

The Islamic Review

Edited by AL-HAJ KHWAJA KAMAL-UD-DIN.

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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ
مُحَمَّدٌ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَلَى سُبُوٰلِ الْكِرَامِ

THE ISLAMIC REVIEW

RAMADĀN, 1343 A.H.

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NOTES

The Berlin Mosque.

In the summer of 1922 Al-Haj Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din visited Germany to see for himself how far the conditions prevailing there would justify an extension of our activities to that country. While in Berlin he came in contact with a great number of prominent and influential persons, and, as a consequence of the visit, Anjuman Isha'at-i-Islam sent Maulvi Abdul Majid as a pioneer of Mission work to Berlin, where, in March, 1923, he was joined by Maulvi Sadr-ud-Din. Though immensely handicapped at the outset by the language difficulty, they were in no way discouraged. In a very short time they became proficient German linguists; and so rapid and so encouraging was the progress made, that it was, shortly after, decided by our organization that a Mosque should be erected in the centre of Berlin; and a piece of ground suitable for the purpose was forthwith acquired. The Mosque is now, to all intents and purposes, complete.

The building, erected from the designs of Herr K. A. Herrmann, was begun on September 13, 1924, and measures 46½ ft. by 46½ ft.; the height of the

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Great Gate being 30 ft. from the ground. The Dome is 75 ft., and the Minarets (yet under construction) 90 ft. high and 100 ft. apart. The Dome itself is 22½ ft. in diameter, and is supported by twelve pillars and twelve massive arches, while the Crescent that crowns it is 11 ft. high. A Hostel has been built for the residence of the Imam, with accommodation for at least four missionaries.

By the Blessing of Allah, resting on the labours of Maulvi Sadr-ud-Din, already twenty-five converts have turned to Islam; while a Review in German, entitled *Moslemische Revue*, is published quarterly, and has achieved noteworthy success.

Another helper, Mr. F. K. Durrani, has recently arrived to assist Maulvi Sadr-ud-Din in his already arduous labours, and we pray that the mercy of Allah may continue with them.

New Workers in the Mission Field.

It is with feelings of humble thankfulness that we welcome two new workers in the Mission Field, in the persons of Abdul Khaliq, and Qadar Dad Khan.

The former is the son of Maulvi Ghulam Hasan, Sub-Registrar of Peshawar, India, a keen and energetic supporter of the Mission from the time of its inception. For some two years his eldest son, Abdullah Jan, was the manager of our *Review*, and it is but a further proof, if such were sought for, of his whole-hearted devotion to the cause which he has so long held dear, that his youngest son is devoting thereto five years of his life, years which might very easily, from the worldly point of view, be more profitably employed elsewhere.

The latter, the nephew of Al-Haj Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, is devoting his whole life to the cause.

Such spontaneous assistance, besides being of itself of enormous encouragement to us in our uphill struggle, serves also to emphasize the all-important

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fact that Islam has never owed anything to the professional missionary, but has been spread solely and entirely by the personal influence, the personal self-sacrifice, the personal example of laymen. We pray that the Blessing of Allah may be upon them, that their labours may bear fruit an hundredfold, and that, fired by their spirit of self-abnegation, others may soon be found to step forward into the field, where, indeed, the harvest is plenteous and abundant, but the labourers are few.

His Holiness Sayyed Abu Muhammad Tahir Saif-ud-Din.

His Holiness Sayyed Abu Muhammad Tahir Saif-ud-Din, the first Sirdar of Deccan, by whose generosity and zeal for Islam, Abdul Khaliq has been enabled to devote himself to the work of the Woking Mission, is the spiritual head of the Bowahirs (generally called Bohras), a deeply respected and highly influential community in Islam, which, with the Mamons and certain other classes, may be said to dominate and control the whole field of Indian commerce.

Though scattered over the world's face in far-off lands, they yet remain one community, firmly united under one religious leader. Well regulated and organized on the admirable system of the Fatimide days in Egypt, it is a society whereof no member lives on charity, or has felt the pinch of unemployment.

Of the various divinely ordained institutions whereby Islam proves herself daily the best of blessings to mankind, that of almsgiving, the annual contribution of $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. of the earnings of each individual for the aid of the indigent, is amongst the most distinctive. But the charitable Bowahirs, not content with this modest rate, contribute in addition a sum equal to one-tenth part of the total amount collected, exercising at the same time that scrupulous care and supervision which in former days it was the duty and the privilege of the Muslim kings to exercise, to

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ensure that the money so contributed shall go only to those that deserve it.

The change of conditions wrought by foreign rule has tended greatly to impair the efficacy of the institution of almsgiving. The Bowahirs, however, have stood four-square against the blasts of indifference and neglect, and find their recompense in an ever-increasing prosperity. Renowned throughout the Muslim world for his sanctity, His Holiness is, moreover, a gentleman of wide culture and profound learning. Erudite in every phase of intellectual activity, no less than in Theology, he yet brings a keen practical insight and a thorough grasp of realities to his selfless administration of the communal affairs. It is an admirable example of the essential unity of Islam, and serves to emphasize yet more cogently the vivid contrast with the hundred and one warring sects of Christendom, that the Working Muslim Mission should count among its zealous supporters Sunnis, Shias, Ahl-i-Hadis, Ahmadis, Bowahirs, Khojas, and every other school of thought in Islam.

What Christian Mission could make a like boast, when a Christian of one sect is, in the eyes of a Christian of another sect, clean outside the pale of Christianity? Verily Christianity has waded knee-deep in the blood of her own children, because one Christian can never be trusted to see eye to eye with another, even on fundamental points.

Islam, Usury and Interest.

We print elsewhere, *in extenso*, a letter from Al-Haj Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar commenting on our Note which appeared under the above heading in the January issue of the *Islamic Review*. In taking exception to our interpretation of the point of view expressed in his very able article, Mr. Sarwar adopts an attitude which it is not quite easy to understand. To epitomize his contention in the words "we are justified in accepting interest, provided always that

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we do not lose sight of the fact that our action is unlawful " may be " an unfortunate way " of putting his point, but we do not think it is an unjust one.

The passage in his article to which he refers as alone capable of affording any pretext for the view we have taken, is sufficiently striking, and may, we think, be profitably quoted at length.

We are living in an age in which usury is common, and, do and declare what we will, we are nearly all of us tainted with it. It is a sin, but Muslims must trade, and Muslims must not fall back. They are already far too backward. If Turkey has natural resources which she cannot develop out of her revenues, and if she cannot obtain money without paying interest to develop those resources, then her only course is to borrow at interest. *This does not mean that the transaction thereby becomes lawful.* It only means, as the Holy Qur-án says: "But whoever is driven to necessity, not desiring, nor exceeding the limit, no sin shall be upon him." Unless Muslims want to become extinct and leave the earth to others, they must trade; and trade nowadays usually means both the taking and paying of interest. Let each man be his own judge.

Mr. Sarwar complains that it is hardly fair to pick out one sentence out of sixteen pages and make nonsense of the whole subject, the one sentence in question being the words italicized above. Surely the blame, if any there be, rests with the presence of the offending words rather than with the construction placed upon them, if indeed their influence is such as "to make nonsense of the whole subject." For our part we fail to see that they have any such effect, or are in any way inconsistent with the course advocated on page 16. It may be that such courses are the only weapons left to us in our struggle against modern conditions, and if that be the case, and we are honestly convinced that it is no sin for us to use them, let us say so boldly. That we took to be Mr. Sarwar's attitude. Apparently we were wrong; and for our misapprehension we are sorry; but we are still unable to find, on reperusal of the article, that any other conclusion was open to us.

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In asking if it be not "the first duty of a man to sacrifice everything for a principle," we used that word (as, we think, might have been sufficiently evident from the context) as signifying one of those "decisive"—as opposed to "allegorical"—commandments of the Holy Qur-án on which are based all the Principles of Islam. The exceptions cited by Mr. Sarwar in connection with the Five Pillars, are each, also, the subject of a "decisive" commandment, having reference always to matters *not* of everyday occurrence, and therefore to be regarded less as exceptions to, than as completions of, the "decisive" commandment.

