



A DROVE OF CAMELS AT KUWEIT, ARABIA.

What are the Missionaries Doing?

PRESENTING CHRIST AS THE SAVIOUR OF RACIAL INDIVIDUALITY

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THERE are some very curious ideas abroad about the work of the missionary, and as to the character of the races for whom he works. I was asked not long ago: "But are the Armenians really worth saving?" As showing another extreme, I remember sitting on the second-class deck of the "Spanish Mail" one hot summer afternoon a year ago, and discussing with an Englishman who had lived many years in Singapore, the question whether the West really had any contribution to make to the East. There is much sincerity in these inquiries, and we will try to consider now just what it is that we are trying to do in our missionary work, and incidentally a few things that we are not trying to do.

We are not striving to change men's customs. I enter an Arab house, and remove my shoes, while I leave my hat on. Why not? It is just as defensible as to remove my hat and leave on my shoes. Indeed, from the sanitary standpoint, the Arab's is the better way. And when I eat with my hands, or more exactly with my right hand, who has a right to object? The right hand can be washed as clean as a spoon, and much cleaner than many spoons are washed. The houses that the people of the Orient live in, and the clothes they wear, may appear very grotesque to us. No doubt the houses might be benefited by a little more

fresh air and sunlight, and the clothes at times could stand more frequent washing, but we are not there to change these things.

We do not go there to revise their educational system. No doubt the curriculum might be extended in many cases with benefit, but schools there have some features that possibly we of the West might profitably study. The Arab boy starts to school at about the same age as he would if born in America. He sits on the ground in a small room with perhaps twenty or thirty others. He reads at the top of his voice, and a school at work can frequently be heard for a block. The teacher sits on a little platform in one corner, and he is armed with a pole long enough to reach the most distant pupil. If attention flags, and some small boy turns to whisper to his neighbor, the teacher takes the long pole and discipline is administered with no loss of time whatever. A shocking system! Ridiculous! But the small boy in that school will be reading the Koran with fluency in a year's time, and indeed sometimes in less. The Koran is difficult Arabic, too. I am not certain that our own educational methods can show as good results. Indeed, I have often wished myself a trained pedagogue, so that I might study that Arab system more adequately.

We are not out there to change methods of thought. The way the Oriental thinks is not our way. One night in Kuwait, I was sleeping in the yard of an Arab house, which in those days served as our hospital. My own room, inside, was so infested with fleas that it was almost uninhabitable. The door of the courtyard was open as it always was, and somewhere about three o'clock in the morning, I was waked up by someone pulling on my arm. "Wake up, Sahib. Wake up. I want some medicine." Night calls in Arabia usually mean some serious emergency, so I woke up with some speed. "Yes, what is the trouble?" "Wake up, Sahib," repeated the woman, "I want some medicine." I was getting waked up by now, so I replied with more intelligence, "Yes, this is the place people get medicine. What do you want it for; where are you hurt?" "I have a pain in my shoulder," she said, "and I have come twenty days' journey to get to this hospital. Just as soon as I arrived, I came straight here." "We are very glad to see you," I replied. "How long have you been suffering this way?" "It is six years now," replied the withered old woman. "Six years! Well," I said, "the medicines are all shut up at this hour, could you come around a little later, say at eight o'clock? There is plenty of medicine, and you are not expecting to leave the city before then, are you?" "Oh, no, I will come any time you say." So she went away and came back at the specified time, and received her medicine. Of course we would not be guilty of imposing on a doctor at that hour of the night unless there was some reason for it. But there is something very attractive about a mind that works in straight lines, and has no sidetracks, and the last thing that we want to do is to train it into the same modes of thinking as our own, if that were possible, which, of course, it is not.

Nor are we there to revise their governmental system. The Oriental believes in an absolute monarchy—a thoroughly bad system which should be abolished. Perhaps. But the best regulated cities that I have ever lived in are in Arabia, and the most democratic, too. It was a great surprise to see administered under the forms of an absolute autocracy such a perfect democracy. The system works exceedingly well in Arabia. A chief is invested with absolute power. “Whom he would, he slew, and whom he would, he kept alive” is the whole governmental philosophy. The chief’s functions are two. He must protect the poor from the rich, and he must maintain public order. Both are done with Oriental directness and simplicity. When I lived in Kuwait, that city had not known a burglary for years. I suppose that if I had left a purse of money in the public road, there would have been nine chances out of ten that the following morning I could have recovered the same purse, with the same money, by asking for it at the castle of the chief, where the finder would have carried it. A few months after I left that town there was a burglary. Three Arabs went out and burglarized two houses. The three men were caught, at least the chief said that they were the men. I hope they were. Questions are not wise under such circumstances. Those three men were taken out and tied to three posts, and whipped to death. I was told that one of the men by mistake was not whipped enough, and got well. It is possible. A ghastly way of punishing burglary, but it will probably be years before it is needed again. “The foundation of a good government is fear,” as an Arab ruler told me once.

