At this word which had slipped out in spite of his threat, the good man took a stick and gave her a good beating, saying, "Nonsense, woman, we will have supper at seven whether God wills or not," then went on his way. At nightfall as he was returning to his home, some robbers fell upon him and beat him so that he lay there insensible for most of the night. At the early hours of the morning he managed to crawl home, a regenerated man, and told his wife to say *Inshallah* all she wanted. The result of his blasphemy had been immediate and unfortunate enough to make him ever after a pious man.

Stronger than any other idea in the Mussulman's mind is his belief in destiny. His every act is in accordance with this fatalism. The candy vender enters a coffee shop and smokes nonchalantly, regardless of whether he misses a customer meanwhile. The Turkish boatmen and hackmen do not compete for a customer with the fury of other nationalities, because they know if it is their destiny he will come to them anyway. The Turkish merchant does not force his goods upon you, nor race out in the street after prospective customers like the Jew and the Armenian. Those whom it is his destiny to get will come of their own accord. This apparent indifference to trade is amazing to the hustling American traveler. He wonders how the Turk can make a living. As a matter of fact, he does not make as good a living as his Jewish or Greek or Armenian competitors, but the peace and contentment which is written on his face is worth the cost he pays for it. There is no strain in his business life. He is as calm and placid as if he were an anchorite meditating upon the goodness of his Creator.

The absence of ambition in the average Turk is partly an outcome of this same fatalism. He is content with whatever Allah sends. He has few desires which a large income could satisfy. In times of business stress his faith in God is superb. In these ways, religion enters into the daily life of the Turk to sweeten it and make it calm and peaceful. Misfortune is met with complete resignation. *Worry never dwells upon the smooth brow of the Turk.*

Life's end is met with the same calm and fortitude. The Angel of Death never comes save at God's command, and at the destined time. Why murmur or repine? Why fruitlessly endeavor to escape one's fate? The prime minister of a certain Sultan once came in fright to his master and asked leave to withdraw for the rest of his life to Tunis. The Angel of Death was following him with calm steps. It was the sight of Death which had caused him to make this effort to escape. The Sultan granted the request and as the prime minister walked gladly from the room thinking he had saved his life for a few years more, the Sultan saw a grim smile upon the face of Death. "Why do you smile?" he asked. Death replied; "Your majesty, Allah sent me to fetch this man, but I was commanded to take him at Tunis. I wondered how I could get him to go there, but now you have solved the difficulty for me."

Such fatalism has its evil side—a folding of the hands without effort to struggle against unfavorable conditions—but it robs life of much of its terror, and death too. It is said that veteran soldiers in any country become fatalists. Frequent exposure to death obliges them to this protection against fear. The calmness with which they face the whistling bullet is induced by the belief that they will not be shot until their time comes. Napoleon was a confirmed fatalist. His faith in his own destiny was so strong that by it he inspired all his followers, and the spirit with which they fought was but a reflection of his own fiery assurance.

In the East this spirit controls all. And in addition to this every Mohammedan who falls in a religious warfare has the promise of immediate Paradise which gives not only calm acceptance of death, but a welcoming to it, and lends a fury to Mohammedan warfare which has more than once made Europe quail.

The Mohammedans in general carry their religion into their every-day lives; it is not a matter of mere seventh-day observance. Their hospitality is renowned. Never do they let the stranger go hungry. They have few organized charities but each Mohammedan is at the service of his brother. A poor man can get bread at the kitchens of the rich; no one need starve. The feeling of brotherhood is very strong in Islam—stronger than in Christianity. Islam is a powerful religious democracy. He who asks in the name of Allah is seldom refused.

I have already spoken of the reverence with which the Mohammedan goes through the forms of his religion. The mosque service cannot fail to inspire any visitor with its feeling of hushed worship and devotion. The Mohammedan at prayer has no attention for

anything else. Nothing can distract him ; his thoughts are fixed on God.

