SKETCHES FROM EASTERN HISTORY

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SKETCHES FROM EASTERN HISTORY

BY

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PREFACE.

Of the following studies, three have already appeared in German periodicals, and one (that on the Koran) forms part of the article Mohammedanism in the 9th edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. But all four have been considerably revised. The remaining essays were written in the course of last year. The fourth, fifth, and sixth, and to some extent the second and third also, may be regarded as supplementing Aug. Müller's excellent *History of Islam*. I have made careful use of all the sources that were accessible to me, but have cited them only rarely. I hope I have been fairly successful in obliterating the traces of laborious study, while, at the same time, I trust that the book may be found to be of some value, even to the specialist.

The account of Mansúr's reign is preceded by a brief *résumé* of the antecedent history, and of the beginnings of the Abbasid dynasty; it was impossible otherwise to exhibit the personality of Mansúr in a proper light. Less organically connected with their context are the paragraphs at the close of the essay upon King Theodore. But the interest which Abyssinia now has, even for the ordinary newspaper reader, justifies, I think, the few words on its history after the death of that king, and the forecast of its future. I take this opportunity of mentioning that an Italian of thorough insight and information has expressed to me his entire concurrence with the opinions indicated in the paragraphs in question.

But I must earnestly beg those who read what I have there said not to leap to the conclusion that I have the same opinion about the German as about the Italian enterprises in Africa.

My old friend, De Goeje, of Leyden, has frequently given me valuable assistance in the history of the servile war, especially on geographical points. I am also indebted for some geographical notes to my friend G. Hoffmann, of Kiel.

In speaking of mediæval times I have often retained the familiar classical names of Oriental countries, such as Babylonia instead of Irák, Mesopotamia for Jezíra, in the belief that most readers will find this more convenient.

Where, in the Mohammedan dates, the day of the week and the day of the month did not seem to agree, I have, in reducing them to terms of the Julian calendar, of course held invariably to the day of the week; in the rude Mohammedan reckoning by lunar months errors of two, or even of three days are quite common. As the Mohammedan months seldom, and the Mohammedan years never, coincide with ours, I have occasionally found it necessary, where my authorities gave only the year and the month, to leave the question open as between two years or months of the Julian calendar. So also with the Syrian (Seleucid) years, which are strictly Julian indeed, but begin with 1st October, not 1st January.

The transcription of Oriental names and other words gives their pronunciation only approximately. *S* is always to be pronounced sharp, as in *song, this*; *z* is the English *z*, as in *razor*. *H* is always a distinctly audible consonant, even in such words as Alláh. Long vowels in Arabic and Persian are indicated thus (—́), but in some cases this diacritical mark has been omitted (viz. in the first syllable of Irán, Isá, Amid, Amol, Aderbiján, and in the word Islam). In words belonging to other Oriental languages than the Arabic and Persian, I

have used the mark but rarely, as in many instances I could not tell whether a vowel denoted as long in the written character was (or is) actually so pronounced.

For Orientalists I may mention, further, that in the following pages I have in Persian geographical names followed the modern pronunciation, and thus have avoided the sounds *é* and *ó*.

In the English translation some slips of the original German edition have been corrected, partly at the instance of my friend Professor Robertson Smith.

TH. NÖLDEKE.

STRASSBURG, 18*th July* 1892.

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I.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SEMITIC RACE.[1]

One of the most difficult tasks of the historian is to depict the moral physiognomy of a nation in such a way that no trait shall be lost, and none exaggerated at the cost of the others. The difficulty of the task may be best appreciated by considering how complicated a thing, full of apparent contradictions, individual character is, and that the historian who seeks to define the character of a nation, or perhaps of a race embracing many nations, has to deal with a still more complex phenomenon, made up of widely varying individuals. This difficulty, indeed, is not equally great with all nations. The common characters of the Semitic nations are in many respects so definite and strongly marked, that on the whole they are more easily portrayed than those of the small Greek people, which, although at bottom a unity, embraced a great variety of distinct local types,—Athenians as well as Bœotians, Corinthians as well as Spartans, Arcadians and Ætolians as well as Milesians and Sybarites. And yet it is no very easy matter to form an estimate of the psychical characteristics of the Semites, —witness the contradictory judgments passed on them by such distinguished scholars as Renan and Steinthal. I have no mind to attempt a new portrait of the Semitic type of humanity. All that I intend is to offer a few contributions to the subject, connecting my remarks, whether by way of

[1] Originally published in *Im neuen Reich*, ii. (1872) p. 881 sqq.

agreement or, occasionally, by way of dissent, with a well-written and ingenious essay of the learned orientalist Chwolson, which is mainly directed against Renan.[1] In this the author is successful in refuting some of Renan's unfavourable criticisms on the Semitic character. But his own judgments are not always strictly impartial; he is himself of Jewish extraction, and in some particulars offers too favourable a picture of the Semitic race, to which he is proud to belong.

Chwolson rightly lays emphasis upon the enormous importance of inborn qualities for nations as well as for individuals; but he is not free from exaggeration in his attempts to minimise the influence of religion and laws on the one hand, of geographical position and of climate on the other. The inhabitants of Paraguay were savage Indians like their neighbours in Brazil and in the Argentine countries; but under the despotic discipline of the Jesuits and their secular successors, they grew into a nation which thirty years ago fought to the death against overwhelming odds for its country and its chief. Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism have exercised a powerful influence for good or for evil even on the character of nations already civilised. In like manner, climate and geographical position are very important factors in the formation of national character. Could we observe the first beginnings of nations, they would perhaps be found to be the decisive factors. Peoples that are, so to speak, adult, and possessed of a developed civilisation, are naturally much less susceptible to such influences than the savage child of nature. But they are not wholly independent of them: isolated countries in particular, with strongly marked geographical peculiarities, such as elevated mountain regions, lonely islands, and above all desert lands —not to speak of polar regions—exercise this influence in a

[1] *Die Semitischen Völker*, Berlin 1872.

high degree. Ethnologically the Persians and the Hindoos are very closely related, yet their characters differ enormously; and this must be mainly ascribed to the geographical contrast between their seats. The Persians dwell on a lofty plateau, exposed to violent vicissitudes of cold and heat, and in great part unfit for cultivation; the Hindoos in a region of tropical luxuriance. Chwolson points to the enormous difference between the ancient and the modern Egyptians as a convincing proof that race character is little dependent upon local environment; but really we see in Egypt how a country with such marked peculiarities forces its inhabitants into conformity with itself. Munziger, in his day unquestionably the best authority upon North-Eastern Africa, brings out in a few masterly touches the essential likeness of modern to ancient Egypt. I will quote only one of his remarks: "The ancient Egyptians," he says, "were not so far ahead of the modern as we are sometimes ready to imagine; then, as now, hovels adjoined palaces, esoteric science coexisted with crass ignorance," and so forth.[1] In the history of ancient Egypt, extending as it does through millenniums, there naturally occur alternate periods of prosperity and of decay; we may not venture to compare the time of the Mameluke sultans and the Turkish rule with that of the pyramid-builders; but it seems to me a very fair question whether the civilisation of Egypt during the best period of the Fatimids did not stand quite as high as the highest attained under the Pharaohs. The main difference is that the Egyptians in remote antiquity had no neighbours who stood on any sort of equality with them, and thus they received no considerable influences from without; but this was also the reason why their civilisation so soon became stationary.

Chwolson might have made more of the point that peoples

[1] *Ostafrikanische Studien*, p. 5 ff.

are not rigid bodies incapable of modification, but organisms that can develop and assimilate,—organisms offering a varying resistance to external influences, but in the long course of centuries capable of such transformation that their early character can only be recognised in some minor features. Many a touch in the Magyar still reminds us of his Asiatic origin; yet, on the whole, he has more resemblance to any one of the civilised peoples of Europe than to his nearest relations on the Ural.

Similarly, in drawing the character of the Semites, the historian must guard against taking the Jews of Europe as pure representatives of the race. These have maintained many features of their primitive type with remarkable tenacity, but they have become Europeans all the same; and, moreover, many peculiarities by which they are marked are not so much of old Semitic origin as a result of the special history of the Jews, and in particular of continued oppression, and of that long isolation from other peoples, which was partly their own choice and partly imposed upon them.

Our delineation of the Semites must begin with the Arabs, Hebrews, and Syrians (Aramæans), the last named of whom, however, have never constituted a closely-welded nationality, politically or otherwise. Of the inner life of the Phœnicians and some minor Semitic nations of antiquity, we know very little. The whole character of the Babylonians and Assyrians, which in many respects differs widely from that of the other Semites, is steadily coming more and more to light through the arduous labours of cuneiform scholars, but we are still far from knowing it nearly so intimately as we know that of the three first-mentioned peoples. Moreover, it still remains undetermined how far non-Semitic people may have had a share in the commencement of the high and extremely ancient civilisation of

Babylon. To make the picture complete it would be necessary, of course, to bring in also the black Semites of Abyssinia and the adjoining regions; but these to all appearance owe their origin to an intermingling of Arab Semites with Africans; indeed, they are for the most part only Semitised "Hamites," and have accordingly retained much pristine African savagery, especially as they were always strongly exposed to the influence of non-Semitic nations dwelling around and among them. Besides, there is much to be said for neglecting undeveloped or atrophied members when delineating the character of a group of peoples.

The religion of the Semites is the first thing that demands our attention, and that not solely on account of the influence it has exerted on us in Europe. Renan is right in neglecting the beginnings of Semitic religion, and taking the results of their religious development and their tendency to monotheism as the really important thing. The complete victory of monotheism, it is true, was first achieved within historical times among the Israelites; but strong tendencies in the same direction appear also among the other Semitic peoples. Renan is also right in reckoning Christianity as only in part a Semitic religion, for even its origin presupposed a world fructified by Greek ideas, and it was mainly through non-Semitic influences that it became a world-religion; nay, we may almost say that the changes which have taken place in Christianity from the Reformation onwards consist in a more and more complete elimination of its Semitic elements. Islam, on the other hand, in its pure Arabic form, the doctrine of Mohammed and of his disciples, which for a century past has again been preached in its purity by the Wahhabites[1] in the country of its birth, is the logical perfection of Semitic religion, with the importation of only one

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[1] See below, p. 103.

fundamental idea, though that is indeed a very important one, namely, the conception of a resurrection and of a life in heaven which had already been adopted by Judaism and Christianity.[1] Islam is infinitely hard and one-sided, but in its crude simplicity strictly logical. Mohammed cannot in strictness be called a great man, and yet the appearance of the religion which found in him such clear and energetic expression—a religion which in one rapid march of conquest first subdued the Semitic world already ripe for the change, and then brought under its sway numerous other peoples both civilised and savage—was the most important manifestation the Semitic genius ever made. In the religious portions of the Old Testament we find that more inward warmth of feeling and that richer fancy which distinguished the ancient Hebrew from the Arab. When we read the Psalms and the Prophets, even without the customary idealising spectacles, we shall place them—and not from the merely æsthetic point of view only—far above the Koran. But the result of the religious development of the Old Testament — the religion of Ezra, of the Pharisees, and of the Rabbins — can hardly be said to stand higher than Islam.

The energy and simplicity of Semitic ideas in religion are not favourable to a complicated mythology. Where anything of the sort is met with among them, it is either of purely foreign provenance, or has arisen through admixture with foreign elements. This holds good perhaps even of the Babylonian mythology (which, for the rest, is somewhat formless), certainly of all the variety of Gnostic sects, and in a large measure also of the official Christianity as it is found among Semites. Mystical doctrines with them easily degenerate into crudeness; compare, for example, the reli-

[1] Strictly speaking, this idea is itself but a conglomerate of Persian religious teachings and Greek thought with Semitic accretions.

gion of the purely Semitic Druses with analogous phenomena of Persian and Indian origin.

Even in the field of religion the nations of Indo-European civilisation display a richer genius than the Semites; but they lack that tremendous energy which produced the belief in the unity of God, not as a result of scientific reflection, but as a moral demand, tolerating no contradiction. This strength of faith, which has subdued the world, is necessarily associated with much violence and exclusiveness. Nowhere is the uncompromising spirit of the Old Testament more impressive than in its half-mythical and yet thoroughly historical portrait of Elijah, that magnificent ideal of prophecy in its zeal for the Lord. I cannot understand how Chwolson will scarcely admit the existence of religious ecstasy among the Semites, when the Old Testament is full of evidences of high imaginative exaltation in its prophets as well as in those of Baal; nay, in Hebrew the very word "to behave as a prophet" (*hithnabbé*) also means simply "to behave madly, to rave." Ecstasy, the condition in which the religiously-inspired man believes himself to hold immediate converse with God, was to the prophets themselves the subjective attestation of their vocation. Not less deeply rooted in their religion is that Semitic fanaticism which Chwolson would also fain deny. "Take heed to thyself lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee; but ye shall break down their altars, and dash in pieces their images, and ye shall cut down their groves" (Ex. xxxiv. 12, 13)—in such or similar terms run those strict commands, which were indeed justifiable at the time, but none the less bear witness to frightful exclusiveness and rigid fanaticism. In the same spirit the followers of Baal destroy the altars of Jehovah and slay His prophets (1 Kings xix. 10). The captives and property taken by the Israelites from their

enemies were often devoted to destruction in honour of Jehovah (*herem*). By the inscription of king Mesha we now know that the Moabites practised the same thing on a large scale, in honour of their god Chemosh. The Greek translation of *herem* is *anathema*, properly "a dedicatory gift;" the cry, "Anathema sit," so often heard in Christendom, is an inheritance from the Semites. I grant that religious fanaticism has been powerful elsewhere, and particularly where there has been a strong priestly class, as in India; but for the Semitic religions, fanaticism is characteristic. Among the Persian priests of the Sásánian period it first became powerful under Semitic influence and in conflict with Semitic religion. The same trait is conspicuous in Islam. There, indeed, it is more deeply rooted, and of stricter inward necessity, than in Christianity, though it has seldom risen to such heights of atrocity as it has sometimes reached in the latter. When all has been said, Moslems are bound to regard all peace with unbelievers as a truce merely—an obligation at this day much more vividly present to the minds of the vast majority of Mohammedans than Europeans usually suspect.

