

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE MAKING OF CONVERTS.

“There must be no compulsion in Religion.”—*Koran*.

IF we compare the methods adopted by the Muslims when advancing their religious opinions, with the systems obtaining amongst certain Christian propagandists, we cannot fail to be struck by the marked difference shown—the one breathing the spirit of love and toleration, and the other savouring more of compulsion and condemnation. The instructions given in the *Koran* are very simple, and lay down in the plainest possible language the duty of the Prophet and his disciples when preaching Islam. They are simply commanded to deliver God’s message to mankind, and no blame is to be attached to them if the message is rejected.

“The apostle has only to preach his message. And remind, O prophet, thou art only to remind, thou art not an authority over them.

“Say, O ye people, there has come to you the truth from your Lord, and he who is guided, his guidance is only for his soul; and he who errs, errs only against it, and say I am not a guardian over it. But if they turn aside, we have not sent thee to them as a guardian, thou hast only thy message to preach. But say this is the truth from your Lord, so let him who will, believe, and let him who will, disbelieve.”

There is no ambiguity whatsoever in these lines from the *Koran*; the missionary is not asked to be a proselytizer, he has only to preach the Word of

God ; if conversion is to bless his efforts it must come entirely by spontaneous judgment, and must not be attained by means of compulsion or persuasion. Christ gave much the same instructions to his disciples when he said, "And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them."

We also have the following verse, still further guiding honest missionaries of every creed :—

"Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and godly warnings, and dispute with them in the kindest way."—Koran (xvi. 26).

Here we see three stages of preaching :—

- (1) Invitation to the religion of God with wisdom and caution.
- (2) Imparting sacred warnings.
- (3) The kindly and beneficent method of conducting the arguments.

If those we are endeavouring to lead towards Islam refuse to listen, we must not get angry or be offended, but merely invoke their witness that we have conveyed to them what we believe to be God's message, and that we are resigned to His Will. All true guidance must come from God, and we have done our duty if we have faithfully preached and endeavoured to explain His messages. In the Koran the Prophet is repeatedly reminded that he is but a "warner," and that no blame will be attached to him on account of the errors or obstinacy of his hearers. "Let him who will, believe, and let him who will, disbelieve." Verses such as this are of frequent occurrence in the Koran, and they certainly show that there is no truth in the constantly repeated charge that the Koran incites its readers to

propagate Islam by oppressive or violent measures. Indeed, it forbids the Holy Prophet to carry even persuasion too far; for he is told that, if the persons preached to pay no heed to his exhortation, he should leave them alone, as it was not his duty to compel anyone to accept Islam. Conversion must come spontaneously, and true religion can only be accepted with an open heart. "Whosoever God wishes to guide, He expands his heart to Islam." Conversions of this class can surely not be the result of compulsion.

It will thus be seen that as far as proselytization goes the methods enjoined by the Koran are entirely of the peaceful and gentle order. Muslims have had, in days gone by, to protect themselves by force of arms, but they have never attempted to promulgate Islamic teachings by means of the sword—we cannot say as much for the Christians.

When we come to consider the possibilities of establishing Islam as one of the religions of the West we are confronted by a very difficult problem, *i.e.*, the harmonizing of Eastern customs which prevailed in Arabia over 1,300 years ago with modern Western usages. Concerning this, Sir Harry H. Johnston is reported to have written:—

\* "If the Mahomedan Egyptians prefer to regard the Koran and the mediæval elaboration of the Koran as the last word, the dominant and ultimate authority in law, science, sanitation, morals, and social economy, so long will Mahomedan teaching institutions be utterly futile in coping with the requirements of the twentieth century, and so long will Mahomedan peoples be unfitted to govern themselves, and still less to govern more intelligent fellow-citizens of more enlightened faiths."

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\* "The Comrade," Delhi, February 21, 1914.