The fear of God is always in the heart of the Mohammedan. He is simple-minded—childlike, if you will, but his heart and mind are fixed upon God. He lives near to God. His speech is permeated with pious phrases.

The hold of religion upon Mohammedans is best seen in their faithful observance of the fast of Ramazan (necessitating a real sacrifice of personal comfort and efficiency) and their total abstinence from liquor, a thing which Christian countries are not able to produce with all their temperance societies and prohibition. The blood of Moslems is not tainted with the ravages of this social evil, they do not bequeath scrofula and insanity to their children. Here is a vigorous race full of red blood that is pure and strong. The Turks are not degenerate nor effete. Their physique is among the best in the world, thanks to their simple life.

The things of which I have so far been speaking are the externals of religion, rather than the indications of a true spirituality ; but there are many ways in which the Oriental shows himself to be more spiritually-minded than his western brother. His thoughts are more constantly upon the divine. It is not without significance that every one of the great world religions has arisen in the East and had its conception in the mind of an Oriental. There is something in the East which seems to induce meditation. Its climate invites you to be dreamy and mystic, just as our American climate forces life into feverish activity. I suppose that is what one means by the "spell of the East." One falls under it insensibly ; but it is there—a real thing—as vital in the lives of its peoples as our machinery is to us. How little time our business men have for meditation, and for speculating on the nature of existence. How seldom when they are together does their conversation turn on spiritual themes, the nature of the ultimate—man's position in the universe—his duty toward the divine. Their view seems shut in, confined, in comparison with the Oriental. The typical American has few thoughts outside the round of his business, his city, and national politics and problems. He has no cosmic view. His mind does not scan the universe—nor formulate for him any definite relation to this mysterious All of which the world where he breathes and lives is but an infinitesimal part. He bothers little with such idle speculations.

To the Oriental, however, this is the one absorbing theme. He is ever pondering upon the nature of existence as a whole. Other things—the practical things of every-day life—are but passing shows

from which he is glad to withdraw whenever possible in order to be face to face with the divine, to feel that mystic sense of union with the Whole which is peculiarly Oriental. If two or three business men get together, their talk is sure to run into religion. It is the favorite subject of discussion. From the time he enters this world till the time he leaves it, the Oriental is surrounded with the feeling of awe and reverence for the unseen, and a reaching out for a closer relation to it.

It is from the East that there have come the ideas of renunciation, submission to God, and the absence of all desire save his will—which I take to be the essence of spirituality; without these qualities no individual can be called spiritual.

Islam teaches these qualities and they are strong in every earnest Mussulman. The very word Islam means "submission" and a Mussulman is "one who submits to God." The patience with which he bears suffering and misfortune is wonderful. This folding of the hands in complete submission to God's will, this calm and majestic attitude toward the buffets of the world, rendering the sufferer superior to his suffering, placing man, even in misfortune, above the plane of material fluctuations—is a thing which only a strong religion can bring to pass.

What is the goal of every individual's desire, save to be beyond the power of misfortune, to be assured of constant peace and happiness? One way of striving for this is to pile up investments, to perfect the external conditions of life, to surround oneself with friends—and then to shake one's fist in the face of destiny and defy it to injure. But the very defiance is a fear. No stronghold is proof against calamity. And even if all other obstacles to happiness were removed, death alone were sufficient to disturb the materialist's peace of mind.

It was an Oriental who once said, "Lay not up your treasures on earth, where moths do corrupt and where thieves break through and steal." And having perhaps a vision of the bravado of our twentieth century materialist, this same Oriental told the story of a man who piled up wealth in his barns and then invited his friends to carouse, defying destiny to do him harm. Fool that he was. His *grain was safe* but *he* was not, for his soul was required of him that very night.

At the risk of tiring the reader we will quote Emerson's poem "Hamatreya," because it so admirably illustrates the different attitudes of the East and West toward material possessions.