Riba is likewise the subject of a "decisive commandment," but here the Holy Qur-án makes no exception; and the taking of interest cannot be regarded as a matter *not* of everyday occurrence, seeing that, as Mr. Sarwar himself admits, "do and declare what we will, we are nearly all of us tainted with it."

If "interest" be one with "usury," the fact that it plays so essential a part in the scheme of modern civilization will not save it. If it is the subject of a "decisive commandment," it must go. We have, however, all along maintained that it is nothing of the kind; and in so maintaining we are actuated, not by any desire to drag Muslims to the level of Jews or any other extortionate community, but to help them to face the complexities of the position squarely; and to find a way out, without quibble or evasion, in strict accord with the teaching of the Holy Qur-án.

The Month of Ramadan.

The month of Ramadan begins this year on March 27th. In order to lighten the labours of our staff, who will be keeping the Fast, the next issue of the *Islamic Review* will be a double number for the months of April and May. It is, perhaps, permissible

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to remind our readers, especially those among them who have but recently turned to our beloved Faith, that in the words of the Holy Qur-án, "the month of Ramadan is that in which the Qur-án was revealed, a guidance to men and clear proof of the guidance and the distinction." And again, the Book says:—

Therefore whoever of you is present in the month, he shall fast therein, and whoever is sick or upon a journey, then (he shall fast) a like number of other days; Allah desires ease for you, and He does not desire for you difficulty, and (He desires) that you should complete the number and that you should exalt the greatness of Allah for His having guided you, and that you may give thanks.¹

The Month of Fasting was thus divinely instituted to the end that man might learn to curb the natural appetites and desires of the flesh, might, in short, learn the discipline of how to "do without," and at the same time to estimate at their real value the manifold blessings of every day which Allah has, in His Mercy, bestowed on him. The order is definite and clear, yet exception is made in favour of those sick or on a journey, while the Divine Message, "Allah desires ease for you, He does not desire for you difficulty," indicates that the Fast is not to be made an instrument of self-torture or mortification, as is the Christian way. We keep the Fast in Ramadan, not to "acquire merit" for ourselves by paying a sort of spiritual insurance premium against Hell-fire (as if such could ever weigh with the Almighty), but, at Allah's command, to exalt His greatness and to equip ourselves the better for the right performance of those duties which His Mercy has laid upon us on earth.

¹ The Holy Qur-án, ii. 185.

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THE ESOTERIC ASPECT OF ISLAM

By KHWAJA SALAH-UD-DIN AHMAD

He it is Who has revealed the Book to you ; and some of the verses are decisive, and they are the basis of the Book, and others are allegorical. . . .—THE HOLY QUR-ÁN, iii. 6.

ALL Prophets of God and spiritual teachers have avoided a direct exposition of spiritual themes. Just as the human eye, naked and unprotected, shrinks from gazing on the glare of the sun, even in eclipse, nor will venture even to obtain a view of the penumbra, save through the protecting medium of coloured glass—as is the sun, unveiled, to the human eye, so are direct facts, and Eternal Truth, bewildering and confusing, and consequently misleading, to the ordinary man. It is for this reason, therefore, that the esoteric writers of Islam have, all along, clothed realities in a multicoloured garb of allegory, so that those eyes only that have the faculty of seeing and understanding, may see and understand the real truth.

All prophets of yore spoke in parables for the same reason. Christ was no exception : people of ordinary intellect, not realizing the drift of arguments, are apt to go astray ; for it requires a certain amount of leavening in one's temperament to grasp the real significance of facts. Culture alone is not sufficient. Take, for example, the miracles of Christ. The West accepts these literally.

In the Holy Qur-án itself the verses are of two kinds, decisive commands which are positive and negative, and such verses as are allegorical, as, for example, stories of the prophets, verses dealing with the Essence and Attributes of God, the Mysteries of Prophethood, and so forth.

It is for this reason that all the Prophets of God, and all great Muslim teachers, have hit upon ceremonial as the basis on which training depends. The

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word *Shari'at*, which stands for ceremonialism or ritualism, is derived from *Sharé*, the beaten-out path in the desert which leads to an oasis. Thus *Shari'at* consists of the esoteric laws which lead to the goal of life where the water of life is to be found. Thus, the real truth, the esoteric laws, lie enveloped in *Shari'at* or exoteric laws. To cut through the shell and to get at the kernel of truth is a laborious task and one full of risk. To those who desire to achieve the goal, after mastering *Shari'at*, so that it becomes part and parcel of their life, Maulana Jalal-ud-Din Rumi says :—

If thou wouldst be acquainted with the inner meaning, drop the letter and adopt the spirit.

The *Masnawi* of Maulana Rumi is full of stories wherein morals are deeply hidden. Here is one which he takes from the Holy Qur-án :—

And when Moses said to his servant : I will not cease until I reach the junction of the two rivers or I will go on for years. So when they had reached the junction of the two (rivers), they forgot their fish, and it took its way into the sea, going away. But when they had gone farther, he said to his servant : Bring to us our morning meal, certainly we have met with fatigue from this our journey. He said : *Did you* see when we took refuge on the rock, then I forgot the fish, and nothing made me forget to speak of it but the devil, and it took its way into the river ; what a wonder ! He said : This is what we sought for ; so they returned retracing their footsteps. Then they found one from among Our servants whom We had granted mercy from Us and whom We had taught knowledge from Ourselves. Moses said to him : Shall I follow *you* on condition that *you should* teach me right knowledge of what *you have* been taught ? He said : Surely *you can* not have patience with me : And how *can you* have patience in that of which *you have* not got a comprehensive knowledge ? He said : If Allah please, *you will* find me patient and I shall not disobey *you* in any matter. He said : If *you would* follow me, then do not question me about any thing until I speak to *you* about it.

So they went (their way) until when they embarked in the boat he made a hole in it. (Moses) said : *Have you* made a hole in it to drown its inmates ? certainly *you have* done a grievous thing. He said : Did I not say that *you will* not be able to have patience with me ? He said : Blame me not for what I forgot,

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and do not constrain me to a difficult thing in my affair. So they went on until, when they met a boy, he slew him. (Moses) said : *Have you slain an innocent person otherwise than for manslaughter ? certainly you have done an evil thing.*

He said : Did I not say to *you* that *you will* not be able to have patience with me ? He said : If I ask *you* about anything after this, keep me not in *your* company ; indeed *you shall* have (then) found an excuse in my case. So they went on until when they came to the people of a town, they asked *them* for food, but they refused to entertain them as guests. Then they found in it a wall which *was on the point of* falling, so he put it into a right state. (Moses) said : If *you had* pleased, *you might* certainly have taken a recompense for it. He said : This shall be separation between me and *you* ; now I will inform *you* of the significance of that with which *you could* not have patience. As for the boat, it belonged to (some) poor men who worked on the river and I wished that I should damage it, and there was behind them a king who seized every boat by force. And as for the boy, his parents were believers and we feared lest he should make disobedience and ingratitude to come upon them : So we desired that their Lord might give them in his place one better than him in purity and nearer to having compassion : And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and there was beneath it a treasure belonging to them, and their father was a righteous man ; so *your* Lord desired that they should attain their maturity and take out their treasure, a mercy from *your* Lord, and I did not do it of my own accord. This is the significance of that with which you could not have patience.¹

The interpretation of the three incidents shows a manifestation of Divine Wisdom in what takes place in the everyday life of man. The Divine Laws, as manifested in Nature, are really working towards ultimate good ; though sometimes they may appear to the outward eye to be working to the detriment of others. The Almighty, out of His Beneficence, is always directing humanity to the goal of great good, though it must entail some apparent loss. Sometimes the loss is only apparent, as in the case of making a hole in the boat ; there was no real loss, but the apparent loss served a great purpose and brought benefit to the owner. Thus we reach the Islamic ideal of morality, to wit, a lesser evil is to be preferred to a greater evil ; or, if the resulting

¹ The Holy Qur-án, xviii. 60-82.

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benefit of a certain act is more than the entailed evil, the act should be done.

In the second instance, the loss is real; but it is for the good of humanity at large; for life must be sacrificed for the ultimate good of humanity. Thus, to fight against and kill a tyrant ruler would be a virtuous act, just as fighting and dying in defence of religious liberty would be meritorious conduct. The third instance shows that for the good of humanity deeds must be done which bring no immediate reward, and that good done by one generation is not devoid of benefit to the next.