The poor are protected from the rapacity of the rich in an equally efficient way. When the accumulation of some man becomes so great that the equitable distribution of society’s wealth is jeopardized, he is sent to enjoy the pleasures of Paradise, which every orthodox believer knows are greater than any possible pleasures on this earth, and his possessions are distributed among the impecunious retainers of the chief. So are the objects of the Socialist attained with efficiency and dispatch. This very thing happened when I was in Bahrein. Bin Gemma was the richest man in all Kateef. (And it is not necessary to waste any pity on him either. He deserved all that he got and more.) One day Bin Gemma was invited to come and see the chief. He has not been seen since. Nor does any one expect to see him till they enter the experiences of the next world. His property has been divided up among the retainers of Bin Saoud, the chief. I suppose that there is no country in the world where the poor are so considerately treated by the rich as in Arabia, and it is easy to see why it should be so. As soon as the death of a rich man would increase the popularity of the chief, the life of that man becomes exceedingly insecure. It behooves him therefore to see that his standing in the community is such that his death is not desired. During the first two years of the European war, the British Political Agent at Bahrein saw famine staring the people

of those islands in the face. It was impossible to sell pearls at any price, and the whole community depends on pearl-fishing. The hard times came. People were desperately poor, but there was no want, and no call for any help from the Political Agent. No one starved. No one was hungry for want of food, nor cold for want of clothes. The resources of the rich were at the call of the poor till the stress passed. A system that works as well as that is worthy of respect, at least.

It works equally well on the side of the chief. His power is absolute. No one questions his decisions. If he takes a man out of the Bazaar today and executes him tomorrow, no one rises to demand an explanation. But he does nothing of that sort. He knows that the popular will is his only support. The people do not care who is chief. One man is as good as another to them. Just as long as the chief is strong enough to rule them efficiently, strong enough to protect the poor from the rich, and to preserve public order, so long are they his enthusiastic supporters. But if the public order is not well maintained, if the poor begin to be oppressed by the rich, there develops in that community a faction of discontented citizens, who desire a change, and as misrule continues, that faction increases, and when it includes perhaps half of the people its leader assassinates the chief and takes his place. It is the old original form of the recall, and it is a very efficient form too. I remember one such old chief, in whose judgment hall I have frequently sat. A strong handed, cruel old despot, who would not look at a bribe, and who had as his first thought the real welfare of his people. The city prospered under him, and that city of probably fifty thousand and more inhabitants was better governed, I think, than any city of equal size that I have ever seen in America. We are not over in these countries to revise their Governmental systems. The systems as they exist at present have much that is most commendable and any change that must come, should come from their hands, not from ours.

But there are some things that those people do need. What are they? One of the striking things to be noticed in Arabia is the almost complete absence of partnerships in business. There is, indeed, almost no co-operation in anything. And the reason is that no one can trust anybody else. The fault runs down deep in their character. There is a fundamental failure to recognize the sacredness and the solidity, the finality of Truth. An illuminating incident occurred once when we were out on a tour in Oman. My Arab guide one windy evening warned me to beware of the scorpions. "The scorpions will come out tonight," he said, "for it is blowing." I knew that the place had plenty of scorpions, but was not clear why there was anything additional to fear on such a night, so I inquired further. "The scorpions," answered my informant, "are very much afraid of mosquitoes. The bite of a mosquito is quite sufficient to cause the death of a scorpion, and on quiet evenings when the mosquitoes are about, the scorpions are compelled

to keep inside their holes, but on an evening like this one, when the wind keeps the mosquitoes away, the scorpions will be out in great numbers."

I expressed some incredulity, but he assured me that this was a matter of common knowledge, that he had seen it, or if not, many of his friends had, and that it was a well authenticated fact. "Well," I said, "it is an easy matter to test, and a fact of some interest if it is true." So I decided to test it the following morning. But the next morning, when I asked him to secure some scorpions from the inhabitants of the district, my friend seemed a good deal surprised, and when I explained what I wanted them for, he was full of deprecating apologies. "Oh, well," he said, "Oh, well, I don't suppose that it would really work that way if it was tested; not necessarily at least. Of course people do talk that way, but I am quite sure that if you tried it out you would not find that the scorpions really died." No, this was not a case of deliberate falsehood. In a curious way, almost incomprehensible to our Western minds, that man really believed what he told me, even though he knew it was not so. The truth has in his mind none of the unconquerable solidity, none of the finality it has for us. A falsehood is just as good as the truth for the foundation of an argument, or a course of action, or an entire life, or indeed an eternal destiny. In a word, there is no difference in the essential value and reliability of Truth and Falsehood.

There is another thing that the Arab needs, and that is a touch of fundamental humility which can see the defects of the present—at least to the degree of desiring improvement. I remember one night talking for a long time with an Arab on a housetop in Mesopotamia. "Yes," I said to him, "you have the finest country in the world, and if you only had a good government, and would irrigate the land properly, you would see a marvelous change. In the place of your poor, insufficient food, you might have plenty, and in the place of the wretched rags that you dress in now, you could have good clothes. In the place of these villages of mud houses you would have great cities and a magnificent civilization." As I finished, the Arab turned to me and replied: "I like it better the way it is." "Which is better," I said, as I took the two from my pocket, "this copper cent, or this five dollar gold piece? Your country now is the copper cent, what it might be is the gold piece, which is better?" "No," said the man, "I like it better the way it is." The independence and the self-respect of the Arab are magnificent, but the missionary's patience is often worn thin by continual contact with an impenetrable conceit and self-satisfaction, which sees no imperfection in their own flea and louse-ridden society, and looks with contempt on the bathing infidels.