Another side of their religious narrowness is shown in the wide diffusion which human sacrifice continued to have amongst highly civilised Semites. Amongst the ancient Hebrews, indeed, only isolated traces of it continue to be met with (as also among the Greeks); but as king Mesha sacrificed his son in his need (2 Kings iii. 27), so also did Carthaginian generals centuries afterwards. In fact, extensive human sacrifices were offered to a god in Carthage every year, and as late as the fourth century B.C., the distress into which Agathocles brought the city (in 310) was attributed to the wrath of the deity because the rich had begun to cause purchased children to be offered instead of their own; on this account the horrible custom was again re-established in

all its simplicity (Diodor. xx. 14). Among the Arabs also we meet with human sacrifice; only a century before Mohammed, the Arab prince of Híra, a town that contained a large Christian population, sacrificed four hundred nuns whom he had taken in war to his goddess Ozza (the planet Venus). In the Semitic religions occasional traces of primitive rudeness in ideas and manners are continually cropping up. In Mecca reverence is still paid to the black stone, a relic of the once widely-diffused worship of stone-fetishes, of which traces are found even in the Old Testament. To the same category belongs the retention, both in Judaism and in Mohammedanism, of the old custom of circumcision. As the unchaste worship of female goddesses was specially in vogue among the ancient Semites, so even now it happens in Arab countries, that amongst people who pass for thoroughly holy and world-weaned (often simply insane) the grossest excesses are regarded as holy deeds; this, to be sure, is only popular belief, and has never been sanctioned by orthodox theologians. It is a high prerogative of the Old Testament that, surrounded by unchaste religious services, it sternly banishes all such immorality from its worship of Jehovah.

In denying to the Semites in general any tendency to asceticism and monkery, Chwolson is not entirely wrong, but neither is he perfectly right. In the first place, it is fair to say that such a tendency is hardly in any instance characteristic of a nation as a whole. And then, again, the Old Testament does look upon the Nazirate (and also the rule of the Rechabites, who, amongst other things, abstained from wine) as something meritorious; the Jewish Essenes were neither more nor less than a monastic order; and the Old Testament and the Koran alike contain some precepts either wholly or partially ascetic in their character. It must, however, be conceded that the precepts are not exorbitant, and that some of them (such as the prohibition of wine) are

very suitable for Asiatic and African countries. Yet it must always be remembered that in all Christendom, Egypt apart, it will be difficult to find such an insane and soul-destroying asceticism as was practised by the purely Semitic Syrians from about the fourth to the seventh century.[1]

The Old Testament almost everywhere breathes a purely ethical spirit, and seeks to conceive of the Godhead as morally perfect; but this view is not wholly strange to other nations. The Roman "Jupiter optimus maximus" is surely intended to express moral perfection as well as the highest power; and amongst the Greeks there arose, at a tolerably early date, a view which freed the gods of the objectionable features attributed to them by the ancient myths. But if the Israelite (like other Semitic peoples) regards his God as the merciful and gracious One, it by no means follows that he is disposed to allow this mercy and grace to extend to other men. The ethical prescriptions of the Old Testament are often unduly idealised. The command to love one's neighbour has reference, in the Old Testament, only to people of one's own nation. Cosmopolitan ideas appear occasionally in some of the prophets, but only in germ, and always in such a way that Israel and Israel's sanctuary remain exalted above all peoples. The cosmopolitanism without which Christianity would be inconceivable, could not gain any strength until after Hellenic and Oriental ideas had begun to combine. Whether the precepts in Deuteronomy, which enjoin humanity in war and otherwise, give as favourable a testimony to the mild disposition of the ancient Israelites as is sometimes supposed, is very doubtful. Perhaps they indicate the very contrary. Chwolson himself points out that among the lying Persians the duty of truthfulness has from of old been specially insisted on; and I believe it would be possible to prove that the hot-blooded ancient

[1] See below, "Some Syrian Saints."

Semites had a strong vein of ferocity. The great humanity and benevolence of the Jews of to-day, a result of their peculiar history, can certainly not be adduced as evidence to the contrary.

In political life the Semites have done more than is commonly supposed. It is true that we find among them, on the one hand, a lawless and highly-divided state of society, in which even the rudiments of political authority are hardly known (as among the ancient and modern Bedouins), and, on the other, unlimited despotism. In the first century of Islam the former of these conditions was almost immediately replaced by the latter. Chwolson ought not to deny the despotic character of the Omayyad caliphate, which was purely Semitic, and not half-Persian, like that of the Abbásids in Bagdad. The Arabs of that age, in fact, could hardly think of a ruler at all as without absolute authority. Even the individual governor or general, as long as he is in office, has full and unlimited power. Even those radical fanatics, the Kharijites, who recognised only a perfect Moslem as ruler, whether great or small,[1] gave absolute authority to their leader, if only he did not apostatise from the faith. If, indeed, he did this—and the decision on this point of fact each reserved for himself—they deposed him, and at that period the actual rulers and chiefs had to reckon very strictly with the views and wishes of their fighting subjects; but in theory they were unrestricted in their actions, and a strong and capable prince in some degree actually was so. It was otherwise, however, in ancient Israel. We can still discern that in both kingdoms the sovereigns were in many points limited by survivals of the old aristocratic constitution. To get rid of Naboth, queen Jezebel required the sentence of a public assembly, which she secured by false witnesses (1 Kings xxi.). The narrator

[1] See below, p. 80.

therefore gives us to understand that the heads of the commune retained the power of life and death in their own hands, although the monarchy was even then an old institution. The kings of Edom appear in very early times to have been elective princes. And the Phœnicians (including the Carthaginians) present a very large variety of political constitution, which reminds one of Greece. Amongst the Phœnicians we find also, at least in times of the direst need, a self-sacrificing patriotism, as is witnessed by the wars against Rome, in which Carthage perished, and the mortal struggle of Tyre against Alexander (although in the latter religious motives seem to have played a part). But, in general, individualism preponderates among the Semites so greatly that they adapt themselves to a firmly settled state only at the call of great religious impulses, or under the pressure of despotic authority; and, even when it is established, they have no real attachment to it. The still untamed Arab is much more strongly attached to the family, the clan, the tribe; so also among the Israelites of the older time, clanship seems to have been a bond of very great strength. But it is an error to try to see in this absence of formed national feeling, as contrasted with the patriotism of the Greeks, any approach to the freer modern conception of the State.

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It is also quite a mistake to attribute to the Semites democratic inclinations. No people has ever laid so much stress upon genealogies as the two Semitic nations with which we are best acquainted, the Hebrews and the Arabs, have done. The genuine Arab is thoroughly aristocratic. Many a feud turns upon the precedence of one family or tribe over another. In the first two centuries after Mohammed bloody wars were waged on such rivalries. Even now it is with a heavy heart that the Arab sees set over him a man of less noble extraction than himself. The deeds of ancestors are accepted as legitimation, but are also the

spur of emulation. In the councils of the tribe or of the community, it is difficult for the man of humble origin to acquire influence. Even a caliph so early as the third in the series owed his throne to the influence of his clan, the Omayyads, who yet shortly before had been the bitterest enemies of the Prophet, but nevertheless, after their subjection, retained the position of greatest prominence in Mecca, and so in the new State. But for the consideration in which his family was held, Moáwiya, the real founder of the Omayyad dynasty, with all his talent and all his services to the empire, would never have attained to the supreme command. In this matter, indeed, Islam has gradually effected a mighty change. At his first appearance Mohammed gave offence to the upper-class Meccans by admitting to the number of his followers slaves, freedmen, and other people of no family or account. The might of the religious idea triumphed over old prejudices. In presence of the almighty extra-mundane God all mortals are on an absolute equality; whosoever went over to Islam received the same rights, and undertook the same duties as the highest and the meanest believer. But, in spite of all this, Mohammed himself made many concessions to the aristocratic temper, and this temper continued for a long time after to be a great power; it was the complete development of the despotism, after the old Oriental fashion, that levelled all subjects. But even to this day aristocratic ideas prevail among the Arabs of the desert, and also among the sedentary Arabs in remoter regions. The genuine Arab has in connection with his aristocratic notions a sense of chivalry, a fine feeling for points of honour (not necessarily the same as we ourselves take), but also a strong propensity to vanity and boasting. There are many evidences that in the communities of ancient Israel also an aristocratic rule (elders and nobles) prevailed. That the constitution of Carthage was in its essential features aristocratic is well known. The

same is true of the Syrian city of Palmyra, though its constitution was modified by the general conditions of the Roman empire, to which it had to accommodate itself.

As the Semite can hardly be induced, voluntarily, to submit to a strict discipline, he does not, on the whole, make a good soldier. Skirmishes and little surprises are what the Arab finds inspiriting; of the adventures of his heroes and robbers he tells stories, as the Hebrews before him did about Samson. Like all vigorous nations with an exuberant vitality, the Arabs delight in narratives of battle and victory, especially if these are properly exaggerated and flatter their pride of family or race. The Old Testament speaks less of heroes than of saints, but then it is a religious book; its many tales of the "wars of the Lord" nevertheless bear witness that the peaceful Hebrew could also be thoroughly warlike. How could it possibly have been otherwise in a land that had been conquered with the sword, and very often required to be similarly defended? When Chwolson tries to demonstrate the absolutely peaceable disposition of the Israelites by reference to the ideal kingdom of peace which was the object of their hopes, it can be argued on the other side that the very prophet who promises the beating of swords into ploughshares, and of spears into pruning-hooks, depicts the daughter of Zion as trampling on the nations or wasting the land of Assyria with the sword (Micah iv., v.). But Semitic armies have seldom done anything great. This might be ascribed to the circumstance that among the Semites the power of taking in complex unities at a glance, the talent for arrangement, is rare, and that therefore they have had no generals; but we have only to think of Hannibal and other great Carthaginians to reject this view. These, however, carried on their campaigns with foreign troops. For it is quite undeniable that the Semites do not readily make good soldiers. For

moulding the Arabs into powerful armies in the early years of Islam, unusual impulses were required: the enthusiasm generated by a new national religion which promised a heavenly reward, and the allurements which the prospects of booty and of settlement in rich lands offered to the inhabitants of the sterile wilderness. Over and above all this there was a wonderful intellectual outburst which showed itself in the appearance of a singular series of highly gifted generals, statesmen, and men of eminence in various directions. And these were precisely the men who then stood at the head of the nation. To subsequent generations the youth of Islam, the true prime of the Arabs, is unintelligible. They are unable to appreciate the great spiritual forces which, either in conjunction with, or in hostile opposition to, each other, were then unfolded. The theological school discerns everywhere only theological battles, and this school dominates the view of later Moslems. This is the chief reason why the names of the great warriors and statesmen of that period have long been almost forgotten in the East, while those of theologians and saints are popular. The later Jews also often fought with the utmost bravery, but only when the defence of their religion was in question. To become subject to a stern discipline, and to encounter death merely for the sake of freedom and fatherland, was not a thought that came naturally to them. Chwolson seems to prefer the enthusiasm of religion to the enthusiasm of patriotism; but I take it that the heroes of Marathon laid the world under a debt of obligation by no means less deep than did the armies of the Maccabees.

In religion the one-sidedness of the Semitic mind was a creative power; but it was highly prejudicial to the development of science. A keen eye for particulars, a sobriety of apprehension (justly dwelt on by Chwolson), are undoubtedly talents of great service in the beginnings of science. Ac-

cordingly we find at a comparatively early period amongst Hebrews and Arabs an intelligent system of chronicles such as was never attained by (let us say) the dreamy Hindoos; and from the firm lapidary style in which king Mesha recounts his exploits we can infer that in his time (about 900 B.C.) some beginnings of historic narrative existed even in that remote land. But, as already remarked, the Semite is deficient in the power of taking a general view, in the gift of comprehensive intelligence, of large and, at the same time, logical thought, and therefore, speaking generally, he has only in a few cases contributed anything of importance to science. The ideas of monotheism and of a creation are by no means products of philosophical reflection; the naive intelligence of the Israelite has not the faintest suspicion of the enormous difficulties which the assumption of a creation out of nothing presents to the reflecting mind; to him the proposition is self-evident. The speculation of the Arabs on the freedom of the will and similar subjects, continued to be very unsystematic and unscientific as long as it was only superficially affected by Greek thought. And even after they had been trained by Greek philosophy, the Arabs, so far as I am able to judge from what I freely confess to be a very limited knowledge, produced little that was new in this field. On the whole, it becomes increasingly apparent that the Syrians and Arabs, whatever their merit in keeping up and handing on the sciences of the Greeks, were not very fruitful in their own cultivation of these, though it must be admitted that the Arabs at least made advances in some matters of detail. Besides, we must not assume that everything written in Arabic must necessarily be Arab and Semitic; one might as well ascribe all the Latin literature of the Middle Ages to the Italians. There are, however, undeniably certain fields of knowledge in which the Arabs distinguished themselves without stimulus from

without; Arabian philology in particular, in its various branches, is a brilliant achievement. Many Persians, it is true, had a share in it, but it is almost entirely Arabian in its first origin, and thoroughly so in spirit. It evinces an exceedingly keen observation of the phenomena of language, and though breadth of view and genuine systematic method are frequently wanting, and the wisdom of the school seeks to improve upon the facts, the Arabic language (of course the Arabic only) is examined from all sides with a subtlety worthy of all admiration. But how any one could ever have thought of finding among the ancient Israelites long before Aristotle's time anything of the nature of natural science is, I confess, incomprehensible to me. When we read that Solomon "spake of trees" and of animals (1 Kings iv. 33; [Heb. v. 13]), the expression admits perhaps of more than one interpretation, but certainly we are not to understand that botany and zoology are meant. Neither should I be disposed to reckon under Semitic science the agricultural treatises of the Carthaginian Mago. We shall be safe in asserting that these did not stand on a higher level than the corresponding Roman and Greek works on that subject, which were directed exclusively to practical ends; but if we are to regard such writings as scientific, we must do the same with cookery books. The discovery of the alphabet, or rather the separation of a true alphabet out of a highly complicated system of writing, has proved infinitely important for science, and bears decisive testimony to the intellectual powers of the Semites,[1] but I hesitate to call this an achievement of science in the proper sense of the word. The science of the Babylonians, on the other hand, deserves high recognition. What they did for astronomy

[1] It may now be regarded as tolerably certain that the Semitic alphabet, from which all those of Europe had their origin, was reached by simplification of the extremely unpractical writing of the Egyptians.

and the measurement of time in particular at a very early period is of the very greatest value, and is even now not wholly out of date; just as, in another aspect, the astrological superstition connected with it dominated succeeding ages. The conspicuous services to science of modern Jewish *savants* clearly cannot come into the account here; for these men belong to civilised Europe.

