

THE RELIGIOUS ORDERS OF ISLĀM

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The Religious Orders of Islām by Edward Sell

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EDWARD SELL

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ORDERS OF ISLĀM**

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OF
ISLÁM

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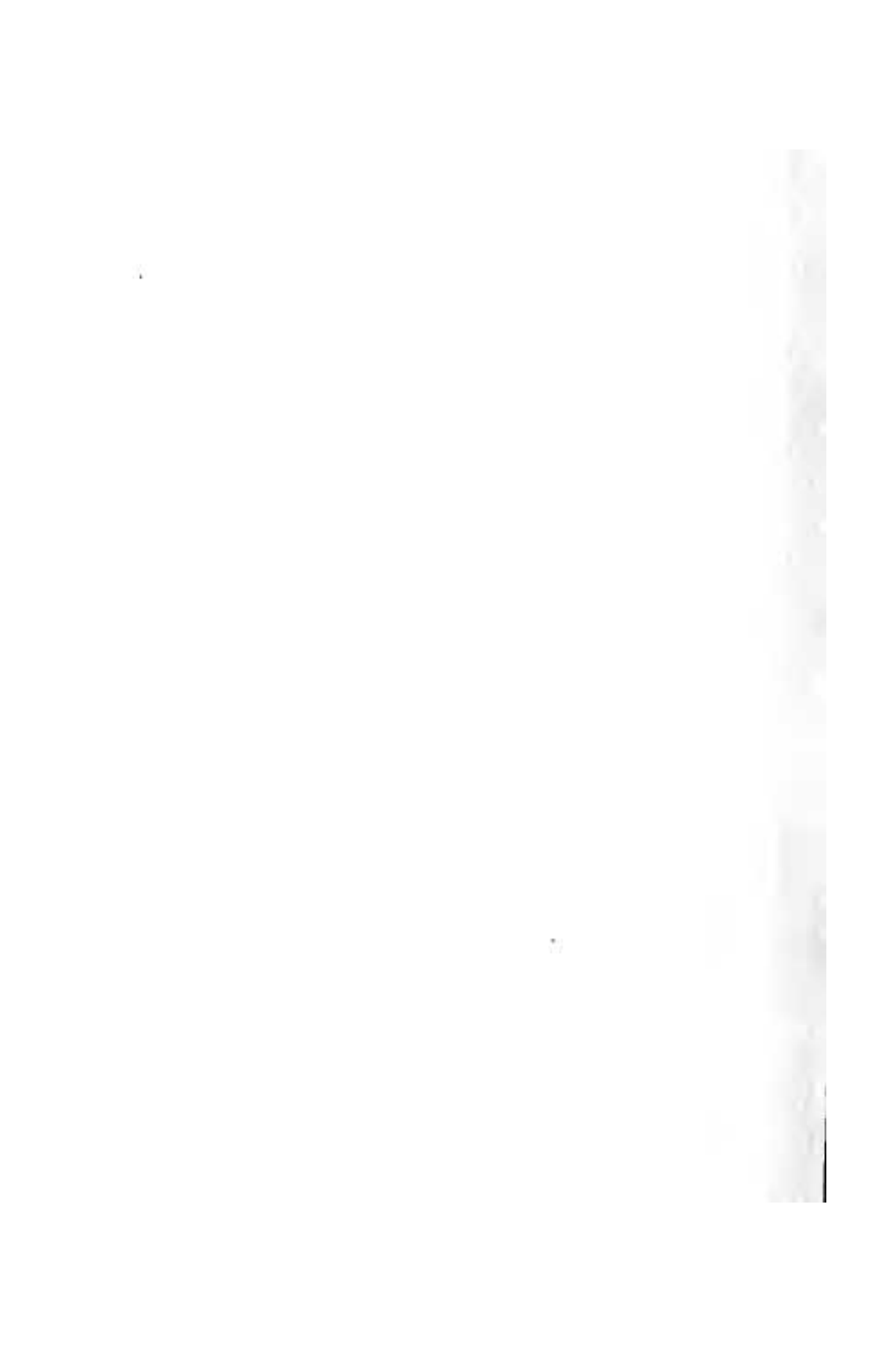
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P R E F A C E

THE main portion of this book formed a chapter in my "Essays on Islam," published in 1901. I have made many additions to it and have added information more recent than any I then possessed. I have published it in this separate form, in order that attention may be more directly drawn to an important movement in Africa. Although increased interest is being taken in African Missions, I doubt whether there is yet any adequate conception of the seriousness of the position, or any true realization of the extreme urgency for immediate action. I trust this simple account of a little-known movement may be a means of developing still more interest in the affairs of all Societies engaged in mission work in Africa.



THE
RELIGIOUS ORDERS
OF ISLAM.

THE two most active elements in Muslim lands in the opposition to social, political, and religious reforms and to the advance of modern civilization are the 'Ulamá, the men who may be said to form the lawyers and the clergy of Islám, and the various Orders of Darweshes. The 'Ulamá speak in the name of the sacred Law, eternal, unchangeable. The Darweshes look upon Islám as a vast theocracy, in which their spiritual leaders are the true guides. It is conceivable that the 'Ulamá might be brought to see that, if some concessions would save a Muslim State from ruin or extinction, it might be to their advantage to make them. The Darwesh treats with scorn any attempt at compromise, and looks upon a Muslim government, which in the least departs from the laws and practices of the early Khalffate, as disloyal to the great principle that Islám is a theocracy.

Its first rulers were neither kings nor princes : they were preachers, Khalīfas, or vice-regents of the Prophet. In the opinion of the Darwesh, as it was then so it should be now. Muslims should be governed by an Imām, who is both a religious and a political leader, whose chief business it is to maintain the laws of Islām intact, to execute justice according to their standard, to guard the frontiers, and to raise armies for the defence of the Faith. He should be so manifestly a ruler that the words of the sacred Tradition would be realized, namely, that "He who dies without recognizing the authority of the Imām of the age, is accounted dead and is an infidel." It is the special function of the great Religious Orders to keep this principle active and to teach the people its vast importance. The most religious of the Muslim people see that the civilization of Europe, now finding its way into Muslim lands, is a very great danger, and they seek to meet and to counteract it by a large development of the Religious Orders. Throughout the East these confraternities, like all which influence the religious life of Islām, are conservative and hostile to modern civilization and European influence. In Africa and in parts of Asia this has resulted in a great pan-Islāmic movement, still actively going on, and having for its object not merely "resistance to the advance of Chris-

tianity; but also opposition to the progress of all modern civilization."¹ Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, this same movement has grown with great rapidity. Under various pretexts, innumerable agents of the Religious Orders have gone throughout the Muslim world. They have adopted many disguises. Sometimes they are students, preachers, doctors; sometimes artisans, beggars, quacks; but they are everywhere received by the people and protected by them when they are suspected by the ruling powers. A French writer, one of the best living authorities on the subject, says that the reform movement in Islam during the nineteenth century has led to a great increase in the Religious Orders. The movement has not depended on the orthodox expounders and authorized keepers of the canon law, but, on the contrary, has relied on the leaders of the mystical sects, such as the Báb, the Mahdí and the great Darwesh leaders. The most active element in Islam is now to be found amongst these Darweshes, and from them has proceeded an active propaganda, especially in Africa. This author sums up a long review of the whole position by saying that "all this constitutes a grave danger to the civilized world."²

¹ Count Castries, "L' Islam," p. 220.

² Chatelier, "Islam au xix. Siécle," p. 187.