There is at least one other thing that the Orient needs. Possibly it is the deepest need of all. While I am at home on furlough, I still keep up my friendship with some of my Arab friends, by means of cor-

respondence. One of these friends, particularly, I consider as one of the most perfectly natural gentlemen that I have ever met. He is vastly better than the men around him. He is vastly better than his own prophet Mohammed. He is a benevolent Customs House keeper, which is almost the same as saying that he is a white blackbird; a sincere, kindly gentleman, beloved of the whole community,—one of the few men against whom I never heard a single word from anyone, during visits in his city which aggregated several months. But when I sit long hours in that man's guest room, I do not see his wife, nor does he eat with her. Indeed, when I desired to ask after her health, for she is a friend of one of our women missionaries, even when we were quite alone I dared not insult him by asking the question directly, but must ask concerning the welfare of "his house." That man, with all his virtues, has two wives. The most serious indictment against him, and against all that society, is not that polygamy is permitted and practiced. Every man can have four legal wives; he may have as many concubines as he has money to pay for. He may sell his concubines as he does his cattle. They are simply slave women who bear him children. He may divorce any one of his so-called legal wives, by returning her dowry, and sending her away. But the serious need in that society is not constituted by the fact that the law permits such things, and that many practice them. The serious need is constituted by the fact that the conscience in these matters seems to have disappeared. Heaven, as drawn in their sacred book, is a place where sexual relations are limited neither by law, nor by fatigue, and the normal life for a man on this earth is just as close an approximation to Heaven as circumstances permit.

— This is not advanced as an adequate analysis of the need of the non-Christian world. It is advanced simply as an indication of the type of that need. Only a few months ago, a man hunted me up, after listening to a missionary address. "Don't you know," he said, "that all those people need is single-tax. If only their property laws were revised on that basis all these other things would take care of themselves." That may sound foolish, but essentially his mistake is no greater than that made by all who are anxious to take to the non-Christian world the veneer and the polish of our Western civilization, and are hoping for its regeneration as a result of such gifts. Some of us are not very proud of Western civilization these days, and the effort to transform the Orient into a land of half-baked Americans, is not futile and foolish merely, it is wicked and wrong. These civilizations have in them elements of great value. It may even be seriously questioned, I think, how much superior our own civilization is, as compared with theirs, when we remember how the worship of trade profits, and military glory, taints our whole structure. Whatever changes come in those civilizations, must come as a growth from within, and not as a veneering from without. Our gift to the non-Christian world is the regeneration of individual character or it is nothing, and worse than

nothing. We take to them the teaching and the example and the power of Christ. Essentially that is all that we do take to them. The Life that they gain from Him will work out its own results in civilization, and in the organization of society.

I pass on with no discussion of what that means as to the character of real missionary work, and the type of men who should go as missionaries, to say at once that this means not the weakening or the minimizing of that regenerated individual's racial peculiarities, but their strengthening and reinforcement. I attended a Presbyterian Church in Japan. It was not a Mission Church. There was, I think, a smaller percentage of European clothes in that audience than I met on the street of the city outside. Scarcely anything that I saw in Japan pleased me more than this. The Christian Arab is going to be a better Arab than before. He will eat the same sort of food, and wear the same sort of clothes, live in the same sort of house as he used to. He will think the same way. He is an Arab, and his new life in Christ has made him more of an Arab than ever. We want an Indian Church, which shall be the keenest center of nationalism in the Empire, and a Chinese church made up of the most devoted patriots that country affords. Christ is the reinforcer of racial peculiarities, and of racial loyalty.

Now, of course, it is evident that the evolution of society is toward more contact between the East and the West, and not less, that, however the missionary may sigh for a country free from Western trade, he knows that such an idea is a Utopian dream. The treasures of the Oriental mind, perhaps the most precious things in the world today, are not going to be preserved by imitating King Canute and ordering the tide to go backward. These racial peculiarities can be preserved, and their contributions to the sum total of humanity's development need not be lost. There is one agency that is working for their preservation, and so far as I know, only one. That is the enterprise of Foreign Missions, the second of the great forces at work in the Orient today. If we can put into those races the needed character and life, their contact with the West will strengthen and not destroy them. It will indeed develop them as nothing else can. And it can be done. Christ is capable of meaning to them not merely individual regeneration, but racial preservation, reinforcement and development.

In all the affairs of the world today, I know of nothing as magnificent as Christ's ambition for the nations, and no enterprise as splendid as our own, as we try to carry that ambition out. It is not a vision of America or England or Germany dominating the world, and imposing her civilization upon it, but a world made up of all the races, standing together, equal in opportunity and development, each contributing its own peculiar and indispensable addition to the common resources of Humanity; equal in each other's sight and in God's sight—the completed Kingdom of God.