All qualified judges are pretty unanimous about Semitic poetry and art. A keen eye for particulars, great subjectivity, a nervous restlessness, deep passion and inwardness of feeling, and, finally, a strong tendency to follow older models and keep to traditional forms of presentation, mark their excellences as well as their defects. I shall not here repeat the remarks so often made on Arabic and Hebrew poetry, as to the want of a Semitic epic and so on. I only observe that the few remains we possess of Hebrew poetry, though mainly of a religious character, reveal many-sidedness in a far higher degree, and also, on the whole, more of depth and freshness, than does the very uniform if formally perfect poetry of the Arabs, of which, notwithstanding many losses, we still possess a very large quantity. From the Syrians much verse has come to us, but hardly anything truly poetical apart from some quite short popular songs of the modern Syrians of the extreme north-east. For the rest, the want of an epos is compensated among the Hebrews and Arabs (as also among some Indo-European peoples) by talent for lively and attractive prose narration. Essentially, as a result of the peculiar structure of their language, the Arabs have naturally a strong tendency to a pointed manner of speech, varying between epigrammatic brevity and ornate tautology. Even the Bedouins in the desert spoke in this way; and this was the style employed by the princes and generals of the first period of Islam in their public addresses as well as in their letters. This artificial and ornate style

inevitably degenerated into a mannerism, and finally issued in a meaningless jingle of words and the well-known oriental inflation which we find so intolerable, especially in Persian and Turkish imitations. The counterpart of this love for a striking and elegant manner of speech was, of course, a great sensibility to style on the part of hearers and readers. Eloquence was a highly-prized gift before Mohammed's time. The pleasure which the Arabs took in beauty of language is one of the principal causes which led to their peculiar success in philology. A taste for well-arranged, striking, and sonorous words existed among the ancient Hebrews also, though not in so highly-developed a form.

Every one admits that, apart from the Babylonians and Assyrians, the Semites have had little success in the plastic arts. The statements of the Old Testament give us a very moderate idea of the architectural performances of the Hebrews. In all essential respects the Phœnicians appear to have copied Egyptian, and afterwards Greek models. The extensive ruins of Palmyra, Petra, Baalbec (Heliopolis), and other towns of Syria, are in a Greek style, only slightly modified by oriental influences. The Arabs, also, have mainly followed foreign patterns. Arab buildings sometimes, indeed, show extraordinary beauty of detail, wonderful ornamentation, splendid colour; but in this department, also, there is a want of sense for totality, of articulate unity of plan. It must, moreover, be noted, that many buildings of the Arabs—the very famous Omayyad mosque at Damascus, among others—were in whole or in part executed by foreigners. It is characteristic of the Arabs that they reckon caligraphy among the fine arts; and certainly any one who has seen finished examples of the work of Arab penmen must acknowledge that there is in them something more than mere dexterity and elegance,—that these wonderfully free and pure forms are controlled by the same feeling for

nobility of outline which appears in all branches of Arab decorative art.[1] In Arabian art we everywhere find a delicate sense for detail, but nowhere large apprehension of a great and united whole. That most Semites have effected nothing in sculpture, and very little in painting strictly so considerations; but at bottom it has its explanation in want of aptitude for these arts. It is only among the Babylonians and Assyrians that an original sculpture has flourished. Among the remains of Nineveh some notable works of art occur, alongside of many pieces of excellent but purely conventional workmanship.

Our general conclusion, then, is that the genius of the Semites is in many respects one-sided, and does not reach the level of some Indo-European nations, especially the Greeks; but it would be most unjust to deny their claim to one of the highest places among the races of mankind. Among the pure Semites of the present day, indeed, we discover extraordinarily few indications of natural or vigorous progress; much points to the conclusion that this group of nations has long since passed its prime. Whether modern European culture may be able really to lay hold of them, and awaken them to a new and strenuous life, is a question which will not be answered in the immediate future.

[1] Some of the Phœnician inscriptions also, in their slender straight lines, show a fine caligraphic taste.

II.

THE KORAN.[1]

The Koran (*Ḳor'án*) is the foundation of Islam. It is the sacred book of more than a hundred millions of men, some of them nations of immemorial civilisation, by all whom it is regarded as the immediate word of God. And since the use of the Koran in public worship, in schools and otherwise, is much more extensive than, for example, the reading of the Bible in most Christian countries, it has been truly described as the most widely-read book in existence. This circumstance alone is sufficient to give it an urgent claim on our attention, whether it suit our taste and fall in with our religious and philosophical views or not. Besides, it is the work of Mohammed, and as such is fitted to afford a clue to the spiritual development of that most successful of all prophets and religious personalities. It must be owned that the first perusal leaves on a European an impression of chaotic confusion,—not that the book is so very extensive, for it is not quite so large as the New Testament. This impression can in some degree be modified only by the application of a critical analysis with the assistance of Arabian tradition.

To the faith of the Moslems, as has been said, the Koran is the word of God, and such also is the claim which the book itself advances. For except in sur. i.—which is a prayer for men—and some few passages where Mohammed

[1] Originally published in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 9th ed., vol. xvi. p. 597 sqq.

(vi. 104, 114, xxvii. 93, xlii. 8), or the angels (xix. 65, xxxvii. 164 sqq.), speak in the first person without the intervention of the usual imperative "say" (sing. or pl.), the speaker throughout is God, either in the first person singular, or more commonly the plural of majesty "we." The same mode of address is familiar to us from the prophets of the Old Testament; the human personality disappears, in the moment of inspiration, behind the God by whom it is filled. But all the greatest of the Hebrew prophets fall back speedily upon the unassuming human "I"; while in the Koran the divine "I" is the stereotyped form of address. Mohammed, however, really felt himself to be the instrument of God; this consciousness was no doubt brighter at his first appearance than it afterwards became, but it never entirely forsook him. We might therefore readily pardon him for giving out, not only the results of imaginative and emotional excitement, but also many expositions or decrees which were the outcome of cool calculation, as the word of God, if he had only attained the pure moral altitude which in an Isaiah or a Jeremiah fills us with admiration after the lapse of ages.

The rationale of revelation is explained in the Koran itself as follows:—In heaven is the original text ("the mother of the book," xliii. 3; "a concealed book," lv. 77; "a well-guarded tablet," lxxxv. 22). By a process of "sending down" (*tanzíl*), one piece after another was communicated to the Prophet. The mediator was an angel, who is called sometimes the "Spirit" (xxvi. 193), sometimes the "holy Spirit" (xvi. 104), and at a later time "Gabriel" (ii. 91). This angel dictates the revelation to the Prophet, who repeats it after him, and afterwards proclaims it to the world (lxxxvii. 6, etc.). It is plain that we have here a somewhat crude attempt of the Prophet to represent to himself the more or less unconscious process by which his ideas

arose and gradually took shape in his mind. It is no wonder if in such confused imagery the details are not always self-consistent. When, for example, this heavenly archetype is said to be in the hands of an exalted "scribe" (lxxx. 13 sqq.), this seems a transition to a quite different set of ideas, namely, the books of fate, or the record of all human actions —conceptions which are actually found in the Koran. It is to be observed, at all events, that Mohammed's transcendental idea of God, as a Being exalted altogether above the world, excludes the thought of direct intercourse between the Prophet and God.

It is an explicit statement of the Koran that the sacred book was revealed ("sent down") by God, not all at once, but piecemeal and gradually (xxv. 34). This is evident from the actual composition of the book, and is confirmed by Moslem tradition. That is to say, Mohammed issued his revelations in fly-leaves of greater or less extent. A single piece of this kind was called either, like the entire collection, *ḳor'án*, *i.e.* "reading," or rather "recitation;" or *kitáb*, "writing;" or *súra*, which is the late-Hebrew *shúrá*, and means literally "series." The last became, in the lifetime of Mohammed, the regular designation of the individual sections as distinguished from the whole collection; and accordingly it is the name given to the separate chapters of the existing Koran. These chapters are of very unequal length. Since many of the shorter ones are undoubtedly complete in themselves, it is natural to assume that the longer, which are sometimes very comprehensive, have arisen from the amalgamation of various originally distinct revelations. This supposition is favoured by the numerous traditions which give us the circumstances under which this or that short piece, now incorporated in a larger section, was revealed; and also by the fact that the connection of thought in the present súras often seems to be interrupted.

And in reality many pieces of the long súras have to be severed out as originally independent; even in the short ones parts are often found which cannot have been there at first. At the same time we must beware of carrying this sifting operation too far,—as I now believe myself to have done in my earlier works, and as Sprenger in his great book on Mohammed also sometimes seems to do. That some súras were of considerable length from the first is seen, for example, from xii., which contains a short introduction, then the history of Joseph, and then a few concluding observations, and is therefore perfectly homogeneous. In like manner, xx., which is mainly occupied with the history of Moses, forms a complete whole. The same is true of xviii., which at first sight seems to fall into several pieces; the history of the seven sleepers, the grotesque narrative about Moses, and that about Alexander "the Horned," are all connected together, and the same rhyme runs through the whole súra. Even in the separate narrations we may observe how readily the Koran passes from one subject to another, how little care is taken to express all the transitions of thought, and how frequently clauses are omitted, which are almost indispensable. We are not at liberty, therefore, in every case where the connection in the Koran is obscure, to say that it is really broken, and set it down as the clumsy patchwork of a later hand. Even in the old Arabic poetry such abrupt transitions are of very frequent occurrence. It is not uncommon for the Koran, after a new subject has been entered on, to return gradually or suddenly to the former theme,—a proof that there at least separation is not to be thought of. In short, however imperfectly the Koran may have been redacted, in the majority of cases the present súras are identical with the originals.

How these revelations actually arose in Mohammed's mind is a question which it is almost as idle to discuss as

it would be to analyse the workings of the mind of a poet. In his early career, sometimes perhaps in its later stages also, many revelations must have burst from him in uncontrollable excitement, so that he could not possibly regard them otherwise than as divine inspirations. We must bear in mind that he was no cold systematic thinker, but an Oriental visionary, brought up in crass superstition, and without intellectual discipline; a man whose nervous temperament had been powerfully worked on by ascetic austerities, and who was all the more irritated by the opposition he encountered, because he had little of the heroic in his nature. Filled with his religious ideas and visions, he might well fancy he heard the angel bidding him recite what was said to him. There may have been many a revelation of this kind which no one ever heard but himself, as he repeated it to himself in the silence of the night (lxxiii. 4). Indeed the Koran itself admits that he forgot some revelations (lxxxvii. 7). But by far the greatest part of the book is undoubtedly the result of deliberation, touched more or less with emotion, and animated by a certain rhetorical rather than poetical glow. Many passages are based upon purely intellectual reflection. It is said that Mohammed occasionally uttered such a passage immediately after one of those epileptic fits which not only his followers, but (for a time at least) he himself also, regarded as tokens of intercourse with the higher powers. If that is the case, it is impossible to say whether the trick was in the utterance of the revelation or in the fit itself.

How the various pieces of the Koran took literary form is uncertain. Mohammed himself, so far as we can discover, never wrote down anything. The question whether he could read and write has been much debated among Moslems, unfortunately more with dogmatic arguments and spurious traditions than authentic proofs. At present, one is in-

clined to say that he was not altogether ignorant of these arts, but that from want of practice he found it convenient to employ some one else whenever he had anything to write. After the emigration to Medina (A.D. 622) we are told that short pieces — chiefly legal decisions — were taken down immediately after they were revealed, by an adherent whom he summoned for the purpose; so that nothing stood in the way of their publication. Hence it is probable that in Mecca, where, as in a mercantile town, the art of writing was commoner than in Medina, a place of agriculture, he had already begun to have his oracles committed to writing. That even long portions of the Koran existed in written form from an early date, may be pretty safely inferred from various indications; especially from the fact that in Mecca the Prophet had caused insertions to be made, and pieces to be erased, in his previous revelations. For we cannot suppose that he knew the longer súras by heart so perfectly that he was able after a time to lay his finger upon any particular passage. In some instances, indeed, he may have relied too much on his memory. For example, he seems to have occasionally dictated the same súra to different persons in slightly different terms. In such cases, no doubt, he may have partly intended to introduce improvements; and so long as the difference was merely in expression, without affecting the sense, it could occasion no perplexity to his followers. None of them had literary pedantry enough to question the consistency of the divine revelation on that ground. In particular instances, however, the difference of reading was too important to be overlooked. Thus the Koran itself confesses that the unbelievers cast it up as a reproach to the Prophet that God sometimes substituted one verse for another (xvi. 103). On one occasion, when a dispute arose between two of his own followers as to the true reading of a passage which both had received from the

Prophet himself, Mohammed is said to have explained that the Koran was revealed in seven forms. In this dictum, which perhaps is genuine, seven stands, of course, as in many other cases, for an indefinite but limited number. But one may imagine what a world of trouble it has cost the Moslem theologians to explain the saying in accordance with their dogmatic beliefs. A great number of explanations are current, some of which claim the authority of the Prophet himself; as, indeed, fictitious utterances of Mohammed play throughout a conspicuous part in the exegesis of the Koran. One very favourite, but utterly untenable interpretation is that the "seven forms" are seven different Arabic dialects.