The incidents are no more than prophetic allegories of Moses' own life, for he himself had, in fact, to undergo the experience of his spiritual guide. Just as the scuttling of a boat would endanger the safety of its occupants, so for Moses to lead his people to places where they thought they had only been brought to drown had every appearance of courting certain destruction; but their safe passage through the water showed that it was for their good. Then he had to order his men to fight against iniquitous people and to put them to death; but he was not shedding human blood uselessly, for it was really a step towards the evolution of a better race; and, finally, his laying down his own life for the Israelites—descendants of a righteous man—corresponds to his spiritual guide's building the wall for the orphans without claiming recompense. Read in this light, the narrative is clearly an ascension of Moses, foreshadowing the great events which were to befall him.

If we consider the story from an esoteric point of view, we find that Moses met his spiritual guide at the junction of the two rivers of Love and Humanity—the Unmanifest and the Manifest, Nirguna and Sarguna; or Esotericism and Exotericism. They cross the first river in a boat of Spiritual training, which in order to be saved from the usurping Satan is bored through with a hole of Love, and thus

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Humanity passes over to Spirituality. The spiritual guide then kills the carnal self, without which the progress would have been impaired, and by this means the real self is brought to the fore. Crossing the next river the spiritual guide reaches the wall of *Shari'at* under which lie the treasure of Prophet-hood and Sainthood, i.e. *Shari'at* protects spiritual treasures.

Here is another story from the same author: A king was travelling in a ship with his slave. The slave had never been on the sea before and, in consequence, began to tremble and wail. One of the king's retinue, a physician, volunteered to calm the slave. He threw him, therefore, into the sea, and after he had dipped him a great number of times, pulled him up again by the hair of his head. The slave then quietly sat in a corner and made no more ado. On being questioned, the physician explained that the slave had not realized the danger of drowning, and was, in consequence, excited; but that when he had actually been through the danger, he realized the safety of being on board the ship.

Similarly, a man cannot hope to understand the esoteric aspect of Islam, until he too is involved in the danger of agnosticism, and is pulled through it by *Shari'at*, i.e. ritualism. The uninitiated is a prey to the ungoverned emotion of his heart; he becomes confused and loses his mental balance. Even when told, he does not accept the truth, and demands to see the actual phenomenon. A perfect guide throws him into the sea of doubt, infidelity and agnosticism, and then pulls him up to the boat of safety of belief. That which he could only have heard and seen with the eyes and ears of spirituality, the uninitiated wants to see at once, through the fatal deceptiveness of human vision. Here is a lesson for the modern Spiritualists of the West. To revert:—

If thou wouldst be acquainted with the inner meanings, drop the latter and adopt the spirit.

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I will confine myself to discussing, very briefly, three of the most important schools of thought of the Sufis. They all have their foundation in a saying of the Holy Prophet :—

God was a hidden treasure. He loved to be known, and created the world to be known.

The first, the *Ijaddiyyah*, are the Creationalists or Transcendentalists. They believe in a God separate from Creation, an extra-cosmic God, Who created the heavens and the earth. Thus, to them, God is the Maker, The Engraver, The Painter, and “from Whom everything is.” They believe that God is One, He exists by His Holy Essence in His Attributes and Works. Nobody takes part in His Actions. His Essence and Knowledge are not like ours, neither are His Hearing, Power, Intention, Speech like ours. There is no resemblance between them except in name. To create is His Special Attribute, for no man can create a thing out of nothing. He is not contained in anything, nor does anything contain Him. He surrounds everything, but His proximity and propinquity are not understood by us.

The second great school, the *Wujuddiyyah*, whose founder, Sheikh Muhiyyuddin-ibn-i-Ali Arbi, was a native of Spain, believe that man comes out of the knowledge of God, gains experience of the world and then returns to his own reality in the knowledge of God; in short, “everything is Him.”

Some people confuse this with Pantheism, but the difference is obvious. Although the One exists, the essence of things is in His Knowledge only. A picture, for example, exists in the knowledge of the painter, and, therefore, the picture is the painter. But when the knowledge has been transferred to the canvas and the picture is made, the picture is no longer the painter. In the same way, the world was not created casually, but actually did exist in the knowledge of God before creation.

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The third great school, the *Shuhudiyyah*, was founded by Sheikh Abdul Karim-i-Jili, the renowned author of *Al Insan-ul-Kamil*. They believe that Essence alone is in evidence, and that the Attributes are always hidden. One may have the cognizance of benevolence, but it is always hidden in the benevolent one, who alone is manifest. They believe that not only did God create man out of nothingness, but that forms also came out of nothingness. Thus, wax is moulded into forms, but the forms themselves came out of nothingness.

Further, they say, when attributes become manifest, they receive names, which like mirrors only reveal certain secrets of the Divine Being. The names are likened to mirrors, for yet another reason. God created the world out of nothingness. The Divine Attributes become manifest by contrast with the attributes of nothingness, which has no-sight, no-hearing, no-providence, no-good, etc. The powers of Speech, Sight, Hearing, Goodness belong to God, and become manifest by contrast with each of them in nothingness. By "nothingness" here, I mean Man.

The Essence of God becomes the essence of the man in manifestation. The essence of man is bounded by the Attributes and Names of God, whereas *Tawhid*—The Unity—consists in merely dropping off the limitations.

This school of thought finds support in the following verses of the Holy Qur-án:—

And Allah is in the East and in the West, therefore whithersoever dost thou turn, there also is Allah.¹

And certainly He created man, and we know what his mind suggests to him, and We are nearer to him than his life-vein.²

He is the First and the Last and the Ascendant (over all) and the Knower of hidden things, and He is cognizant of all things.³

He it is Who created the heavens and the earth. He is with you wherever you go, and Allah sees what you do.⁴

¹ The Holy Qur-án, ii. 115.

² lvii. 3.

³ l. 16.

⁴ lvii. 4.

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The following saying of the Holy Prophet Muhammad points to the same truth :—

Man is God's secret and God, his.

Man is the manifestation of God's Attributes. God sees man in the mirror of His Own Names and Attributes. Thus, when the Holy Prophet threw a handful of dust at the army of the enemy at the battle of Ohod, "it was not," says the Holy Qur-án, "you (O prophet) who threw it, but God Himself." ¹ Again, in another place it says that "the hand of God is on thy hand." ²

In this stage of spiritual attainment, God is the doer—it is God Who acts; man is but His instrument. Sometimes, however, the position is reversed, and God would seem to be the instrument and man His actor. In this case, God is hidden in man, and man is manifest. Thus the "created" sees, hears and touches by the Sight, Hearing and Touch of God. This appears to be an interpretation of the saying of the Holy Prophet. "Man is God's secret, and God, his," or in other words, man is a manifestation of God's Names. God sees man and man beholds himself in the mirrors of the Names and Attributes of God. "Let it be known," says Sheikh Abdul Karim-i-Jili in his *Al Insan-ul-Kamil*, "that God has many and innumerable worlds, upon whichever of these He looks through man, it is known as *Shahadat-i-Wujudiiyah*—the evidence of existence—and upon whichever He looks without the instrumentality of man, it is called the Unseen. Of the latter order of existence is the Angelic World, which exists in the knowledge of man, like his cognizance of angels; and the other is the abstract unseen world of which man has no knowledge. God alone has cognizance of this.

Since the unseen world governs and controls the

¹ The Holy Qur-án, viii. 17.

² xlvi. 10.

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visible, further and indeed unlimited knowledge is implied as being possessed by God, over and above that which He possesses through the instrumentality of man ; although as far as the seen world is concerned, God's knowledge of it may be only co-extensive with the knowledge of man himself. Thus Maulana Jalal-ud-Din Rumi, in his *Masnavi*, says :—

The knowledge of God becomes hidden in the Sufi's knowledge. How can this statement find credence with the common people ?

Thus the knowledge of man is in reality God's Knowledge in limitation. When man's knowledge is apparent, God's Knowledge is hidden. Just as when ice, which is water in limitation, is apparent, water, itself, is not.