## HAMATREYA.

"Bulkeley, Hunt, Willard, Hosmer, Meriam, Flint,  
 Possessed the land which rendered to their toil  
 Hay, corn, roots, hemp, flax, apples, wool and wood.  
 Each of these landlords walked amidst his farm,  
 Saying, 'Tis mine, my children's, and my name's.  
 How sweet the west wind sounds in my own trees!  
 How graceful climb those shadows on my hill!  
 I fancy these pure waters and the flags  
 Know me, as does my dog: we sympathize;  
 And, I affirm, my actions smack of the soil.'

"Where are these men? Asleep beneath their grounds  
 And strangers, fond as they, their furrows plow.  
 Earth laughs in flowers, to see her boastful boys  
 Earth-proud, proud of the earth which is not theirs;  
 Who steer the plough, but cannot steer their feet  
 Clear of the grave.  
 They added ridge to valley, brook to pond,  
 And sighed for all that bounded their domain;  
 'This suits me for a pasture; that's my park;  
 We must have clay, lime, gravel, granite-ledge,  
 And misty lowland, where to go for peat.  
 The land is well,—lies fairly to the south.  
 'Tis good, when you have crossed the sea and back,  
 To find the sitfast acres where you left them.'  
 Ah! the hot owner sees not Death, who adds  
 Him to his land, a lump of mould the more.  
 Hear what the Earth says:

## EARTH-SONG.

"'Mine and yours;  
 Mine, not yours.  
 Earth endures;  
 Stars abide—  
 Shine down in the old sea;  
 Old are the shores;  
 But where are old men?  
 I who have seen much,  
 Such have I seen.

"'The lawyer's deed  
 Ran sure,  
 In tail,  
 To them, and to their heirs  
 Who shall succeed,  
 Without fail,  
 Forevermore.

"Here is the land,  
 Shaggy with wood,  
 With its old valley,  
 Mound and flood.  
 But the heritors?—  
 Fled like the flood's foam.  
 The lawyer, and the laws,  
 And the kingdom,  
 Clean swept herefrom.

"They called me theirs,  
 Who so controlled me;  
 Yet every one  
 Wished to stay, and is gone,  
 How am I theirs,  
 If they cannot hold me,  
 But I hold them?"

"When I heard the Earth-song,  
 I was no longer brave;  
 My avarice cooled  
 Like lust in the chill of the grave."

To the Occidental a material possession seems the most solid thing in the universe, but to the Oriental, who has always the eternal values in mind, the things of this earth appear very fluctuating and unstable, while death is the only sure universal adjunct of life.

Here is another way, a better way of insuring peace in the midst of one's possessions, and that is by being detached from them. Only he who is without desire is safe from misfortune. As Lao-tze says, "By not making any claims of ownership, the sage is superior to loss." Of course he is, for how can a man lose what he does not possess? And the man who is free from desire, who is submissive to God's will, looks upon his possessions as loaned to him, and is ready at any time to see them go without complaint or whining. Thus only is he master of his possessions, instead of being mastered by them. Thus only is he superior to misfortune.

This is the constant attitude of the mind of the Oriental. He is very little attached to material things. He can do without the things which the Westerner considers as necessities. He can be happy under almost any circumstances. Thus he lives perpetually in a realm of peace above the jar and turmoil of the world. In the solitudes of his deserts he meditates upon God and his life is partly lived in spiritual spaces.

No visitor to the East returns without an indelible impression of the joy of life there—its lambent happiness, surrounding one like

a Lethean stream and blotting out bothersome things. It is not conducive to activity, perhaps. It fails at the point where the West is strong—in the constant striving for improvement, for more perfect mastery of the material environment. I do not say that the East has all, nor that it is better than the West, but only that it is more spiritual. The practical also has its claims, and here the West leads.

The perfect civilization would be that which combined these two elements; the masterful wrestling with nature for the utilization of her resources and the prevention of waste, whether economic, social, or physiological; and the calm submission to the will of the Almighty which insures peace and happiness. Either without the other is but half perfection.