When such discrepancies came to the cognisance of Mohammed it was doubtless his desire that only one of the conflicting texts should be considered authentic; only he never gave himself much trouble to have his wish carried into effect. Although in theory he was an upholder of verbal inspiration, he did not push the doctrine to its extreme consequences; his practical good sense did not take these things so strictly as the theologians of later centuries. Sometimes, however, he did suppress whole sections or verses, enjoining his followers to efface or forget them, and declaring them to be "abrogated." A very remarkable case is that of the two verses in liii., when he had recognised three heathen goddesses as exalted beings, possessing influence with God. This he had done in a moment of weakness, to win his countrymen by a compromise which still left Allah in the highest rank. He attained his purpose indeed, but was soon visited by remorse, and declared the words in question to have been inspirations of the Evil One.

So much for abrogated readings; the case is somewhat different when we come to the abrogation of laws and directions to the Moslems, which often occurs in the Koran.

There is nothing in this at variance with Mohammed's idea of God. God is to him an absolute despot, who declares a thing right or wrong from no inherent necessity, but by His arbitrary fiat. This God varies His commands at pleasure, prescribes one law for the Christians, another for the Jews, and a third for the Moslems; nay, He even changes His instructions to the Moslems when it pleases Him. Thus, for example, the Koran contains very different directions, suited to varying circumstances, as to the treatment which idolaters are to receive at the hands of believers. But Mohammed showed no anxiety to have these superseded enactments destroyed. Believers could be in no uncertainty as to which of two contradictory passages remained in force; and they might still find edification in that which had become obsolete. That later generations might not so easily distinguish the "abrogated" from the "abrogating" did not occur to Mohammed, whose vision, naturally enough, seldom extended to the future of his religious community. Current events were invariably kept in view in the revelations. In Medina it called forth the admiration of the Faithful to observe how often God gave them the answer to a question whose settlement was urgently required at the moment. The same *naïveté* appears in a remark of the Caliph Othmán about a doubtful case: "If the Apostle of God were still alive, methinks there had been a Koran passage revealed on this point." Not unfrequently the divine word was found to coincide with the advice which Mohammed had received from his most intimate disciples. "Omar was many a time of a certain opinion," says one tradition, "and the Koran was then revealed accordingly."

The contents of the different parts of the Koran are extremely varied. Many passages consist of theological or moral reflections. We are reminded of the greatness, the goodness, the righteousness of God as manifested in Nature,

in history, and in revelation through the prophets, especially through Mohammed. God is magnified as the One, the All-powerful. Idolatry and all deification of created beings, such as the worship of Christ as the Son of God, are unsparingly condemned. The joys of heaven and the pains of hell are depicted in vivid sensuous imagery, as is also the terror of the whole creation at the advent of the last day and the judgment of the world. Believers receive general moral instruction, as well as directions for special circumstances. The lukewarm are rebuked, the enemies threatened with terrible punishment, both temporal and eternal. To the sceptical the truth of Islam is held forth; and a certain, not very cogent, method of demonstration predominates. In many passages the sacred book falls into a diffuse preaching style, others seem more like proclamations or general orders. A great number contain ceremonial or civil laws, or even special commands to individuals down to such matters as the regulation of Mohammed's harem. In not a few, definite questions are answered which had actually been propounded to the Prophet by believers or infidels. Mohammed himself, too, repeatedly receives direct injunctions, and does not escape an occasional rebuke. One súra (i.) is a prayer, two (cxiii., cxiv.) are magical formulas. Many súras treat of a single topic, others embrace several.

From the mass of material comprised in the Koran—and the account we have given is far from exhaustive—we should select the histories of the ancient prophets and saints as possessing a peculiar interest. The purpose of Mohammed is to show from these histories how God in former times had rewarded the righteous and punished their enemies. For the most part the old prophets only serve to introduce a little variety in point of form, for they are almost in every case facsimiles of Mohammed himself. They preach exactly like him, they have to bring the very same charges against

their opponents, who on their part behave exactly as the unbelieving inhabitants of Mecca. The Koran even goes so far as to make Noah contend against the worship of certain false gods, mentioned by name, who were worshipped by the Arabs of Mohammed's time. In an address which is put in the mouth of Abraham (xxvi. 75 sqq.) the reader quite forgets that it is Abraham, and not Mohammed (or God Himself), who is speaking. Other narratives are intended rather for amusement, although they are always well seasoned with edifying phrases. It is no wonder that the godless Koraishites thought these stories of the Koran not nearly so entertaining as those of Rostam and Ispandiár related by Nadr the son of Hárith, who, when travelling as a merchant, had learned on the Euphrates the heroic mythology of the Persians. But the Prophet was so exasperated by this rivalry that when Nadr fell into his power after the battle of Badr, he caused him to be executed; although in all other cases he readily pardoned his fellow-countrymen.

These histories are chiefly about Scripture characters, especially those of the Old Testament. But the deviations from the Biblical narratives are very marked. Many of the alterations are found in the legendary anecdotes of the Jewish Aggádá and the New Testament Apocrypha; but many more are due to misconceptions such as only a listener (not the reader of a book) could fall into. The most ignorant Jew could never have mistaken Haman (the minister of Ahasuerus) for the minister of Pharaoh, or identified Miriam the sister of Moses with Mary (=Miriam) the mother of Christ. In addition to such misconceptions there are sundry capricious alterations, some of them very grotesque, due to Mohammed himself. For instance, in his ignorance of everything out of Arabia, he makes the fertility of Egypt —where rain is almost never seen and never missed—depend

on rain instead of the inundations of the Nile (xii. 49). The strange tale of "the Horned" (*i.e.* Alexander the Great, xviii. 82 sqq.) reflects, as has been lately discovered, a rather absurd story, written by a Syrian in the beginning of the sixth century; we may believe that the substance of it was related to the Prophet by some Christian. Besides Jewish and Christian histories, there are a few about old Arabian prophets. In these he seems to have handled his materials even more freely than in the others.

The opinion has already been expressed that Mohammed did not make use of written sources. Coincidences and divergences alike can always be accounted for by oral communications from Jews who knew a little and Christians who knew next to nothing. Even in the rare passages where we can trace direct resemblances to the text of the Old Testament (comp. xxi. 105 with Ps. xxxvii. 29; i. 5 with Ps. xxvii. 11) or the New (comp. vii. 48 with Luke xvi. 24; xlvi. 19 with Luke xvi. 25), there is nothing more than might readily have been picked up in conversation with any Jew or Christian. In Medina, where he had the opportunity of becoming acquainted with Jews of some culture, he learned some things out of the Mishna, *e.g.* v. 35 corresponds almost word for word with Mishna *Sanh.* iv. 5; compare also ii. 183 with Mishna *Ber.* i. 2. That these are only cases of oral communication will be admitted by any one with the slightest knowledge of the circumstances. Otherwise we might even conclude that Mohammed had studied the Talmud; *e.g.* the regulation as to ablution by rubbing with sand, where water cannot be obtained (iv. 46), corresponds to a Talmudic ordinance (*Ber.* 15*a*). Of Christianity he can have been able to learn very little even in Medina; as may be seen from the absurd travesty of the institution of the Eucharist in v. 112 sqq. For the rest, it is highly improbable that before the Koran any real literary

production—anything that could be strictly called a book—existed in the Arabic language.

In point of style and artistic effect, the different parts of the Koran are of very unequal value. An unprejudiced and critical reader will certainly find very few passages where his aesthetic susceptibilities are thoroughly satisfied. But he will often be struck, especially in the older pieces, by a wild force of passion, and a vigorous, if not rich, imagination. Descriptions of heaven and hell, and allusions to God's working in Nature, not unfrequently show a certain amount of poetic power. In other places also the style is sometimes lively and impressive; though it is rarely indeed that we come across such strains of touching simplicity as in the middle of xciii. The greater part of the Koran is decidedly prosaic; much of it indeed is stiff in style. Of course, with such a variety of material, we cannot expect every part to be equally vivacious, or imaginative, or poetic. A decree about the right of inheritance, or a point of ritual, must necessarily be expressed in prose, if it is to be intelligible. No one complains of the civil laws in Exodus or the sacrificial ritual in Leviticus, because they want the fire of Isaiah or the tenderness of Deuteronomy. But Mohammed's mistake consists in persistent and slavish adherence to the semi-poetic form which he had at first adopted in accordance with his own taste and that of his hearers. For instance, he employs rhyme in dealing with the most prosaic subjects, and thus produces the disagreeable effect of incongruity between style and matter. It has to be considered, however, that many of those sermonising pieces which are so tedious to us, especially when we read two or three in succession (perhaps in a very inadequate translation), must have had a quite different effect when recited under the burning sky and on the barren soil of Mecca. There, thoughts about God's greatness and man's duty, which are familiar to us

from childhood, were all new to the hearers—it is hearers we have to think of in the first instance, not readers—to whom, at the same time, every allusion had a meaning which often escapes our notice. When Mohammed spoke of the goodness of the Lord in creating the clouds, and bringing them across the cheerless desert, and pouring them out on the earth to restore its rich vegetation, that must have been a picture of thrilling interest to the Arabs, who are accustomed to see from three to five years elapse before a copious shower comes to clothe the wilderness once more with luxuriant pastures. It requires an effort for us, under our clouded skies, to realise in some degree the intensity of that impression.

The fact that scraps of poetical phraseology are specially numerous in the earlier súras, enables us to understand why the prosaic mercantile community of Mecca regarded their eccentric townsman as a "poet," or even a "possessed poet." Mohammed himself had to disclaim such titles, because he felt himself to be a divinely-inspired prophet; but we too, from our standpoint, shall fully acquit him of poetic genius. Like many other predominantly religious characters, he had no appreciation of poetic beauty; and if we may believe one anecdote related of him, at a time when every one made verses, he affected ignorance of the most elementary rules of prosody. Hence the style of the Koran is not poetical but rhetorical; and the powerful effect which some portions produce on us is gained by rhetorical means. Accordingly the sacred book has not even the artistic form of poetry; which, among the Arabs, includes a stringent metre, as well as rhyme. The Koran is never metrical, and only a few exceptionally eloquent portions fall into a sort of spontaneous rhythm. On the other hand, the rhyme is regularly maintained; although, especially in the later pieces, after a very slovenly fashion. Rhymed prose was a favourite form

of composition among the Arabs of that day, and Mohammed adopted it; but if it imparts a certain sprightliness to some passages, it proves on the whole a burdensome yoke. The Moslems themselves have observed that the tyranny of the rhyme often makes itself apparent in derangement of the order of words, and in the choice of verbal forms which would not otherwise have been employed; *e.g.* an imperfect instead of a perfect. In one place, to save the rhyme, he calls Mount Sinai *Sínín* (xcv. 2) instead of *Sínâ* (xxiii. 20); in another Elijah is called *Ilyásín* (xxxvii. 130) instead of *Ilyás* (vi. 85, xxxvii. 123). The substance even is modified to suit exigencies of rhyme. Thus the Prophet would scarcely have fixed on the unusual number of *eight* angels round the throne of God (lxix. 17) if the word *thamániyah*, "eight," had not happened to fall in so well with the rhyme. And when lv. speaks of *two* heavenly gardens, each with *two* fountains and *two* kinds of fruit, and again of *two* similar gardens, all this is simply because the dual termination (*án*) corresponds to the syllable that controls the rhyme in that whole súra. In the later pieces, Mohammed often inserts edifying remarks, entirely out of keeping with the context, merely to complete his rhyme. In Arabic it is such an easy thing to accumulate masses of words with the same termination, that the gross negligence of the rhyme in the Koran is doubly remarkable. One may say that this is another mark of the Prophet's want of mental training, and incapacity for introspective criticism.

On the whole, while many parts of the Koran undoubtedly have considerable rhetorical power, even over an unbelieving reader, the book, æsthetically considered, is by no means a first-rate performance. To begin with what we are most competent to criticise, let us look at some of the more extended narratives. It has already been noticed how vehement and abrupt they are where they ought to be

characterised by epic repose. Indispensable links, both in expression and in the sequence of events, are often omitted, so that to understand these histories is sometimes far easier for us than for those who heard them first, because we know most of them from better sources. Along with this, there is a great deal of superfluous verbiage; and nowhere do we find a steady advance in the narration. Contrast, in these respects, "the most beautiful tale," the history of Joseph (xii.), and its glaring improprieties, with the story in Genesis, so admirably conceived and so admirably executed in spite of some slight discrepancies. Similar faults are found in the non-narrative portions of the Koran. The connection of ideas is extremely loose, and even the syntax betrays great awkwardness. Anacolutha are of frequent occurrence, and cannot be explained as conscious literary devices. Many sentences begin with a "when" or "on the day when," which seems to hover in the air, so that the commentators are driven to supply a "think of this" or some such ellipsis. Again, there is no great literary skill evinced in the frequent and needless harping on the same words and phrases; in xviii., for example, "till that" (*hattá idhá*) occurs no fewer than eight times. Mohammed, in short, is not in any sense a master of style. This opinion will be endorsed by any European who reads through the book with an impartial spirit and some knowledge of the language, without taking into account the tiresome effect of its endless iterations. But in the ears of every pious Moslem such a judgment will sound almost as shocking as downright atheism or polytheism. Among the Moslems, the Koran has always been looked on as the most perfect model of style and language. This feature of it is in their dogmatic the greatest of all miracles, the incontestable proof of its divine origin. Such a view on the part of men who knew Arabic infinitely better than the most accomplished European Arabist will ever do, may well

startle us. In fact, the Koran boldly challenged its opponents to produce ten súras, or even a single one, like those of the sacred book, and they never did so. That, to be sure, on calm reflection, is not so very surprising. Revelations of the kind which Mohammed uttered, no unbeliever could produce without making himself a laughing-stock. However little real originality there is in Mohammed's doctrines, as against his own countrymen he was thoroughly original, even in the form of his oracles. To compose such revelations at will was beyond the power of the most expert literary artist; it would have required either a prophet or a shameless impostor. And if such a character appeared *after* Mohammed, still he could never be anything but an imitator, like the false prophets who arose about the time of his death and afterwards. That the adversaries should produce any sample whatsoever of poetry or rhetoric equal to the Koran is not at all what the Prophet demands. In that case he would have been put to shame, even in the eyes of many of his own followers, by the first poem that came to hand. Nevertheless, it is on such a false interpretation of this challenge that the dogma of the incomparable excellence of the style and diction of the Koran is based. The rest has been accomplished by dogmatic prejudice, which is quite capable of working other miracles besides turning a defective literary production into an unrivalled masterpiece in the eyes of believers. This view once accepted, the next step was to find everywhere evidence of the perfection of the style and language. And if here and there, as one can scarcely doubt, there was among the old Moslems a lover of poetry who had his difficulties about this dogma, he had to beware of uttering an opinion which might have cost him his head. We know of at least one rationalistic theologian who defined the dogma in such a way that we can see he did not believe it (Shahrastání, p. 39). The truth is, it would have been a miracle indeed if the style

of the Koran had been perfect. For although there was at that time a recognised poetical style, already degenerating to mannerism, a prose style did not exist. All beginnings are difficult; and it can never be esteemed a serious charge against Mohammed that his book, the first prose work of a high order in the language, testifies to the awkwardness of the beginner. And further, we must always remember that entertainment and æsthetic effect were at most subsidiary objects. The great aim was persuasion and conversion; and, say what we will, that aim has been realised on the most imposing scale.