The other four schools, as far as we are concerned, are of little importance. First, those that hold that God is *Thought*, believing that He is now just as He was from the birth of Time. Thought makes no change in individuality, for it remains unchanged and in essence is unchangeable. The followers of the school of *Will* hold that God is manifest through the Power of His Knowledge ; for without Will there can be no forms manifest. The followers of the *Love* system hold that the Universe is a mirror in which God sees Himself, and hence the universe is a manifestation of His Beauty and Love. The followers of the fourth school of *Light* find their support in a verse of the Holy Qur-án :—

Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth ; a likeness of His light is as a *pillar on* which is a lamp, the lamp is in a glass, (and) the glass is as it were a brightly shining star, lit from a blessed olive-tree, neither eastern nor western, the oil whereof almost gives light though fire touch it not—light upon light—Allah guides to His light whom He pleases, and Allah sets forth parables for men, and Allah is cognizant of all things.¹

¹ The Holy Qur-án, xxiv. 35.

THE CONCEPTION OF GOD IN ISLAM

THE CONCEPTION OF GOD IN ISLAM

By M. T. AKBAR

ISLAM is invariably taken in the West as synonymous with polygamy, freedom of divorce, a paradise full of *houris*, the degradation of women, and many other institutions which blemish human life; in fact, the religion is supposed to be so hopeless that a diligent and faithful inquiry into what it exactly stands for is assumed to be not worth the trouble. Many Muslim writers—and even non-Muslim writers—have written exhaustively with the idea of correcting these misconceptions; so that it is not necessary for me to cover the same ground.

Let me, therefore, endeavour, within the short compass of this article, to set forth what the Islamic conception of God or Allah is. The true conception of Allah in Islam in its full significance is best indicated (of all Muslim writers) in a poem which is well known to English readers; I refer to Omar Khayyám's *Rubáiyát*. The different estimates of this poem by English readers have been a source of wonder and merriment to Muslims all the world over. He is regarded as a poet who deified materialism in its basest form, who extolled and glorified woman, wine and song. But this Omar Khayyám never did. To him woman stands as a symbol for Alláh, and wine for *Ishk*, the love of God; and song for that outburst of lyrical ecstasy which the true love of God creates in the breast of man. Let me quote two verses, and leave the theorists of the materialistic school to reflect:—

One moment in Annihilation's waste,
One moment, of the Well of Life to taste—
The stars are setting and the caravan
Starts for the Dawn of *Nothing*—Oh, make haste!

For in and out, above, about, below,
'Tis nothing but a magic shadow-show,
Play'd in a box whose candle is the Sun,
Round which we Phantom Figures come and go.

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Omar Khayyám—"old Omar," as some English writers, who have mistaken this unfortunate poet for a sly old rogue, affectionately call him—is here playing on the meaning of the one sentence which sums up the whole religion of Islam—*La Ilaha Ilallahu*—i.e. Nothing is a fit subject for adoration save Allah. Now the Arabic word *La* means *nothing*. The very word *allahu* contains this mystic word *La*, and may be split up into *al* meaning *the*, *la* meaning *nothing*, and *hu* meaning *He*; so that the word *allahu*, when so split up, means *the nothing is He*. That is to say, the highest effort of man to conceive God can never attain to that true conception of the Almighty Creator which the word *Allah* connotes; it only ends in the *dawn of nothing*.

Or in other words, any conception of God by mortal man can only end in the conception of what is known in Arabic as *Makhluk*; that is to say, of what is created, and not of the *Khalik*, the Creator. Such "solitary thinkings" only dodge

Conception to the very bourne of heaven,
Then leave the naked brain.

In the words of the Holy Qur-án :—

Vision comprehends Him not, but He comprehends all vision; and He is the Knower of all subtilities, the Aware (chapter vi).

Nothing is like a likeness to Him, and He is the Hearing, the Seeing (chapter xlii).

Meaning, as Maulvi Muhammad Ali aptly says in his Translation of the Holy Qur-án: "He is not only above all material limitations, but even above *the limitation of metaphor*."

So sublime and transcendent is the Muslim conception of God, that even the phrase *Allahu Akbar*, which occurs in the five daily calls to prayer, and which is wrongly translated *God is Great*, really means that God is greater than anything that man can conceive of, for the word *Akbar* is used here in the comparative sense.

But the religion of Islam, which is such a noble

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inspiration to many millions of God's creatures, does not end in a mere negation. This "nothing" is not a dead thing. On the contrary, it is *Al Hayy, Al Qayyum, the Living, the Self-Subsisting*, through which everything exists, which, in fact, is the only One that exists. It is the "Sun" of Omar Khayyám—the old reprobate with the amorous leer on his face, and the merry twinkle in his eyes, quaffing goblets of wine:—

'Tis nothing but a magic shadow-show
Play'd in a box whose candle is the Sun,
Round which we Phantom Figures come and go.

In the chapter *An-Noor*, the Light, in the Holy Qur-án, there is a description of this Sun which is the "nothing" of Islam. It is impossible to reproduce in a cold and lifeless translation the true magnificence and sublimity of the language and rhythm of the original Arabic, but it is a passage which brings tears to the eyes of millions of Muslim men and women, as they read this passage, *Havfan Va Thamman*, in "fear and hope," as the Holy Qur-án says (chapter vii, verse 56), and as they bless God day and night for His great mercy in giving them the consolation of this Divine Book.

The translation from Maulvi Muhammad Ali's Qur-án is as follows:—

God is the light of the heavens and earth; a likeness of this light is as a niche in which is a lamp, the lamp is in a crystal, and the crystal is as it were a brightly shining star, lit from a blessed olive-tree, neither Eastern nor Western, the oil whereof almost gives light though fire touch it not—light upon light—God guides to His light whom He pleases and God sets forth parables for men and God is cognizant of all things.

The niche in this passage is a reference to the true human heart, and the blessed olive from which that light is lit, stands here as a symbol for the religion of Islam—which means the religion of peace—peace with God and peace with man—just as the fig stands for a symbol of Judaism. This blessed oil—this Islam—belongs neither to the East nor the West; in Islam all men and women are equal.

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For a conception of this light upon light—*Noorun Alah Noor*—the Holy Qur-án contains many passages and hints. In fact, the Holy Book for the greater part of it consists of hints for the hearing of

The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue.

All Muslims—men and women—when reading their Holy Book, which is to them so holy that they will not touch the Book unless they are thoroughly clean both in body and mind, always feel with Wordsworth—

A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man ;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

Now the *La*, which is so significant in Islam, has another meaning. Islam, as I have said, means in its primary sense the making of peace ; that is to say, peace with God and peace with His creatures. In Islam this peace with God implies a continual remembrance of God and a complete submission to His Will, Who is the source of all purity and goodness ; and peace with His creatures implies the doing of good to his fellow-creatures.

In chapter ii, verse 112—and here again it is impossible to reproduce the true beauty of the original—we find this verse :—

Yea ! Whoever submits himself entirely to God, and he is the doer of good to others, he has his reward from his Lord ; and there is no fear for him, nor shall he grieve.

It is this *Dhikr Allah*—this communion with God every minute of one's life—that is always insisted on in the Holy Qur-án.

(To be continued.)

“ THE SOURCES OF CHRISTIANITY ”

“ THE SOURCES OF CHRISTIANITY ”

A RECENT work on *The Sources of Christianity*, by Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, of the Mosque, Woking, England, is full of information and inspiration for all students of Religion. The learned Khwaja has rendered a lasting service to Islam. To many who had looked to Christianity as the highest revelation, and to Christ as the ideal of Godhead and humanity, it will be a severe shock to learn that all the ceremonials, the Atonement, the Eucharist and the Cross, on which the religion of Christ rests, existed long before the Gospels spread their supposed new teachings. To us the result of this masterly research of the Khwaja is clear. Christian priests cannot say that Christianity is a revealed religion, and that the Christ is the Saviour of mankind. To do so will give the priority to all the ancient cults of mankind. No one will be justified in calling the Mithraic cult Pagan, for all that Mithraism teaches is identically the same as Christianity does. And Mithraism being older than Christianity, the conclusion is that the latter is the offspring of the former. We quote from *The Sources of Christianity* :—

“ Mithraism came from Persia, where it seems to have been flourishing for about six hundred years, the cult reaching Rome about 70 B.C. It spread through the Empire and extended to Great Britain. Remains of Mithraic monuments have been discovered at York, Chester and other places. Mithra was believed to be a great *Mediator between God and man*. His birth took place in a cave on December 25th. He was born of a virgin. He travelled far and wide ; he had twelve disciples ; he died in the service of humanity. He was buried, but rose again from the tomb. His resurrection was celebrated with great rejoicing. His great festivals were the Winter Solstice and the Vernal Equinox—Christmas and Easter. He was called Saviour, and some-

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times figured as a Lamb. People were initiated into his cult through Baptism. *Sacramental feasts* were held in his remembrance."

