

**ISLAM IN AFRICA; ITS EFFECT
- RELIGIOUS, ETHICAL AND
SOCIAL - UPON THE PEOPLE
OF THE COUNTRY**

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Islam in Africa; its effect - religious, ethical and social - upon the people of the country by
Anson P. Atterbury

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ISLAM IN AFRICA

ITS EFFECTS—RELIGIOUS, ETHICAL, AND
SOCIAL—UPON THE PEOPLE OF
THE COUNTRY

BY

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INTRODUCTION

THE true character of the Oriental religions has never been so widely discussed as at the present time. There have been two extremes in the treatment of these systems, and it is of the very first importance that well considered and candidly presented truth respecting them should be laid before the public. The idea that Islam is wholly an imposture, destitute of all true ethics, wholly opposed through all its history to enlightenment, and breathing only cruelty and destruction, and that it is therefore unworthy of serious study, should be laid aside as not only unjust, but as productive of harm so far as it is untrue and misleading. Partly by way of reaction from this intolerant position, many apologists of the system have gone to an opposite extreme of laudation; and this has been carried to such an extent that it may now be

said to be the fashion to exalt Islam and to claim that it is a sort of preparatory school by which such countries as Africa, for example, may most successfully be brought to an ultimate civilisation.

The work prepared by Rev. Anson P. Atterbury, D.D., Ph.D., on African Mohammedanism, is therefore most timely ; and after a careful perusal I have not hesitated to request its publication. It strikes me as eminently fair in its treatment. It is also thorough, being characterised by a conscientious examination of facts and the authorities by which they are given. The works of Mr. R. Bosworth Smith, Canon Taylor, and Dr. Edward Blyden, on the one hand, and the writings of Livingstone, Stanley, the late Bishop Crowther, Cardinal Lavigerie, and many others on the other, have presented so many contradictions in regard to the influence of Islam upon the northern and central portions of Africa that the public mind is more or less involved in doubt. Is it the part of wisdom to leave Africa for a time at least to the aggressive influence of Mohammedanism, as Canon Taylor has advised, and to trust to its

known hostility to intemperance as the best and most effective barrier against the trade of so-called Christian nations in intoxicating liquors? Shall we allow Mohammedan propagandism along the whole southern border of Eastern and Western Soudan to take the place of Bantu superstitions among the races lying south of them, in the belief that Islam is better than fetichism and the wholesale murder induced by witchcraft? Or shall the Christian world put forth strenuous efforts for those superstitious tribes ere Mohammedanism shall have fixed its stamp of fanaticism and bigotry upon them, rendering it thereafter far more difficult to reach them with civilising agencies?

It is such considerations as these that render the work of Dr. Atterbury timely and important. In his earlier chapters he has given such general attention to the rise and character of Islam and its author as seems necessary in opening the way to the particular questions which he has treated farther on. His estimate and judgment of Mohammed himself will not be considered severe by any candid man. If he errs in any respect it is on the side of charity. His survey

of the African field, the race divisions of its population, the aggressive tendencies of the Mohammedan peoples, and the more or less helpless condition of the tribes which they are invading, is full of instruction. The theatre of the great conflict which seems to lie in the immediate future is well and graphically presented.

The real vital questions, which are ably discussed in the later chapters, are such as these: What is the character of Mohammedan propagandism in Africa? Is it a peaceful missionary work, actuated by a sincere desire of devoted men to raise up superstitious tribes to a knowledge of the one only true God, with corresponding efforts to bring them to a high degree of thrift and a participation in all the blessings of civilisation? Or is it for the most part a remorseless and bloody conquest, either by ambitious adventurers like Samadu in the West, acting under the cloak of religious propagandism, or by the still worse impulse of unscrupulous and cruel slave raiders like Tippu Tip and others on the Congo and throughout Eastern Africa? It seems to me that the facts presented by Dr.

Atterbury are conclusive on this point. He is sustained, not only by the testimony of numerous travellers, as well as of missionaries, but by the current records of the newspaper press as they have come to us from time to time in the last decade.

It is confessed that the arraignment of Western nations for the great evils connected with the wholesale traffic in ardent spirits on the Congo and in the ports of West Africa is just, and difficult to answer, if regard be had to nations and governments as such. But the great difference between the wrongs inflicted by a certain element in this country and in Europe on the one hand, and the high philanthropic and benevolent interest and effort of the Christian Church of every denomination on the other, is one which it seems exceedingly difficult to impress either upon Mohammedans in the East or upon their apologists in the West. There is a vast difference between the liquor traffic on the West Coast and the slave traffic in the East, in the fact that the whole weight of Christian influence lies against the liquor traffic, while the influence of Mohammedanism is on the side of