Mohammed repeatedly calls attention to the fact that the Koran is not written, like other sacred books, in a strange language, but in Arabic, and therefore is intelligible to all. At that time, along with foreign ideas, many foreign words had crept into the language, especially Aramaic terms for religious conceptions of Jewish or Christian origin. Some of these had already passed into general use, while others were confined to a more limited circle. Mohammed, who could not fully express his new ideas in the common language of his countrymen, but had frequently to find out new terms for himself, made free use of such Jewish and Christian words, as was done, though perhaps to a smaller extent, by certain thinkers and poets of that age who had more or less risen above the level of heathenism. In Mohammed's case this is the less wonderful, because he was indebted to the instruction of Jews and Christians whose Arabic—as the Koran pretty clearly intimates with regard to one of them—was very defective. Nor is it very surprising to find that his use of these words is sometimes as much at fault as his comprehension of the histories which he learned from the same people—that he applies Aramaic expressions as incorrectly as many uneducated persons now employ words derived from the French. Thus, *forkán* means really

"redemption," but Mohammed (misled by the Arabic meaning of the root *frk*, "sever," "decide") uses it for "revelation." *Milla* is properly "Word," but in the Koran "religion." *Illiyún* (lxxxiii. 18, 19) is apparently the Hebrew name of God, *Elyón*, "the Most High;" Mohammed uses it of a heavenly book (see S. Fraenkel, *De vocabulis in antiquis Arabum carminibus et in Corano peregrinis*, Leyden 1880, p. 23). So again the word *mathání* is, as Geiger has conjectured, the regular Arabic plural of the Aramaic *mathnítha*, which is the same as the Hebrew *Mishna*, and denotes, in Jewish usage, a legal decision of some of the ancient Rabbins. But in the Koran "the seven *Mathání*" (xv. 87) are probably the seven verses of súra i., so that Mohammed appears to have understood it in the sense of "saying" or "sentence" (comp. xxxix. 24). Words of Christian origin are less frequent in the Koran. It is an interesting fact that of these a few have come over from the Abyssinian, such as *hawárlyún*, "apostles," *máida*, "table," and two or three others; these all make their first appearance in súras of the Medina period. The word *shaitán*, "Satan," which was likewise borrowed, at least in the first instance, from the Abyssinian, had probably been already introduced into the language. Sprenger has rightly observed that Mohammed makes a certain parade of these foreign terms, as of other peculiarly constructed expressions; in this he followed a favourite practice of contemporary poets. It is the tendency of the imperfectly educated to delight in out-of-the-way expressions, and on such minds they readily produce a remarkably solemn and mysterious impression. This was exactly the kind of effect that Mohammed desired, and to secure it he seems even to have invented a few odd vocables, as *ghislín* (lxix. 36), *sijjín* (lxxxiii. 7, 8), *tasním* (lxxxiii. 27), and *salsabíl* (lxxvi. 18). But, of course, the necessity of enabling his hearers to understand ideas which

they must have found sufficiently novel in themselves, imposed tolerably narrow limits on such eccentricities.

The constituents of our present Koran belong partly to the Mecca period (before A.D. 622), partly to the period commencing with the emigration to Medina (from the autumn of 622 to 8th June 632). Mohammed's position in Medina was entirely different from that which he had occupied in his native town. In the former he was from the first the leader of a powerful party, and gradually became the autocratic ruler of Arabia; in the latter he was only the despised preacher of a small congregation. This difference, as was to be expected, appears in the Koran. The Medina pieces, whether entire súras or isolated passages interpolated in Meccan súras, are accordingly pretty broadly distinct, as to their contents, from those issued in Mecca. In the great majority of cases there can be no doubt whatever whether a piece first saw the light in Mecca or in Medina; and, for the most part, the internal evidence is borne out by Moslem tradition. And since the revelations given in Medina frequently take notice of events about which we have pretty accurate information, and whose dates are at least approximately known, we are often in a position to fix their date with, at any rate, considerable certainty; here, again, tradition renders valuable assistance. Even with regard to the Medina passages, however, a great deal remains uncertain, partly because the allusions to historical events and circumstances are generally rather obscure, partly because traditions about the occasion of the revelation of the various pieces are often fluctuating, and often rest on misunderstanding or arbitrary conjecture. But, at all events, it is far easier to arrange in some sort of chronological order the Medina súras than those composed in Mecca. There is, indeed, one tradition which professes to furnish a chronological list of all the súras. But not to mention that it occurs in several divergent

forms, and that it takes no account of the fact that our present súras are partly composed of pieces of different dates, it contains so many suspicious or undoubtedly false statements, that it is impossible to attach any great importance to it. Besides, it is *à priori* unlikely that a contemporary of Mohammed should have drawn up such a list; and if any one had made the attempt, he would have found it almost impossible to obtain reliable information as to the order of the earlier Meccan súras. We have in this list no genuine tradition, but rather the lucubrations of an undoubtedly conscientious Moslem critic, who may have lived about a century after the emigration.

Among the revelations put forth in Mecca there is a considerable number of (for the most part) short súras, which strike every attentive reader as being the oldest. They are in an altogether different strain from many others, and in their whole composition they show least resemblance to the Medina pieces. It is no doubt conceivable—as Sprenger supposes—that Mohammed might have returned at intervals to his earlier manner; but since this group possesses a remarkable similarity of style, and since the gradual formation of a different style is on the whole an unmistakable fact, the assumption has little probability; and we shall therefore abide by the opinion that these form a distinct group. At the opposite extreme from them stands another cluster, showing quite obvious affinities with the style of the Medina súras, which must therefore be assigned to the later part of the Prophet's work in Mecca. Between these two groups stand a number of other Meccan súras, which in every respect mark the transition from the first period to the third. It need hardly be said that the three periods—which were first distinguished by Professor Weil—are not separated by sharp lines of division. With regard to some súras, it may be doubtful whether they ought to be reckoned

amongst the middle group, or with one or other of the extremes. And it is altogether impossible, within these groups, to establish even a probable chronological arrangement of the individual revelations. In default of clear allusions to well-known events, or events whose date can be determined, we might indeed endeavour to trace the psychological development of the Prophet by means of the Koran, and arrange its parts accordingly. But in such an undertaking one is always apt to take subjective assumptions or mere fancies for established data. Good traditions about the origin of the Meccan revelations are not very numerous. In fact, the whole history of Mohammed previous to his emigration is so imperfectly related that we are not even sure in what year he appeared as a prophet. Probably it was in A.D. 610; it may have been somewhat earlier, but scarcely later. If, as one tradition says, XXX. 1 sq. ("The Romans are overcome in the nearest neighbouring land") refers to the defeat of the Byzantines by the Persians, not far from Damascus, about the spring of 614, it would follow that the third group, to which this passage belongs, covers the greater part of the Meccan period. And it is not in itself unlikely that the passionate vehemence which characterises the first group was of short duration. Nor is the assumption contradicted by the tolerably well-attested, though far from incontestable statement, that when Omar was converted (A.D. 615 or 616), XX., which belongs to the second group, already existed in writing. But the reference of XXX. 1 sq. to this particular battle is by no means so certain that positive conclusions can be drawn from it. It is the same with other allusions in the Meccan súras to occurrences whose chronology can be partially ascertained. It is better, therefore, to rest satisfied with a merely relative determination of the order of even the three great clusters of Meccan revelations.

In the pieces of the first period the convulsive excitement of the Prophet often expresses itself with the utmost vehemence. He is so carried away by his emotion that he cannot choose his words; they seem rather to burst from him. Many of these pieces remind us of the oracles of the old heathen soothsayers, whose style is known to us from imitations, although we have perhaps not a single genuine specimen. Like those other oracles, the súras of this period, which are never very long, are composed of short sentences with tolerably pure but rapidly-changing rhymes. The oaths, too, with which many of them begin, were largely used by the soothsayers. Some of these oaths are very uncouth and hard to understand, some of them perhaps were not meant to be understood, for indeed all sorts of strange things are met with in these chapters. Here and there Mohammed speaks of visions, and appears even to see angels before him in bodily form. There are some intensely vivid descriptions of the resurrection and the last day, which must have exercised a demonic power over men who were quite unfamiliar with such pictures. Other pieces paint in glowing colours the joys of heaven and the pains of hell. However, the súras of this period are not all so wild as these; and those which are conceived in a calmer mood appear to be the oldest. Yet, one must repeat, it is exceedingly difficult to make out any strict chronological sequence. For instance, it is by no means certain whether the beginning of xcvi. is really what a widely-circulated tradition calls it, the oldest part of the whole Koran. That tradition goes back to the Prophet's favourite wife Aïsha; but as she was not born at the time when the revelation is said to have been made, it can only contain at the best what Mohammed told her years afterwards, from his own not very clear recollection, with or without fictitious additions. Aïsha, moreover, is by no means very trustworthy. And,

besides, there are other pieces mentioned by others as the oldest. In any case xcvi. 1 sqq. is certainly very early. According to the traditional view, which appears to be correct, it treats of a vision in which the Prophet receives an injunction to recite a revelation conveyed to him by the angel. It is interesting to observe that here already two things are brought forward as proofs of the omnipotence and care of God: one is the creation of man out of a seminal drop—an idea to which Mohammed often recurs; the other is the then recently introduced art of writing, which the Prophet instinctively seizes on as a means of propagating his doctrines. It was only after Mohammed encountered obstinate resistance that the tone of the revelations became thoroughly passionate. In such cases he was not slow to utter terrible threats against those who ridiculed the preaching of the unity of God, of the resurrection, and of the judgment. His own uncle, Abú Lahab, had somewhat brusquely repelled him, and in a brief special súra (cxi.) he and his wife are consigned to hell. The súras of this period form almost exclusively the concluding portions of the present text. One is disposed to assume, however, that they were at one time more numerous, and that many of them were lost at an early period.

Since Mohammed's strength lay in his enthusiastic and fiery imagination rather than in the wealth of ideas and clearness of abstract thought on which exact reasoning depends, it follows that the older súras, in which the former qualities have free scope, must be more attractive to us than the later. In the súras of the second period the imaginative glow perceptibly diminishes; there is still fire and animation, but the tone becomes gradually more prosaic. As the feverish restlessness subsides, the periods are drawn out, and the revelations as a whole become longer. The truth of the new doctrine is proved by

accumulated instances of God's working in nature and in history; the objections of opponents, whether advanced in good faith or in jest, are controverted by arguments; but the demonstration is often confused or even weak. The histories of the earlier prophets, which had occasionally been briefly touched on in the first period, are now related, sometimes at great length. On the whole, the charm of the style is passing away.

There is one piece of the Koran, belonging to the beginning of this period, if not to the close of the former, which claims particular notice. This is i., the Lord's Prayer of the Moslems, and beyond dispute the gem of the Koran. The words of this súra, which is known as *al-fátiha* ("the opening one"), are as follows:—

"(1) In the name of God, the compassionate Compassioner. (2) Praise be [literally "is"] to God, the Lord of the worlds, (3) the compassionate Compassioner, (4) the Sovereign of the day of judgment. (5) Thee do we worship, and of Thee do we beg assistance. (6) Direct us in the right way; (7) in the way of those to whom Thou hast been gracious, on whom there is no wrath, and who go not astray."

The thoughts are so simple as to need no explanation; and yet the prayer is full of meaning. It is true that there is not a single original idea of Mohammed's in it. Several words and turns of expression are borrowed directly from the Jews, in particular the designation of God as the "Compassioner," *Rahmán*. This is simply the Jewish *Rahmáná*, which was a favourite name for God in the Talmudic period. Mohammed seems for a while to have entertained the thought of adopting *al-Rahmán* as a proper name of God, in place of *Alláh*, which was already used by the heathens.[1] This purpose he ultimately relinquished, but it is just in

[1] Since in Arabic also the root *RHM* signifies "to have pity," the Arabs must have at once perceived the force of the new name.

the súras of the second period that the use of *Rahmán* is specially frequent. It was probably in the first súra also that Mohammed first introduced the formula, "In the name of God," etc. It is to be regretted that this prayer must lose its effect through too frequent use, for every Moslem who says his five prayers regularly—as the most of them do—repeats it not less than twenty times a day.

The súras of the third Meccan period, which form a pretty large part of our present Koran, are almost entirely prosaic. Some of the revelations are of considerable extent, and the single verses also are much longer than in the older súras. Only now and then a gleam of poetic power flashes out. A sermonising tone predominates. The súras are very edifying for one who is already reconciled to their import, but to us, at least, they do not seem very well fitted to carry conviction to the minds of unbelievers. That impression, however, is not correct, for in reality the demonstrations of these longer Meccan súras appear to have been peculiarly influential for the propagation of Islam. Mohammed's mission was not to Europeans, but to a people who, though quick-witted and receptive, were not accustomed to logical thinking, while they had outgrown their ancient religion.