After reading the above, the reader can imagine the origin, the growth and spread of Christianity. And the reader may also take notice that Mithraism spread into the Roman Empire about seventy years before Christ.

No one need think that the Mithraic cult was known to the Persians only. It was a universal cult in the East, and was known to all nations of antiquity by different names. The Greeks knew it as the cult of Dionysus or of Apollo; the Romans as that of Hercules; the Syrians called it after Adonis and Altis; the Egyptians knew it as Osiris, Isis and Horus; it was the Baal and Astarte of the Babylonians and Carthaginians.

These striking resemblances are not confined to the East. When Cortes, the first Spaniard to penetrate Mexico, went to the New World, he found that the same legends and ceremonials existed there. This similarity has aroused the wonderment of many a Western writer. What is this strange Mithraic cult? Why did all the nations of antiquity worship it? Says the Khwaja:—

"The reason is obvious. The sun presents the same phenomena everywhere in the Northern Hemisphere; its phases are the same, and occur on the same date in each country. Its rise and decline create the same effect; its appearance, its weakness, and its strength, must lead to the same phenomena and inspire the human imagination with the same ideas. Hence religions were the same everywhere. At the appearance of Jesus, there were temples without end dedicated to the Sun-god."

To what shall we attribute the resemblance of Christianity to these cults of the ancient worlds? Decidedly Christianity cannot claim to be an original religion.

The early Christians knew this resemblance, and they attributed it to the work of the Devil! So

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the Devil knew Christianity hundreds of years before its actual appearance. The Devil is omniscient.

The writers of the Gospel-story of Jesus were influenced by the cult of the sun-worshippers. For instance, do not the following sayings prove that they have been copied from the sun-scriptures? “ He was a burning and a shining light ; and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in that light ” ; “ I am the light of the world ” ; “ I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day ; the night cometh when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world ” ; “ Yet a little while is the light with you : walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you. While ye have the light, believe in the light.”

The Christians may say that the language is metaphorical, and that Jesus is not the real Sun but the Sun of Righteousness. To prove that this is absurd, the Khwaja quotes another saying of Jesus which admits of no such explanation : “ And no man hath ascended up to heaven, save the Son of man, who is in heaven.” Now this is clearly not the word of Jesus. How could he have uttered this when he, as a Jew, knew that at least two men, Enoch and Elijah, had ascended into heaven? Jesus at the time of this utterance was not in heaven ; he was on the earth. People living in the Northern Hemisphere know that this statement applies perfectly to the Sun-god, who comes down from heaven at his birth, and goes up again into heaven, and yet remains all the time in heaven. How aptly does the statement befit the Sun-god. We quote it again : “ And no man hath ascended up to heaven, save the *Son of man*, who is in heaven.” The writer of the Gospel-story evidently had the sky-scripture before him at the time of writing his gospel, and deliberately changed the word *Sun* into *Son of man*.

The reverence for the *Cross* has been borrowed from the Sun-worshippers. The Vernal Equinox

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occurs at a time when the sun in his ecliptic revolution, as it passes the Equator, makes the shape of a cross. It has also been ascertained that owing to the precession of the Equinoxes, the crossing point of the ecliptic was different from what it is now.

Before the introduction of the Cross, the Fish was a Christian symbol of the faithful. This fish represented Jesus, and the early tomb inscriptions of mediæval days bore the Fish and not the Cross. The Gospels cannot explain the why and how of the Fish symbol, excepting that Jesus ate fish. But the Sun-scripture can. The sun passes the Zodiacal sign Pisces—the Fish—in February, Christ, as a sun-god, must be symbolized by the Fish !

Another proof that Christianity laid its foundation on sun-worship, is the tonsure of the Monks. The single life of Jesus might encourage monasticism, but not the shaving of the crown of the head. Even St. Paul is silent about it. Sun-worship can alone explain it. Mithraism had its monks and nuns, as Tertullian admits, with the tonsure in honour of the *disc of the Sun*. To be shorn of hair is, doubtless, a sign of asceticism ; but it is the form of the tonsure—the round bare place on the head of the Romish priests and monks, formed by shaving the hair, that bears a resemblance to the disc of the Sun.

The origin of the idea of the *Good Shepherd* is to be found in the older cults. Good shepherd, according to the Church, means beautiful shepherd. The Greek word for the “ good ” in the English translation does not mean good, but beautiful, and it is certain that Apollo, the beautiful, was also called shepherd long before the Christian God.

The idea of Atonement is foreign to the precepts of Jesus as contained in the Gospels, if they are to be relied on. He defined his God thus : “ Our Father in Heaven, Who always forgives our debts as we forgive our debtors.” The inference is obvious. God is Merciful. He forgives our sins. Then is the

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Atonement theory correct? Its source must be somewhere else.

We have culled only a few of the most interesting proofs given in this book that Christianity is a Pagan cult. We refer the curious reader to the book itself, which ought to be read by all those who are interested in the religion of Christianity. We hear that it has had a very liberal reception by the Indian Christians, who have been awakened to the desirable result that Christianity is not a new idea; and we are informed that many Indian Christians are deserting the religion of the Gospels.

S. QUDRAT SHAH.

THE RELIGION OF NATURE

By SYED MAQBOOL AHMED, B.A.

THERE are certain natural instincts common to all living things—as, for example, the instinct of self-preservation (the desire to live, the fear of death), the love of parents for their progeny, and mutual affection between male and female—which lead us to the conclusion that Nature, or the Great Wisdom Whom we call God, has implanted this feeling in us so that we may live and multiply, rather than strive for mutual destruction. To regulate these natural instincts, rules and regulations were necessary to save men acting thereon from total extinction. That is the definition of religion. Mere natural instincts cannot achieve the desired result, as each man knows by his own experience. For example, the cohabiting of male and female is a natural instinct, but it was necessary to regulate it; to make distinction between discriminate and indiscriminate cohabiting—that called marriage, which is not sin, and that called adultery, which is sin. Why is the one lawful and the other unlawful? For the very simple reason that the responsibility, in the latter case, for bringing up a child, would not be likely to

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be shared by the father ; and the poor mother, unhelped, cannot adequately nourish the child. Thus cohabiting which adversely affects the species is unlawful or, in other words, adultery ; polyandry will therefore be adultery, but not so polygamy ; for the former retards the progress of birth, while the other accelerates it, and nature desires for us the second of these objects. Polygamy, in a limited sense, according to a man's means, should not, and cannot, be disallowed by the Religion of Nature.

So it will be seen that religion did not come to man as his natural instinct ; it was taught to him by initiated men from God, whom we call prophets. Before the advent of these inspired persons whom God has caused to be sent to every clime and race, either as prophet himself, or as the disciple of a prophet, man could not be induced to accept the laws of nature by thinking them out for himself. His natural instinct to fear death, and his constant experience that man dies by some malady which in his simple mind he considers to be an evil spirit, or by some abnormal condition of nature, led him to fear that the evil spirits, or the abnormal conditions of nature, might cause him also to die ; and so he thinks out methods of pleasing them. He has found that abject flattery towards a fellow-being has often been of service in turning away that fellow-being's anger ; and so he begins to worship and flatter these agencies of death. But he finds that, in spite of all this, death is still busy among his fellow-men, that his worship has apparently had no effect ; these agencies are hungry for a life, and no prayer can appease their hunger ; it can, perhaps, only be satiated by giving them what they want. Perhaps they will accept a substitute life for his own. With this idea, he began to make sacrifice, which is the common practice of an untaught and uninitiated religion. He found by his experience that even

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sacrifice did not avail to save his fellow-being ; so he began to think out ways, actively offensive ways, wherewith to drive away these agencies of death. From this idea was evolved the medicine man, who could exorcise, and rid them of, these evil things. We have found such phases of uncultured religion, not only among wild and savage people, but even in the Bible. The development of religion from Moses to Jesus indicates the same development of ideas in primitive man. Moses stands for sacrifice, and Jesus for the medicine man. What true religion ought to be, could never have been evolved unless God-inspired messengers had been sent to teach mankind those things which they did not know, and could never have known of themselves. To live in peace is the fundamental principle of religion, and peace cannot be obtained unless a man is made to believe that there is Someone who watches his actions, and is displeased or pleased according to the nature of those actions, and that, indeed, He will punish them and reward them, and has every power to do so. Unless man were made to believe in God, and the Day of Judgment, there could be no possibility of making him responsible for his actions ; and such belief, moreover, must be explained to him in simple words.