These expressions of opinion, coming from one whose great experience in Africa and the Near East entitles him to most respectful hearing and attention, may not be lightly brushed aside. We cannot agree as to the existence of a "more enlightened faith," since it seems impossible to conceive any creed more enlightened than that which does away with all idolatrous rites, relies entirely on the help and direction of the one and only God, and which teaches our duty to our neighbour, and beneficence to *all our fellow creatures*. The difficulties which seem to exist are chiefly those due to ceremonials. The actual spirit of Islam is far above all these minor points, but it must not be forgotten that the true disciple of the Holy Prophet loves to follow—to the letter, as far as worldly circumstances will permit—all the injunctions laid down so explicitly in the Koran. Hard and fast rules under one set of conditions may be fairly easy to obey, *e.g.*, Eastern conditions many centuries ago—but they may be extremely difficult to follow up in the West at the present day. We may appreciate the piety and zeal of the modern Muslim, but we must also consider the great hindrances there are to, say, a modern European business man, *who is entirely in accord with Islamic teaching in the spirit and truth of our grand religion*, who finds himself unable to conform rigidly to the letter of the law of Islam. This is probably what Sir Harry Johnston means when he refers to the "mediæval elaboration of the Koran." May God grant that all the obstacles may in time be removed, and that the East and West may worship in the same simplicity, and trust to the sole and supreme aid of the Great Creator and Protector of all mankind.

There are many good and sincere Mahomedans who hold that their belief in the Divine Unity of

God, and their acceptance of the messages delivered to the world by the inspired Prophet, and their obedience to the commandments from on High, are sufficient to entitle them to be enrolled in the ranks of the Faithful. Their failure to conform to what may be called the minor conventions is not sufficient to exclude them from the great Brotherhood of Islam. The Unity of God, duty to neighbours, and belief in the Angels and Prophets of God, together with an acceptance of the Koran, as revealed to the Holy Prophet Mahomet, constitute the essentials of Islam: outward forms and ceremonies cannot be held—as the Christians say their baptisms are—to be generally *necessary* to salvation. I would say that, in presenting Islam to Westerns, stress should only be laid on the vital points, and that the main injunctions of the Koran—which is, of course, the Gospel of Islam—should be adhered to. We have seen from the above that a correct representation of the inspired Book should form the chief feature of Islamic preaching, and that particular care should be taken to do nothing to irritate or offend those we wish to win over. All is to be done in the kindest manner, and without giving cause for resentment or anger.

How great is the difference between the method of propagating religion, as practised by the Muslims who follow the instructions of the Koran as above enumerated, and that aggressive and irritating system adopted by those who endeavour to dispense various brands of the Christian faith!

I can point to several cases within my own knowledge of rigid and uncompromising Protestants making house-to-house visitations to Roman Catholics in a Roman Catholic country in the hope of making “converts.” These possibly well-meaning but excessively irritating people go about armed with

tracts which they press their victims to accept and read. Such visits often upset whole households, causing bickerings and disputes between the otherwise happy and contented members of families. How strangely neglectful are these mistaken proselytizers of their duty towards neighbours, and that beneficence, which should be the distinguishing mark of Christ's followers! The Roman Catholics also carry on their work of conversion, but they are far more diplomatic and clever in their methods, and probably meet with greater success.

Christians spend vast sums annually on Missions to "Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Heretics"—the three latter terms being applied to Muslims and generally to all those who do not regard the Almighty exactly from their own standpoint—and it would be instructive to ascertain how much money is annually thrown away in attempts to force or persuade men of other faiths to change their religions.

That the Medical Missions do admirable work, and that they are worthy of support, cannot for a moment be denied, and we should also respect those who endeavour to give a religion to communities of savages who know not God at all, and worship only idols, or sticks and stones. It is when we come to find offers of worldly advantages or, in plainer language, bribes being advanced in order to tempt a change of religion, that we feel impressed with the hollowness of the system of proselytizing in lands where excellent forms of worship already exist. I have been told that the accounts of the Societies for the Conversion of Jews show that the cost per Jew convert is many thousands of pounds. Surely this money might be put to better uses? With respect to Mahomedan conversions, probably the cost is still higher, as there are very few Muslims of any education at all who would change their pure and simple

faith for any other. It is only the very poorest and lowest who can be induced to change, and they only take the step in order to better their worldly position.

The missionary is paid to make converts : he is doing well in his profession if he secures many, and badly if he secures few ; but he should not stoop to unworthy methods and, above all, he should never wilfully misrepresent the religion of those he is endeavouring to lead into another path.