When we reach the Medina period it becomes, as has been indicated, much easier to understand the revelations in their historical relations, since our knowledge of the history of Mohammed in Medina is tolerable complete. In many cases the historical occasion is perfectly clear, in others we can at least recognise the general situation from which they arose, and thus approximately fix their time. There still remains, however, a remnant, of which we can only say that it belongs to Medina.

The style of this period bears a pretty close resemblance to that of the latest Meccan period. It is for the most part pure prose, enriched by occasional rhetorical embellish-

ments. Yet even here there are many bright and impressive passages, especially in those sections which may be regarded as proclamations to the army of the faithful. For the Moslems, Mohammed has many different messages. At one time it is a summons to do battle for the faith; at another, a series of reflections on recently experienced success or misfortune, or a rebuke for their weak faith, or an exhortation to virtue, and so on. He often addresses himself to the "doubters," some of whom vacillate between faith and unbelief, others make a pretence of faith, while others scarcely take the trouble even to do that. They are no consolidated party, but to Mohammed they are all equally vexatious, because, as soon as danger has to be encountered, or a contribution is levied, they all alike fall away. There are frequent outbursts, ever increasing in bitterness, against the Jews, who were very numerous in Medina and its neighbourhood when Mohammed arrived. He has much less to say against the Christians, with whom he never came closely in contact; and as for the idolaters, there was little occasion in Medina to have many words with them. A part of the Medina pieces consists of formal laws belonging to the ceremonial, civil, and criminal codes; or directions about certain temporary complications. The most objectionable parts of the whole Koran are those which treat of Mohammed's relations with women. The laws and regulations were generally very concise revelations, but most of them have been amalgamated with other pieces of similar or dissimilar import, and are now found in very long súras.

Such is an imperfect sketch of the composition and the internal history of the Koran, but it is probably sufficient to show that the book is a very heterogeneous collection. If only those passages had been preserved which had a permanent value for the theology, the ethics, or the jurisprudence of the Moslems, a few fragments would have been

amply sufficient. Fortunately for knowledge, respect for the sacredness of the letter has led to the collection of all the revelations that could possibly be collected,—the "abrogating" along with the "abrogated," passages referring to passing circumstances as well as those of lasting importance. Every one who takes up the book in the proper religious frame of mind, like most of the Moslems, reads pieces directed against long-obsolete absurd customs of Mecca just as devoutly as the weightiest moral precepts,—perhaps even more devoutly, because he does not understand them so well.

At the head of twenty-nine of the súras stand certain initial letters, from which no clear sense can be obtained. Thus, before ii. iii. xxxi. xxxii. we find *ALM* (*Alif Lám Mím*), before xl.–xlvi. *HM* (*Há Mím*). At one time I suggested that these initials did not belong to Mohammed's text, but might be the monograms of possessors of codices, which, through negligence on the part of the editors, were incorporated in the final form of the Koran; but I now deem it more probable that they are to be traced to the Prophet himself, as Sprenger and Loth suppose. One cannot indeed admit the truth of Loth's statement, that in the proper opening words of these súras we may generally find an allusion to the accompanying initials; but it can scarcely be accidental that the first verse of the great majority of them (in iii. it is the second verse) contains the word "book," "revelation," or some equivalent. They usually begin with: "This is the book," or "Revelation ('down sending') of the book," or something similar. Of súras which commence in this way only a few (xviii. xxiv. xxv. xxxix.) want the initials, while only xxix. and xxx. have the initials, and begin differently. These few exceptions may easily have proceeded from ancient corruptions; at all events, they cannot neutralise the evidence of the greater number.

Mohammed seems to have meant these letters for a mystic reference to the archetypal text in heaven. To a man who regarded the art of writing, of which at the best he had but a slight knowledge, as something supernatural, and who lived amongst illiterate people, an A B C may well have seemed more significant than to us who have been initiated into the mysteries of this art from our childhood. The Prophet himself can hardly have attached any particular meaning to these symbols: they served their purpose if they conveyed an impression of solemnity and enigmatical obscurity. In fact, the Koran admits that it contains many things which neither can be, nor were intended to be, understood (iii. 5). To regard these letters as ciphers is a precarious hypothesis, for the simple reason that cryptography is not to be looked for in the very infancy of Arabic writing. If they are actually ciphers, the multiplicity of possible explanations at once precludes the hope of a plausible interpretation. None of the efforts in this direction, whether by Moslem scholars or by Europeans, have led to convincing results. This remark applies even to the ingenious conjecture of Sprenger, that the letters *KHY'Ṣ* (*Káf Hé Yé 'Ain Sád*) before xix. (which treats of John and Jesus, and, according to tradition, was sent to the Christian king of Abyssinia) stand for *Jesus Nazarenus Rex Judæorum*. Sprenger arrives at this explanation by a very artificial method; and besides, Mohammed was not so simple as the Moslem traditionalists, who imagined that the Abyssinians could read a piece of the Arabic Koran. It need hardly be said that the Moslems have from of old applied themselves with great assiduity to the decipherment of these initials, and have sometimes found the deepest mysteries in them. Generally, however, they are content with the prudent conclusion, that God alone knows the meaning of these letters.

When Mohammed died, the separate pieces of the Koran, notwithstanding their theoretical sacredness, existed only in scattered copies; they were consequently in great danger of being partially or entirely destroyed. Many Moslems knew large portions by heart, but certainly no one knew the whole; and a merely oral propagation would have left the door open to all kinds of deliberate and inadvertent alterations. Mohammed himself had never thought of an authentic collection of his revelations; he was usually concerned only with the object of the moment, and the idea that the revelations would be destroyed unless he made provision for their safe preservation, did not enter his mind. A man destitute of literary culture has some difficulty in anticipating the fate of intellectual products. But now, after the death of the Prophet, most of the Arabs revolted against his successor, and had to be reduced to submission by force. Especially sanguinary was the contest against the prophet Maslama, an imitator of Mohammed, commonly known by the derisive diminutive Mosailima (*i.e.* "Little Maslama"). At that time (A.D. 633) many of the most devoted Moslems fell, the very men who knew most Koran pieces by heart. Omar then began to fear that the Koran might be entirely forgotten, and he induced the Caliph Abú Bekr to undertake the collection of all its parts. The Caliph laid the duty on Zaid, the son of Thábit, a native of Medina, then about twenty-two years of age, who had often acted as amanuensis to the Prophet, in whose service he is even said to have learned the Jewish letters. The account of this collection of the Koran has reached us in several substantially identical forms, and goes back to Zaid himself. According to it, he collected the revelations from copies written on flat stones, pieces of leather, ribs of palm-leaves (not palm-leaves themselves), and such-like material, but chiefly "from the breasts of men," *i.e.* from their memory. From these he wrote a

fair copy, which he gave to Abú Bekr, from whom it came to his successor Omar, who again bequeathed it to his daughter Hafsa, one of the widows of the Prophet. This redaction, commonly called *al-sohof* ("the leaves"), had from the first no canonical authority; and its internal arrangement can only be conjectured.

The Moslems were as far as ever from possessing a uniform text of the Koran. The bravest of their warriors sometimes knew deplorably little about it; distinction on *that* field they cheerfully accorded to pious men like Ibn Mas'úd. It was inevitable, however, that discrepancies should emerge between the texts of professed scholars, and as these men in their several localities were authorities on the reading of the Koran, quarrels began to break out between the levies from different districts about the true form of the sacred book. During a campaign in A.H. 30 (A.D. 650–1), Hodhaifa, the victor in the great and decisive battle of Neháwand—which was to the empire of the Sásánians what Gaugamela was to that of the Achæmenidæ—perceived that such disputes might become dangerous, and therefore urged on the Caliph Othmán the necessity for a universally binding text. The matter was entrusted to Zaid, who had made the former collection, with three leading Koraishites. These brought together as many copies as they could lay their hands on, and prepared an edition which was to be canonical for all Moslems. To prevent any further disputes, they burned all the other codices except that of Hafsa, which, however, was soon afterwards destroyed by Marwán, the governor of Medina. The destruction of the earlier codices was an irreparable loss to criticism; but, for the essentially political object of putting an end to controversies by admitting only one form of the common book of religion and of law, this measure was necessary.

The result of these labours is in our hands; as to how

they were conducted we have no trustworthy information, tradition being here too much under the influence of dogmatic presuppositions. The critical methods of a modern scientific commission will not be expected of an age when the highest literary education for an Arab consisted in ability to read and write. It now seems to me highly probable that this second redaction took this simple form: Zaid read off from the codex which he had previously written, and his associates, simultaneously or successively, wrote one copy each to his dictation. These, I suppose, were the three copies which, we are informed, were sent to the capitals Damascus, Basra, and Cufa, to be in the first instance standards for the soldiers of the respective provinces. A fourth copy would doubtless be retained at Medina. Be that as it may, it is impossible now to distinguish in the present form of the book what belongs to the first redaction from what is due to the second.

In the arrangement of the separate sections, a classification according to contents was impracticable because of the variety of subjects often dealt with in one súra. A chronological arrangement was out of the question, because the chronology of the older pieces must have been imperfectly known, and because in some cases passages of different dates had been joined together. Indeed, systematic principles of this kind were altogether disregarded at that period. The pieces were accordingly arranged in indiscriminate order, the only rule observed being to place the long súras first and the shorter towards the end, and even that was far from strictly adhered to. The short opening súra is so placed on account of its superiority to the rest, and two magical formulæ are kept for a sort of protection at the end; these are the only special traces of design. The combination of pieces of different origin may proceed partly from the possessors of the codices from which Zaid compiled his first

complete copy, partly from Zaid himself. The individual súras are separated simply by the superscription, "In the name of God, the compassionate Compassioner," which is wanting only in the ninth. The additional headings found in our texts (the name of the súra, the number of verses, etc.) were not in the original codices, and form no integral part of the Koran.

It is said that Othmán directed Zaid and his associates, in cases of disagreement, to follow the Koraish dialect; but, though well attested, this account can scarcely be correct. The extremely primitive writing of those days was quite incapable of rendering such minute differences as can have existed between the pronunciation of Mecca and that of Medina.

Othmán's Koran was not complete. Some passages are evidently fragmentary; and a few detached pieces are still extant which were originally parts of the Koran, although they have been omitted by Zaid. Amongst these are some which there is no reason to suppose Mohammed desired to suppress. Zaid may easily have overlooked a few stray fragments, but that he purposely omitted anything which he believed to belong to the Koran is very unlikely. It has been conjectured that in deference to his superiors he kept out of the book the names of Mohammed's enemies, if they or their families came afterwards to be respected. But it must be remembered that it was never Mohammed's practice to refer explicitly to contemporary persons and affairs in the Koran. Only a single friend, his adopted son Zaid (xxxiii. 37), and a single enemy, his uncle Abú Lahab (cxi.)—and these for very special reasons—are mentioned by name; and the name of the latter has been left in the Koran with a fearful curse annexed to it, although his son had embraced Islam before the death of Mohammed, and although his descendants belonged to the high nobility. So,

on the other hand, there is no single verse or clause which can be plausibly made out to be an interpolation by Zaid at the instance of Abú Bekr, Omar, or Othmán. Slight clerical errors there may have been, but the Koran of Othmán contains none but genuine elements—though sometimes in very strange order.

It can still be pretty clearly shown in detail that the four codices of Othmán's Koran deviated from one another in points of orthography, in the insertion or omission of a *wa* ("and"), and such-like minutiæ; but these variations nowhere affect the sense. All later manuscripts are derived from these four originals.

At the same time, the other forms of the Koran did not at once become extinct. In particular we have some information about the codex of Obay. If the list which gives the order of its súras is correct, it must have contained substantially the same materials as our text; in that case Obay must have used the original collection of Zaid. The same is true of the codex of Ibn Mas'úd, of which we have also a catalogue. It appears that the principle of putting the longer súras before the shorter was more consistently carried out by him than by Zaid. He omits i. and the magical formulæ of cxiii. cxiv. Obay, on the other hand, had embodied two additional short prayers, whose authenticity I do not now venture to question, as I formerly did. One can easily understand that differences of opinion may have existed as to whether and how far formularies of this kind belonged to the Koran. Some of the divergent readings of both these texts have been preserved, as well as a considerable number of other ancient variants. Most of them are decidedly inferior to the received readings, but some are quite as good, and a few deserve preference.

The only man who appears to have seriously opposed the general introduction of Othmán's text is Ibn Mas'úd. He

was one of the oldest disciples of the Prophet, and had often rendered him personal service; but he was a man of contracted views, although he is one of the pillars of Moslem theology. His opposition had no effect. Now when we consider that at that time there were many Moslems who had heard the Koran from the mouth of the Prophet, that other measures of the imbecile Othmán met with the most vehement resistance on the part of the bigoted champions of the faith, that these were still further incited against him by some of his ambitious old comrades, until at last they murdered him, and finally that in the civil wars after his death the several parties were glad of any pretext for branding their opponents as infidels;—when we consider all this, we must regard it as a strong testimony in favour of Othmán's Koran that no party—that of Alí not excepted—repudiated the text formed by Zaid, who was one of the most devoted adherents of Othmán and his family, and that even among the Shíites we detect but very few marks of dissatisfaction with the Caliph's conduct in this matter.