To assure men of the existence of an omnipotent God, the Cherisher, the Sustainer, the Preserver, and of the mystery of death, and to assure them of its exact continuation in a world next to this—that was the first task of the prophet. A very hard task, this ; he had to convince his fellow-men, by the examples of nature, that what he said was true ; and indeed men began to believe him rather reluctantly. “ Surely we were nothing ; or at most a clot of blood,” they said to themselves. “ Who gave us this life ? Not father and mother, no, nor the evil spirit, nor the sun and moon ; for they have all been found helpless and transitory. Well, then, if we are born from nothing, how can we be born again

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after we die? Death indeed is fearful to think of. It deprives us of soft breezes, sunshines, pleasures, charming faces whom we love, sparkling wine which we quaffed and wherewith we made merry; all this to go for ever? It is a dark outlook. O that these pleasures could only return to us a hundred-fold!" And the prophet caught them in this thinking mood. It is better to hope for future life (when it is no impossibility) from One who created us first, than to be thinking that our final end comes after a very brief existence with no hope for the future. And they believed in the future life. Belief in God and the future life paved and smoothed the path for laying down the rules of life. The first was faith, and the second was religion.

Peace was the purpose of these regulations. They were called the regulations of peace, or, in other words, the religion of Islam. To withhold man from creating disturbance, and hindering God's great purpose, clear rules of conduct had to be given: not to steal, not to covet, not to murder, not to hate; these direct commands of doing or not doing a thing on the occasion, may be overlooked by man; like a child, he is very likely to care little about not doing that which he is forbidden to do; nay, he might even do exactly the reverse of what he has been taught. There must be other preventive measures, by which he should be compelled to practise throughout his life certain rules which tend automatically to make him do good deeds and shun evil deeds. A man is responsible to his Creator and Lord. His Lord has rights over him. He must be served first. A man is next responsible to his fellow-being. He must be served next. A man is next responsible for his own safety. His own self must also be saved. For the first, he was taught to pray to God; he must do this at least five times a day, throughout his life. That is a way to make him fear his Lord, and not do any act which He has forbidden. For the second, he must at least part

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with a fixed proportion of his income every year, to sustain his fellow-men who have not had the same chances in life as he. For the third, he must be temperate in what he eats and drinks, but above all, he must, by renouncing his bodily hunger, at a fixed interval, learn the way of knowing what hunger and thirst mean, and of reflecting on what that tribulation and suffering must be to a poor man. That is, however, by the way. The renouncing of food and water is mainly for our own benefit and health (i.e. physically) directly, and for moulding our character (i.e. mentally) indirectly.

These preventive measures are the fundamental practice of a Religion of Nature. To give a final touch to bring the desired end of peace, along with this principal practice (prayer, fasting, and almsgiving), cleanliness is taught, which is to be made obligatory for the performing of each one of these practices. He is taught also to revere the memory, and keep it green, of that fountain-head of wisdom, by imitating his action, who first gave mankind the ideas of God, and the Day of Judgment: and this will incidentally bring them in touch with all races of mankind and produce a sympathetic brotherhood. That is, however, an indirect purpose of pilgrimage; the direct purpose is nothing but to preserve the memory of the father of Unitarians, Abraham, by performing the same rites as he used to perform to glorify his rightfully-conceived Deity. The imitation is throughout consistent, even to donning the dress he used to wear, to help us the more readily to follow in his steps. The first three are the primary practice, while these two are only supplementary, but no less compulsory.

This is Islam, a religion which finds its echo in natural laws. Where lies the absurdity? And why is it not considered preferable and of stronger appeal to a nation whose sons are reputedly men of common sense?

EUROPEAN BIOGRAPHIES OF THE
HOLY PROPHET MUHAMMAD

By MAULVI ABDUL MAJID

(Continued from Vol. XIII., No. 2, p. 72.)

WE can, for this purpose, divide the European writers into three classes :—

(1) Those who are not acquainted with the Arabic language and the original sources. Their information depends upon translations made by others. Their chief task is, therefore, to present the doubtful and incomplete material in the mould of guesswork and fancy, according to the nature of their respective dispositions and theories.¹ But it is worth mentioning, and worth noticing, that to this group of authors belong men like Gibbon, who possess sound judgment and are so fair-minded that they extract particles of gold even from what would seem to be a heap of ashes. But such persons are rare.

(2) Those who are well-versed in the Arabic language, are at home in the *belles-lettres* of Arabic, and are intimately acquainted with the history and philosophy of Islam ; but the thing which is prominent by its absence in them, is their total ignorance of religious literature, and the art of biography. This class of learned men has very seldom contributed books dealing with the biography of the Prophet, or any book on Islam ; but sometimes presuming on the fact that they know the Arabic language, they have assumed every right to criticize Islam also here and there in their writings. Professor Sachau,² whose familiarity with the Arabic language and wide range of knowledge no one would question, has attached a preface to another Arabic book called

¹ Cf. H. G. Wells, *A Short History of the World.*, Leipzig, pp. 145-6. One wonders if Mr. Wells knows anything of the Arabic language !

² He has also edited *Tabaqat-ibn-i-Sad*, which is a well-known and rare book dealing with the lives of the companions of the Prophet.

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Kitab-ul-Hind of Albiruni¹ which displays his marked ability, his insight and amazing power of research, to such a degree that it excites feelings of envy in the breasts of his readers. But in this very learned preface he has made such reflections on matters Islamic that, after having read it, one wonders whether it can be the same able person whom we met a little while ago. Professor Theodor Noeldeke, another well-known German Orientalist and Arabic scholar, made the study of the Qur-án his special subject; and has contributed an article on the "Koran" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, vol. xv (eleventh edition), which at every step betrays not only his prejudice but also the hidden secret of his ignorance.

(3) Those Orientalists who have devoted themselves exclusively to the study of the Islamic and religious literature, e.g. Palmer and Professor D. S. Margoliouth. We are entitled to expect much from them, but in spite of their Arabic learning and the wide range of their studies in Arabic literature, one can best express what would seem to be their state of mind by a little verse of Urdu, which being translated runs : "I see everything, but I understand nothing."

Professor Margoliouth has read word by word the six thick volumes of *Musnad* of Imam Hanbal; and it would be safe to assert that in this age of ours there will be found none who could claim to be his equal in this achievement. But the book² which he has written on the life of the Prophet is such as to defy comparison in the history of the world, for falsehood and the imputation of falsehood, for mis-construction and prejudice. If there is a distinctive merit in this book, it is that the author, through his ingenuity and cleverness, distorts even those events which are admittedly clear and beyond all cavilling. Sprenger, another German Arabic scholar, for many years Principal of the Madrisa Aliyā,³ Calcutta, and

¹ Albiruni's *India*, ed. by Sachau, London, 1887.

² *Mohammed* (London, 1905).

³ School for the Oriental languages.

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the compiler of the *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Libraries of the Kings of Oudh*, 1854, also editor of the *Isaba-fi-Ahwal-is-Sababa*,¹ has written a notable book, *Das Leben Muhammed* (Berlin, 1851), in three volumes, the perusal of which leaves us gasping with astonishment.

It is true that although the European historian tries to find the links in the chain of cause and effect displayed in every event, and tries to produce with the help of a far-fetched guesswork, and appeals to probability, those links, so as to form the chain of a connected story, yet in all this his own prejudice plays a great part. He makes his own ideas the pivot on which all events have to turn.

The chief blunders and misrepresentations of the European Orientalist are naturally to be sought in their religious and political prejudices; but there are other reasons which may perhaps serve to excuse them.

(i) Their material, and sources of authority, are the historical books and the books on Sirat,² e.g. *Maghazi* of Waqidi, *Sirat-ibn-Hisham*, and *Tarikh-i-Tabari*. And it is obvious, and a matter of no wonder, that any non-Muslim desiring to write the biography of the Prophet would, being led by his common sense, have recourse to these books. But the truth is that, of all these books mentioned above, there is not one of such a nature as to be worthy of being placed on a high pedestal of authority from the historical point of view. Hafiz Zain-ud-Din Iraqi, d. 1404, a well-known traditionist, says in his book *Al-fiya fis-Siyar*, i.e. Biography of the Prophet, in 1,000 Rajaz verses as follows:—

¹ A book dealing with the accounts of the lives of the companions of the Prophet.

² The battles fought by the Prophet were known by the name of Sirat or Maghazi. Accordingly, the book of Ibn-i-Ishāq is called *Maghazi* or *Sirat*. Ibn-i-Hajr, d. 1448, in his book *Fath-ul-Bari*, in chapters called "Kitab-ul-Maghazi," used these two words "Sirat" and "Maghazi" equivalent to each other. In *Fiqh*, i.e. Muhammadan Law, in the chapter called "Kitab-ul-Jihad-was-Siyar," the word "Sirat" implies the battles and the orders for Jihad. Until the end of the ninth century the word "Sirat" denoted battles.

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“The seeker should remember that books on the ‘Sirat’ (biography) of Muhammad gather all kinds of traditions and sayings—true ones and those which should be rejected.”¹

Apart from this fact, the traditions which are contained in these books of “Sirat” are to be traced to Saif, Surri, Ibn-i-Salma, Ibn-i-Najib, and all of them are untrustworthy authorities.² We may accept their evidences for ordinary events, but for events upon which the foundations of important problems rest, they must be rejected. The reliable events of the life of the Prophet are those which are related in the books of Hadith. But in the books of Hadith³ events are not related in an historical order. The European writers, when writing the biography of Muhammad, make the books on “Sirat” their basis—which process is wrong—and subject the Hadith books to the accounts given by the Sirat-writers, and a fitting subject for guesswork and speculation. The European writers are quite unaware of this Hadith treasure, and if there is one who is cognizant of it, e.g. Professor Margoliouth of Oxford, then first he is not

¹ Cf. Ibn-ul-Jauzi’s *Fath-ul-Mughith*, Lucknow, p. 114; Ali b. Sultan Muhammad Al Qari’s, d. 1605, *Kitab-ul-Mauduat*, Delhi, pp. 92, 113; Ibn-i-Taimiyya’s *Kitab-ul-Tawassul*, pp. 99, 101, 105, 106, Almanar Press; *Zurqani*, vol. iii. p. 11.

² To ascertain whether a certain narrator of a certain tradition is trustworthy, one should consult the special branch of the Arabic literature known as *Asma-ur-Rijal*, i.e. the names of the persons who have either spoken to or seen the Prophet. In these books are preserved the accounts of lives of the persons who are narrators of traditions. These books tell us whether we should accept him or reject him. Thousands of traditionists spent their whole lives in preparing this branch of knowledge. They undertook long journeys to meet and see the persons who could relate the events of the life of Muhammad. They met them and inquired about them: whether the narrator was a pious man, what were his occupations, whether he had a good memory, whether he was of a superficial or deep character. And if any defect was found, his evidence was rejected.

³ I have already pointed out that the Sirat books were not compiled carefully, and that into these books crept every kind of nonsense. Note the difference between “Hadith” and “Sirat.”

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a master of this art, and if he be, then one spark of prejudice suffices to burn a veritable palace of knowledge.

(ii) Again, the methods prevailing in Europe of criticizing and investigating historical coincidences are quite different from those of Orientals, i.e. Muslims. Europe does not care whether the narrator is a liar or a truth-loving person, nor does it concern itself with what kind of memory he had. According to the European point of view such investigation is neither necessary nor is it, indeed, possible. Europe cares only to find out whether the narration of the narrator, as it is, coincides with events or not. For example, if one of the biggest liars narrates an event, which event as narrated by him happens to coincide with what is known from other sources, and the surrounding circumstances of the time; and if the narration seems to be traceable to the original sources, and if the narrator does not stumble anywhere, then such a narrative will be accepted as true and substantially correct by European historians. On the contrary, the process of the Muslims, and especially that of the collectors of Hadith literature (traditions of the Prophet), is that they attach no importance to the nature of the tradition, and the first thing they would do would be to consult the books on *Asma-ur-Rijal*, i.e. the biographies of the companions of the Prophet, and find out whether the narrator himself has been regarded as trustworthy by the exponents of the science of biography.¹

This difference of principle has created a marked influence on the writings of Europeans. For example, the Europeans, when dealing with any event in the life of the Prophet, regard the statements of Waqidi² as most reliable. Why? Because the narrations of Waqidi are most connected and seem to be most

¹ The following are a few books on the science of biography: *Tahzib-ul-Kamal*, *Tahzib-ul-Tahzib*, *Lisan-ul-Mizan*, *Ansab-i-Sama'ani*, *Mizan-ul-Itidal*, *Tazkirut-ul-Huffaz*, *Taqrib*, *Tarikh-ul-Kabir*.

² A biographer of Muhammad, d. 823. The names of his books are *Kitab-us-Sirat* and *Kitab-ul-Maghazi*.

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readily traceable to the original sources. In his statements the chains of details are closely knit one with another. There occurs no gap between one event and the other; in short, all those attributes which go to make any given event interesting and plausible are to be found in his book in full measure. The book of Ibn-i-Sad,¹ d. 844, a book dealing with the lives of the companions of the Prophet, also quotes from Waqidi, who has been unanimously regarded as a liar, and essentially untrustworthy, by the traditionists of the first rank. Therefore when compiling the life of the Prophet, one should do away with the statements emanating from Waqidi. And, moreover, certain great narrators, e.g. Salma and Abrash, are not good authorities. The book of Ibn-i-Ishāq is trustworthy, but his narrator, Bakkai, according to the authority of Bukhari² and Abu Hatim, is also below the standard of the collectors of traditions.

Therefore, the Qur-án and the Hadith Literature, coupled with the principles of Prudence (fully dealt with in the book *Fath-ul-Mughith*, by Ibn-ul-Jauzi, p. 114), should always serve as a guide to those who are compiling the life of the Prophet—and it is a pity to find that these things are conspicuous by their absence in the European biographies of Muhammad!

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ISLAM, USURY AND INTEREST

To the Editor of the ISLAMIC REVIEW.

SIR,—In your Note on “Islam, Usury and Interest” in the January issue, you say:—

“Mr. Sarwar, while holding theoretically that interest in every shape and form may be, from the strictest Muslim point of view, argued to be unlawful, holds nevertheless that, in existing

¹ This book has been edited by Professor Sachau. The name of the book is *Kitab Tabaqat-il-Kabir*, i.e. the great book of the different classes of companions of Muhammad.

² One of the greatest and most reliable collectors of Hadith (Traditions) of the Prophet, d. 870.

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circumstances, we are justified in accepting interest, provided always that we do not lose sight of the fact that our action is unlawful." This, Sir, is a most unfortunate way of putting my point. I never said, "our action is unlawful," nor did I say that "interest in every shape and form may be argued to be unlawful." I distinctly laid down that where the capital does not remain fixed and cannot be realized at its original value the taking of interest is not *riba*. I said: "Usury only applies to cases where the capital remains intact" (p. 26). I also said: "Loans to Governments, and other similar institutions on interest, are really not usurious; because one cannot realize one's capital at any given time. If you hold Government securities, you can only sell them in the open market for what they will fetch. These loans are very much like usury, but are outside the definition of usury." By usury here, as elsewhere, I mean *riba*. I also said (p. 26): "Moneys invested in shares of all commercial undertakings are lawful, because, even though the term 'interest' be used in describing the payment of profits, it is not usury." How in the face of these statements anyone can assert that I said that "interest in every shape and form may be argued to be unlawful" passes my understanding. I took some pains to illustrate my point. Islam is truly a most universal religion applicable to all times, all conditions, and all grades of civilization, from the lowest to the highest. The only one unchangeable principle of Islam is faith in the ONENESS of God. When a Muslim is forced to say the contrary, he is saying something that is wrong, but his action is not even then sinful:—

"He who disbelieves in Allah after his having believed, *not he who is compelled while his heart is at rest on account of faith*, but he who opens (his) breast for disbelief—on these is the wrath of Allah, and they shall have a grievous chastisement" (The Holy Qur-*án*, xvi. 106). I quoted this verse, and it is in the *Islamic Review* for January (p. 16). I say, therefore, arguing by analogy, that he who opens his heart to usury and interest, and *not he* who is compelled while his heart is at rest on account of faith, sins.