But this redaction is not the close of the textual history of the Koran. The ancient Arabic alphabet was very imperfect; it not only wanted marks for the short, and in part even for the long vowels, but it often expressed several consonants by the same sign, the forms of different letters, formerly clearly distinct, having become by degrees identical. So, for example, there was but one character to express B, T, Th, and in the beginning and in the middle of words N and Y (I) also. Though the reader who was perfectly familiar with the language felt no difficulty, as a rule, in discovering which pronunciation the writer had in view, yet as there were many words which admitted of being pronounced in very different manners, instances were not infrequent in which the pronunciation was dubious. This variety of possible readings was at first very great, and many readers

seem to have actually made it their object to discover pronunciations which were new, provided they were at all appropriate to the ambiguous text. There was also a dialectic licence in grammatical forms, which had not as yet been greatly restricted. An effort was made by many to establish a more refined pronunciation for the Koran than was usual in common life or in secular literature. The various schools of "readers" differed very widely from one another; although for the most part there was no important divergence as to the sense of words. A few of them gradually rose to special authority, and the rest disappeared. Seven readers are generally reckoned chief authorities, but for practical purposes this number was continually reduced in process of time; so that at present only two "reading styles" are in actual use,—the common style of Ḥafṣ and that of Náfi', which prevails in Africa to the west of Egypt. There is, however, a very comprehensive massoretic literature in which a number of other styles are indicated. The invention of vowel-signs, of diacritic points to distinguish similarly formed consonants, and of other orthographic signs, soon put a stop to arbitrary conjectures on the part of the readers. Many zealots objected to the introduction of these innovations in the sacred text, but theological consistency had to yield to practical necessity. In accurate codices, indeed, all such additions, as well as the titles of the súra, etc., are written in coloured ink, while the black characters profess to represent exactly the original of Othmán. But there is probably no copy quite faithful in this respect.

The correct recitation of the Koran is an art difficult of acquisition to the Arabs themselves. Besides the artificial pronunciation mentioned above, a semi-musical modulation has to be observed. In these things also there are great differences between the various schools.

In European libraries, besides innumerable modern manu-

scripts of the Koran, there are also codices or fragments of high antiquity, some of them probably dating from the first century of the Flight. For the restoration of the text, however, the works of ancient scholars on its readings and modes of writing are more important than the manuscripts, which, however elegantly they may be written and ornamented, proceed from irresponsible copyists. The original, written by Othmán himself, has indeed been exhibited in various parts of the Mohammedan world. The library of the India Office contains one such manuscript, bearing the subscription: "Written by Othmán the son of Affán." These, of course, are barefaced forgeries, although of very ancient date; so are those which profess to be from the hand of Alí, one of which is preserved in the same library. In recent times the Koran has been often printed and lithographed both in the East and the West.

Shortly after Mohammed's death certain individuals applied themselves to the exposition of the Koran. Much of it was obscure from the beginning, other sections were unintelligible apart from a knowledge of the circumstances of their origin. Unfortunately those who took possession of this field were not very honourable. Ibn Abbás, a cousin of Mohammed's, and the chief source of the traditional exegesis of the Koran, has, on theological and other grounds, given currency to a number of falsehoods; and at least some of his pupils have emulated his example. These earliest expositions dealt more with the sense and connection of whole verses than with the separate words. Afterwards, as the knowledge of the old language declined, and the study of philology arose, more attention began to be paid to the explanation of vocables. A good many fragments of this older theological and philological exegesis have survived from the first two centuries of the Flight, although we have no complete commentary of this period. Most of the expo-

sitory material will perhaps be found in the very large commentary of the celebrated Tabarí (A.D. 839–923), of which an almost complete copy is in the Viceregal library at Cairo. Another very famous commentary is that of Zamakhsharí (A.D. 1075–1144), edited by Nassau-Lees, Calcutta 1859; but this scholar, with his great insight and still greater subtlety, is too apt to read his own scholastic ideas into the Koran. The favourite commentary of Baidáwí (*ob.* A.D. 1286) is little more than an abridgment of Zamakhshari's. Thousands of commentaries on the Koran, some of them of prodigious size,[1] have been written by Moslems; and even the number of those still extant in manuscript is by no means small. Although these works all contain much that is useless or false, yet they are invaluable aids to our understanding of the sacred book. An unbiassed European can no doubt see many things at a glance more clearly than a good Moslem who is under the influence of religious prejudice; but we should still be helpless without the exegetical literature of the Mohammedans.

Even the Arab Moslem of the present day can have but a very dim and imperfect understanding of the Koran, unless he has made a special study of its exegesis. For the great advantage, boasted by the holy book itself, of being perspicuous to every one, has in the course of thirteen centuries vanished. Moreover, the general belief is that in the ritual use of the Koran, if the correct recitation is observed, it is immaterial whether the meaning of the words be understood or not.

A great deal remains to be accomplished by European scholarship for the correct interpretation of the Koran. We want, for example, an exhaustive classification and discussion of all the Jewish elements in the Koran; a praiseworthy beginning has already been made in Geiger's

[1] See below, p. 206, on the commentary of Khalaf.

youthful essay, *Was hat Mahomet aus dem Judenthum aufgenommen?* We want especially a thorough commentary, executed with the methods and resources of modern science. No European language, it would seem, can even boast of a translation which completely satisfies modern requirements. The best are in English, where we have the extremely paraphrastic, but for its time admirable translation of Sale (repeatedly printed), that of Rodwell (1861), which seeks to give the pieces in chronological order, and that of Palmer (1880), who wisely follows the traditional arrangements. The introduction which accompanies Palmer's translation is not in all respects abreast of the most recent scholarship. Considerable extracts from the Koran are well translated in E. W. Lane's *Selections from the Kur-án.*

Besides commentaries on the whole Koran, or on special parts and topics, the Moslems possess a whole literature bearing on their sacred book. There are works on the spelling and right pronunciation of the Koran, works on the beauty of its language, on the number of its verses, words, and letters, etc.; nay, there are even works which would nowadays be called "historical and critical introductions." Moreover, the origin of Arabic philology is intimately connected with the recitation and exegesis of the Koran. To exhibit the importance of the sacred book for the whole mental life of the Moslems, would be simply to write the history of that life itself; for there is no department in which its all-pervading, but unfortunately not always salutary, influence has not been felt.

The unbounded reverence of the Moslems for the Koran reaches its climax in the dogma (which appeared at an early date through the influence of the Christian doctrine of the eternal Word of God) that this book, as the divine Word, *i.e.* thought, is immanent in God, and consequently *eternal* and *uncreated.* That dogma has been accepted by almost all

Mohammedans since the beginning of the third century. Some theologians did indeed protest against it with great energy; it was, in fact, too preposterous to declare that a book composed of unstable words and letters, and full of variants, was absolutely divine. But what were the distinctions and sophisms of the theologians for, if they could not remove such contradictions, and convict their opponents of heresy?

The following works may be specially consulted: Weil, *Einleitung in den Korán*, 2nd ed. 1878; Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorân's*, Göttingen, 1860; and the Lives of Mohammed by Muir and Sprenger.

III.

ISLAM.[1]

On the 14th of September 629, the emperor Heraclius again set up the true Cross in Jerusalem. He had vanquished the Persians after a desperate struggle, and compelled them to restore this most sacred of relics, which they had carried off on their conquest of the Holy Land. It was a day of triumph for all Christendom, which is still marked in its calendars as the "Feast of the Elevation of the Cross." At the very moment of this striking celebration of the victory of Christendom over unbelievers, we may suppose tidings to have been brought to the emperor, that his Arabian troops beyond Jordan had been attacked by a small band from the interior, and had only with difficulty succeeded in repelling the violent onset. It is not likely that the news can have struck him as implying anything very serious. Nevertheless this was the first assault of the Moslems; it was quickly followed by others, and in a few years Palestine and many other provinces had been for ever torn away from the Roman empire, to which they had for seven centuries belonged, the empire of Persia had been destroyed, and in the native lands of Christianity and Zoroastrianism a new faith and a new people had attained an enduring ascendency. No overturn at once so great and so rapid is recorded in history.

The founder of this new religion, Mohammed, son of Abdalláh, was no martial hero. It was under the pressure of circumstances, and by the necessities of thoughts which

[1] Originally published in *Deutsche Rundschau*, ix. (1883) p. 378 sqq.

carried him much farther than he could possibly have divined, that he became a prince and a conqueror. The hysterical enthusiast, conscious of a vocation to make known the Oneness of God, was forced into a career of battle by the opposition of his kinsfolk and neighbours. The conviction that his light came from God gave him strength and confidence, and raised him above every prejudice and scruple. The character of the new religion was very powerfully influenced by the manly spirit of some of its first confessors and champions; both the good and the bad qualities of the Arabs, among whom it arose, and for whom it was in the first instance promulgated, have stamped their unmistakable impress upon it.

It may be doubted if the original teaching of any other founder of a new religion is known to us so exactly as Mohammed's. For the sacred book of Mohammedanism, the Koran, consists entirely of his own revelations, given in the name of God; and among his spoken utterances which have been handed down by tradition there is, mixed up with a great deal that is spurious, so much of what is genuine, that by its aid we are able at many points to supplement the Koran. And Koran and *Sunna*, that is, "the rule," given by the tradition of the Prophet's words and deeds, have ever been regarded by Mohammedans as the sources of their religion.

In the several heads of Mohammed's doctrine there is practically nothing original. The Arabs of that time had outgrown their crude heathenism, and it was only by force of habit, without real attachment, that, a highly conservative people as they were, they held firmly by the ancient practices. In particular, isolated ideas originating in Christianity had become widely diffused through the agency of wandering bards. Very many Arabs were already Christians. Their Christianity, it is true, sat but loosely on them; for the finest

elements of that religion they had no organ. Moreover, there were in Arabia many Jews who here also occasionally, as in Abyssinia, made numerous proselytes; but the rigid and irksome ordinances of Judaism were suited to the nature of the proud and untamed inhabitants of the Arabian desert as little as were the mystical doctrines and the too ideal ethics of Christianity. Mohammed borrowed from both religions, but especially from Judaism, those elements which instinct rather than reflection taught him to be suited to his countrymen. The main lines of his doctrine are a further development of Judaism, only simpler and coarser; speaking generally, it stands much nearer to the religion of the Old Testament than the Christianity of the Church does.

Mohammed's idea of God is essentially that of the Old Testament, only he gives greater prominence to the divine omnipotence and arbitrary sovereignty, and less to the divine holiness. He attributes to God many human features, but these no longer have the naive and poetic charm possessed by so many of the Old Testament anthropomorphisms. Everything is done and determined by God; man must submit himself blindly; whence the religion is called *Islám* ("surrender"), and its professor *Muslim* ("one who surrenders himself"). Mohammed had the strongest antipathy for the doctrines of the Trinity and the divine Sonship of Christ. True, his acquaintance with these dogmas was superficial, and even the clauses of the Creed that referred to them were not exactly known to him; but he rightly felt that it was quite impossible to bring them into harmony with simple genuine Semitic monotheism, and probably it was this consideration alone that hindered him from embracing Christianity.

According to the Koran, God makes known His will through prophets, of whom, in the course of time, He has sent many into the world. From Jesus down to the time

of Mohammed, it was the duty of men to follow the former and His gospel; the Jews incurred grave sin by rejecting Him. Jesus was greater than all the prophets before Him; but the final revelation was first made known through Mohammed. The earlier sacred writings taught the same doctrine as the Koran, and bear witness to Mohammed; but they had been falsified by the Jews and the Christians. The laws which God laid down through the prophets are not necessarily in harmony with each other, for God changes His ordinances at will; even in the Koran itself He sometimes cancels commandments which He had previously laid down in that very book. Mohammed is but a frail mortal, only chosen of God. He is subject to sin, and without the gift of miracles bestowed on former prophets. This last limitation, which is clearly expressed in the Koran, was, as was to be expected, very soon explained away by his followers, and numerous miracles are accordingly related of him.

God rewards good and punishes evil deeds; only, He is merciful, and is easily propitiated by repentance. But the punishment of the impenitent wicked will be fearful. The horrors of hell are vividly presented; we can see how grievously the thought of them afflicted the Prophet himself. In accordance with Christian precedent, he conceives of hell as fire. In his description of the heavenly paradise, or "garden," also, Mohammed appropriates representations from the Old and New Testaments, yet depicts its joys according to his own fancy. His picture of the glory of the saints above can be properly understood only when the reader remembers the barrenness of Mohammed's native land and the exceedingly simple manner of life of his countrymen. The bright-eyed maidens who give their society to the righteous in paradise are the innovation of a sensual nature. The crude representations of hell and heaven took powerful hold of the Arab imagination, and

unquestionably contributed much to the diffusion and establishment of Islam. Other eschatological imaginings, about the resurrection and the last judgment, have an important *rôle* in the Koran. All of them attach to older ideas, and particularly to such as had already been borrowed from the Persians by Judaism, and partly also by Christianity. Awe of the judgment day was perhaps the most important cause of Mohammed's becoming a visionary and a prophet. The Koran has, of course, much to say of angels and devils. Alongside of these figure also demons or *jinn*, taken from Arab popular belief, but connected also with late Jewish notions. The minor contradictions that naturally occur in such myths and fancies have caused little difficulty to the ingenuity of interpreters, and still less to the simple faith of the masses.

The ethics of Islam are not so strict or earnest as those of Judaism. Mohammed, it is true, insists on virtuous disposition and action, and is energetic in his denunciations of vice: he urges honourable dealing, benevolence, placability, and so forth, and requires men ever to be mindful of God and of the retribution beyond the grave. But he is no rigorist. His very crass doctrine of retribution, which governs the rules of conduct, admits the application of commercial principles: the consequences of sins can be averted by certain penances; under certain circumstances one can rid oneself of the duty of fulfilling an obligation, and even perjury can be made up for by good works. In dire necessity even the faith may be denied in words (contrast Matt. x. 32, 33); against making a free use of this permission, Mohammedans have, it is true, been protected by their pride and the strength of their conviction. Islam is a thoroughly practical religion, which does not make it necessary to explain away too high demands (such as those of Matt. v. 33–41) by artificial interpretations. The Koran

also has comfort for the persecuted and the suffering; but it is too Arab—or, shall we say, too natural and too manly?—to declare the poor and oppressed to be in themselves happy. The Koran, further, pronounces all earthly things to be indeed vain; yet it takes much account of human wants and desires, and lays down definite regulations about property and goods. If the Prophet had immediately met with recognition in his native town, he might perhaps have founded a contemplative monkish community; but, driven by necessity to become the ruler of a warrior State, he had to follow another course. After some hesitation he finally preached war against unbelievers as such; they have no choice but between acceptance of Islam and extermination. Only to the professors of old religions of revelation, that is to say, in the first instance, to Jews and Christians, does it remain lawful to live on as subjects on payment of tribute. The Moslem's vocation, alike in this and in the future life, is to rule the world.