You further say:—

"We must have perfect confidence in ourselves, if we are to be successful; and if we take interest, at the same time believing in our hearts that we are sinning against Almighty God, what becomes of our confidence, if we are sincere?" You are quite right in what you say, but I never suggested that we should not be confident. On the contrary, the other verse on which I relied says clearly, "no sin shall be upon him." Now when Allah says "no sin shall be upon him" are we to say that we sin when we are compelled? Certainly not. I entirely refute your allegations of "sinning." All that I say is that what is "unlawful" under one set of circumstances is made permissible and sinless under other circumstances by the Almighty God Himself—not by me or by any mortal.

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The only sentence which in any way lends colour to your argument is at the top of p. 28, and runs as follows: "This does not mean that the transaction thereby becomes lawful." If so, it is hardly fair to me to pick out one sentence out of sixteen pages and make nonsense of the whole subject. If this sentence does not agree with the tastes of any of your readers, I am perfectly willing to withdraw it; my argument is not affected thereby. But even here I added: "It only means, as the Holy Qur-án says: 'But whoever is driven to necessity, not desiring, nor exceeding the limit, no sin shall be upon him.'"

The subject is one which must be handled with extreme care. No Muslim should go beyond the limits prescribed by Allah. But when Allah allows or permits something under compulsion and stress of circumstances which ordinarily is unlawful, it is not for us to condemn it.

I am much grieved to read in your Note the following:—

"If Islam cannot afford to eradicate the modern 'Institution of Interest,' as it is, and substitute for it a better one; or if it has not yet (as may, perhaps, be urged) the capacity to assimilate it, it must make room for a better system." To this the only reply is:—

"They desire to put out the light of Allah (Islam) with their mouths, but Allah will perfect His light, though the unbelievers may dislike it."

"He it is Who sent His messenger with the guidance and the religion of the Truth, that it may override all other religions, even though the polytheists dislike it" (The Holy Qur-án, lxi. 8, 9).

"Truth has come and falsehood has vanished, for falsehood was bound to vanish" (The Holy Qur-án, xvii. 81).

You, Sir, ask the question: "Is it not the first duty of a man to sacrifice everything for a principle?" I ask you: "Is it?" and "What do you mean by everything?" Also, "What is a principle, and are not there principles and principles?" Suppose a man made it his principle never to kill any human being under any circumstances. That would indeed be a most noble principle. Suppose now that a burglar broke into his house and was going to kill his wife or child, and the only means of preventing his so doing was his being shot down by the man of principle. Should the man of principle sacrifice his wife or child to his principle? No, Sir, self-defence is one of the most sacred rights of individuals and communities, and *that also is a principle higher than many other principles.*

Let the Muslim who, in self-defence, is compelled to pay or take interest "be at rest on account of faith." Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. The Holy Qur-án does not take away our confidence. It gives confidence under the most difficult conditions.

Of course, if you desire to allow interest without any consideration of the principles of Islam, you may raise Muslims to

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the same condition as the Jews—rich in pelf and poor in soul.
May Allah protect us all. Peace be with you !

Yours, etc.,

Singapore,

H. G. SARWAR.

January 2, 1925.

To the Editor of the ISLAMIC REVIEW.

DEAR SIR,—I have been much interested in the articles in your magazine lately on "Islam, Usury and Interest," by Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar, and the conclusion he draws. But may an outsider be permitted to complain that his conclusions are neither logical to the undoubted intention of the Prophet nor strict enough in their condemnation of modern conditions ?

I need not comment on the dangers of usury to the morals of the community. They are well known to all thinking people, and are, moreover, set forth in the Qur-án in several memorable passages well known to all students of Islam. It is the conclusion of your eminent contributor that usury and modern "interest" are not the same thing with which I wish to quarrel.

Can any unprejudiced person look round the modern world and say that so-called "capitalism" is not in fact the greatest moral danger of the day ? I am speaking as an Englishman, and as one who very naturally likes his country and his countrymen to stand for all that is best in life and in the world. Yet of the political errors and crimes which the English, for all their undoubted experience of governing and good intentions towards the peoples committed to their charge, do unfortunately at times commit, can you find one that is not to be traced to the financial interests behind the scenes, i.e. is not due to capitalism ? Is not the decay of the English arts and crafts, and even of the language, due to the same evil influence ? I maintain stoutly that but for the grit and determination of the working classes of England and certain of their sympathizers in other classes (to whom be all honour), the soul of my nation must have long ago gone under to the corrupting influence of that detestable philosophy summed up in the phrase "Money talks."

Now, in dealing with the Prophet's teachings on any subject and their application to modern conditions, what must be our attitude ? (I run the risk of you thinking my remarks insolent from a non-Muslim, but I place myself in the matter at the feet of your courtesy and known broad-mindedness.) Surely we must try to visualize the Prophet as though he were living now, and judge of what he would be likely to say were he to be confronted with present-day conditions.

Can anyone doubt that he (or, for a matter of that, Jesus, or any of the prophets) would immediately condemn modern capitalism ? When you have admitted atheists and freethinkers, like Herbert Spencer, Karl Marx and Lenin, prepared to fight to the death against it as an overwhelming evil, what must be the attitude of a man of God ? Can any sane person who fears

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God, and regards all mankind as brothers and His creation, imagine any possibility of compromise with modern industrial conditions ? Even the poorest beggar of the Middle Ages was at least a man, with the control of his own soul ; but all of us in the modern world are at the mercy of the machines which are our own creation. And the men who control the machines are not their makers or even their administrators but the capitalists behind them, because capital is the oil which makes the machine work smoothly.

And how do the capitalists get their capital, the source of all their power ? The answer is simple. *We lend them the money, you and I.* Disguise it how you will, the big financial interests are nothing but usurers, and we are taking part in usury when we lend them our money ; we forge the chains with which they bind us. It seems to me there is no escaping this essential fact. Is it not possible to believe that the Prophet had something of this in his mind when he, to use an Americanism, "came out so strong" against usury ? Did he not grasp the essential fact, which the modern world is only slowly beginning to realize—that is, when you place everything in the world in the power of money, you thereby kill all spiritual and artistic values—all the finer ways of looking at life—stone dead ? The business man of the present day judges everything by the fact of it "paying" or "not paying" ; what is this but the usurious outlook upon life ? Anybody who has had anything to do with artistic or literary work of any kind knows the difficulty which this outlook places in his path ; publishers of books or theatrical managers do not decide on whether a piece of work is good or not good, but as to whether it will "make money." (And behind the entrepreneurs, in an astonishing number of cases, one finds our old friends the Jews, up to the same tricks as in the Prophet's time !)

I like to think that the Prophet's teaching and the philosophy of life which was built up in the Middle Ages thereon, stand for *ordered living*—civilized living, if you like to call it so in the best sense of the word ; and it seems to me that between that conception and the dark muddle of the present day, with its vast forces wielded silently by hidden hands in quiet offices, there can be no compromise. Therefore, with all respect to your esteemed contributor, I cannot see how any Muslim can possibly invest money in any industrial enterprise or leave it in any bank under existing conditions ; for he is thereby *allowing his money to be made use of for just those purposes* which, so it seems to me, *the Prophet explicitly condemned.* *If the bank or the industry is co-operative—yes ; but the ordinary bank or business—no.*

I beg to remain, sir,

Very truly yours,

RICHARD COKE.

Baghdad,

January 29, 1925.