Islam has no mystical sacraments, although it has a number of external observances. Originally Mohammed himself had attached the greatest value to severe exercises of penance, such as watching and fasting; gradually he relaxed much both to himself and to his followers, but an Oriental religion wholly without mortifications of this kind is quite unthinkable. Accordingly he made fasting in the month of Ramadán obligatory in the sense that throughout the entire month, as long as the sun is above the horizon, both eating and drinking are absolutely forbidden. In Oriental heat this is a severe burden, and one can readily believe that in the month of the fast, towards the end of the day, the majority of the faithful are thinking much more about the enjoyments of the coming night than about God and the hereafter. Still more important than fasting is the *salát*. As with all Oriental Christians a certain number of daily prayers are prescribed to the clergy, and partly also to

the laity, so Mohammed again, after some hesitation, finally fixed for all believers that there should be five daily "prayers." This *salát* is essentially different from what we call prayer. It consists in a fixed series of bowings, prostrations, and other attitudes, accompanied by the recitation of certain religious formulæ. Of course the worshipper is not forbidden at other times or in other ways to call upon God in words of his own; but to do so is not the official and obligatory action. Prayer is preceded by an ablution; when water, a commodity of such rarity in Arabia, is wanting, rubbing with sand can be substituted.[1] It is more meritorious to take part in the public *salát* of the community, conducted by a leader (*Imám*), than to discharge the *salát* by oneself. Public attendance ought to be given, in particular, on Friday, which is especially set apart for public worship, but in other respects is regarded as a working day: the Sabbath rest is unknown to Islam. The common prayer and its formalities have done much to give stability to Islam. The multitudes, while doing what was indispensable for the salvation of their souls, became trained to the habit of strictly following a leader. As Von Kremer has pointed out, the mosque was the drill ground for the warlike believers of early Islam.

A noteworthy survival of Arab heathenism is the pilgrimage to Mecca. In Mohammed's native town there was a temple called the Caaba ("the die"), with an object of ancient veneration, "the black stone." This sanctuary had gradually come to be the centre of pilgrimage for the greater part of Arabia. In connection with this a lively trade was developed, which must have been very advantageous to the inhabitants of Mecca, the Koraish. Still more important for these was the circumstance that their whole territory

[1] This substitution was also known among the Jews. From them also were borrowed certain mitigations of the task in time of travel or circumstances of danger.

was held to be holy and inviolable, and that they had the most favourable opportunities for entering into friendly relations with the various Bedouin tribes. They were thus able to maintain a caravan traffic with the old lands of civilisation beyond the desert and its predatory nomads. In this way they not only became prosperous, but also gained a great intellectual superiority over the other Arabs. As a man of Koraish, Mohammed himself had grown up in pious reverence for the Caaba and the black stone. Properly speaking, indeed, this reverence was at variance with the principles of his religion; but he managed to adjust matters by his theory that these holy things had been established by Abraham, and only abused by the heathen. Possibly in this view he was but following some Meccan predecessor whom Jews or Christians had told about Abraham and Ishmael. The heathen of Mecca, of course, knew nothing about these or any other characters of the Old Testament. That the retention of this sanctuary on Mohammed's part was due less to calculation than to deeply-rooted religious habit, seems to be shown by this, among other things, that between his emigration and the capture of Mecca, he frequently expressed his sorrow at being excluded from free participation in the ceremonies there. When at last he made his entry as a conqueror, he did away with all the open signs of idolatry, and in his last Pilgrimage, shortly before his death, he finally fixed the observances—some of them very peculiar—to be followed. Everything heathenish was to disappear; or, if various things of that nature remained, they were uncomprehended, and therefore inoffensive. Yet one rock of offence was unremoved—the veneration of the old fetish—the black stone, a veneration to which some consistent Moslems could only reluctantly bring themselves, and which in later times is occasionally even scoffed at by less steadfast believers. In strictness it is the duty of every

Moslem to take part in the yearly pilgrimage as often as he can; but it is not contrary to the intention of Mohammed (who was always ready to take account of practical difficulties), if the proviso "as he can" is strongly accentuated in practice, and thus comparatively few join in the expedition from the more distant lands of Mohammedanism. With all this the pilgrimage has been a chief pillar of Islam. In Mecca the most pious Moslems still meet from year to year out of regions so remote as Turkestan, British and Dutch India, the Turkish dominions, Morocco, and Nigritia, and exchange ideas and prejudices; a custom which naturally helps to maintain the unity of the faith. What is of particular importance is that many of the most zealous and learned pilgrims stay permanently in Mecca, and from this centre labour to promote the pure faith, and hostility against all idolaters (Europeans in particular).

Another relic of rude heathenism handed down from hoary antiquity is circumcision. It is not specially enjoined in the Koran, but is taken for granted as being the custom with all Arabs. It is not, however, theoretically at least, an integral part of religion, as it is in Judaism.

Like the Jews, Mohammed puts a high value upon alms. Gradually, however, he changed the freewill offering of love into a formal and somewhat heavy tax, out of which not only were the poor supported, but also the expenses of government were met.

Mohammed's laws relating to food are not nearly so complicated as those of the Jews. The animals of which the Moslem, whether by Mohammed's injunction or by some later rule, may not eat are mostly such as men are naturally averse to (*e.g.* carnivora). Only the pig and the dog are wholly unclean. Moreover, it is lawful to eat only of such animals as have been duly slaughtered with the formula: "In the name of God, the compassionate Compassioner." The Moslem, like

the Jew, and, strictly speaking, the Christian also (Acts xv. 20, 29, xxi. 25), is enjoined to abstain from blood. But, in danger of death by starvation, he is permitted the use of any food. Wine is interdicted; and under this name the legislature meant to include all intoxicating drinks. No impartial observer will deny that this regulation, much as it has been broken, has proved a real blessing to all the lands of Islam. It is not certain whether the prohibition of a favourite Arab game of chance (*meisir*), in which pointless arrows were used as lots, is intended to include all forms of gambling; perhaps Mohammed had in view only the heathenish practices, or the wastefulness, that used to be associated with the *meisir*.

On the whole the ritual commands and prohibitions of Islam do not bear with excessive hardness on the life of the Oriental, which in any case moves somewhat monotonously in fixed forms. Of the anxious scrupulosity with which Judaism discusses "clean" and "unclean," "lawful" and "unlawful," there are but few traces, even in the writings of the later theologians of Islam, not to speak of Mohammed himself, or the life of his followers until now.

Religion and the law of the State are not separated in Islam. Here, accordingly, properly speaking, would be the place for considering the whole system of civil and criminal law which Mohammed gave in the Koran or in his spoken utterances. In his decisions, which were usually occasioned by some particular case definitely before him at the moment, he follows partly Arabian partly Jewish custom, but very often also the promptings of his own mind. Completely to abolish blood revenge would have been impossible, and probably was never in his thoughts; he only bound it to the observance of certain forms. It is not the executive, but the nearest relative of the slain that decides whether the murderer shall die, or whether he shall buy himself off.

The anomalies that can result when an individual man essays permanently to fix the order of Church and State according to his own discretion on the spur of the moment, are exemplified with singular clearness in the Moslem calendar. The Arabs, like the majority of ancient peoples, had a year of twelve true (lunar) months; and this, as often as seemed to be required, they brought roughly into accordance with the solar year by the intercalation of a thirteenth month. The intercalation was not very skilful, it is true; still any trifling derangements of the calendar which may have resulted were not such as could produce any practical inconveniences in the simple relations of life in those days. But Mohammed, who objected either to the inequality of the year, now of twelve now of thirteen months, or to the connection that subsisted between this arrangement of the calendar and the heathen system, shortly before his death unfortunately took it into his head to ordain that Moslems should have a movable lunar year of twelve lunar months, without any intercalations whatever. Every Mohammedan year is thus some ten days shorter than the solar year which governs the course of nature; so that the Mohammedan festivals move in succession through all the seasons.[1] The husbandman must accordingly everywhere provide himself with a second (Christian or Persian) calendar, based upon the solar year, in addition to the ecclesiastical one. A Mohammedan at thirty-three is no older than a Christian at thirty-two. The conversion of Mohammedan into Julian or (what is worse) Gregorian dates, is for the student who has not the requisite tables at hand a very laborious task.

The position of women was left by Mohammed essentially where it had been among the Arabs. He limited polygamy

[1] One can see how hard is the precept of fasting for the Tartars in Kasan when Ramadán falls in summer with a day of eighteen hours, as contrasted with its lightness when it falls at the time of the winter solstice.

somewhat, and made the separation of women from men rather more strict. But Islam changed for the worse the lot of women in those countries where polygamy had already disappeared, and divorce was not so easy or so common as among the Arabs. That the husband can dismiss the wife at any time, a moment of ill-temper thus very often resulting in a divorce, is, moreover, a far worse evil for Moslem society than its polygamy (which in practice is not very extensive), or the permission it gives to take female slaves as concubines. The Bedouins, who then, as they still do, showed the most chivalrous respect for a defenceless woman, nevertheless placed the weaker sex so low that they had no scruple in burying new-born girls alive. This barbarity, which perhaps never occurred in the more prosperous towns, was opposed by Mohammed at the very outset of his career, and he afterwards completely suppressed it. The Arabs, further, in their wars were accustomed to carry off the wives and children of their enemies as prisoners or slaves; between Moslems this totally ceased. On the other hand, by giving up the holy month's "truce of God," Mohammed inflicted a serious injury on his country. His wish was to put an end to all wars among his followers, but in this he was least successful of all in Arabia, where to this day the feuds never cease from year's end to year's end.

The thought of abolishing slavery never so much as occurred to Mohammed any more that it did to the apostles; but he declared manumission of slaves to be a meritorious deed, and he gave to slaves a certain security in the eye of the law.

Islam in its original form as a whole ranks far below primitive Christianity. In many respects it is not to be compared even with such Christianity as prevailed, and still prevails, in the East; but in other points, again, the new faith, simple, robust, in the vigour of its youth, far surpassed the religion of the Syrian and Egyptian Christians,

which was in a stagnating condition, and steadily sinking lower and lower into barbarism. Above all things, Islam gave, and gives, to those who profess it a feeling of confidence such as is imparted by hardly any other faith. The Moslem is proud of being a Moslem; he is convinced that he is preferred by God before all other men, whom accordingly he despises as fuel appointed for hell-fire. The Christian is bidden enter into his closet to pray; the Moslem takes his stand, and especially when unbelievers are near, in as conspicuous a place as possible for the performance of his ceremonies of prayer. His heart has little part in these, but he nevertheless feels himself raised by them, and equally so whether he rightly understands the Arabic formulæ he repeats or not. Islam is not very well fitted to produce purity and delicacy of feeling; we shall be justified if we assume that during the first centuries of its existence many a deep and finely-touched spirit had to pass through severe inward struggles because his religious needs were not satisfied by it. But all such struggles fully fought themselves out long ago, and deep peace now fills every Moslem's heart. All those who make faith and assurance of salvation the chief heads of religion, ought to work for Islam. A religion amongst the followers of which suicide is almost absolutely unknown, has surely some claim on our respect.

After Mohammed's death (8th June 632) the most prominent of his companions united to elect as his successor Abú Bekr, who had been his most trusted friend. At first, indeed, it had cost some trouble to get the Medinites, the old "helpers" of Mohammed, off the idea that one of themselves ought to become the leader. But no attention was paid to the sulking of Alí, whose wife, Fatima, was the only surviving child of his cousin Mohammed. There was no doubt that the choice of Abú Bekr was what the Prophet himself would have desired. But hardly had the Arabs

heard of Mohammed's death when they rebelled *en masse*. Many renounced Islam entirely; many attached themselves to new prophets who arose here and there after the pattern of the Prophet of Mecca; others were willing to retain Moslem prayer indeed, but not to pay taxes; in a word, Mohammed's whole work was brought into question. Then it was that the strength of Islam, and of a firm will, was shown. Abú Bekr, assured as he was in his own faith, scorned, even in the hour of most pressing need, to make any concession whatever to the insurgents; he insisted on absolute submission to the commands of Islam. The insurrections, which were unconnected with each other, were for the most part easily quelled by the Moslems, led as they were by a single will; but in some instances torrents of blood had first to be shed. The military merit of these deeds belongs chiefly to Khálid, "the sword of God," a man of Koraish, like almost all the prominent warriors and statesmen of that time, the same who nine years before had turned the battle in favour of the unbelieving Meccans against Mohammed at Mount Ohod.

As soon as all Arabia had been again brought into subjection, the great wars of conquest began. It was certainly good policy to turn the recently subdued tribes of the wilderness towards an external aim in which they might at once satisfy their lust for booty on a grand scale, maintain their warlike feeling, and strengthen themselves in their attachment to the new faith. But I do not believe those undertakings to have been mainly the result of cool political calculation. Mohammed himself had already sent expeditions across the Roman frontier, and thereby had pointed out the way to his successors. To follow in his footsteps was in accordance with the innermost being of the youthful Islam, already grown great amid the tumult of arms. The Bedouins knew uncommonly little Koran, but

on such children of nature it is success that makes the deepest impression. That faith which had subdued themselves, and which was now leading them on to victory and plunder, must be true; very soon there was no one to doubt this. Though the nomads among the Arabs have naturally few religious needs, they yet possess as the purest of all Semites a deeply-seated religious disposition; and this simple religion, which corresponded to their inclinations and flattered their self-esteem, soon took entire possession of them. Under the sagacious, clear-headed, and strong-handed Omar (634–644), the fresh force of the new faith, and the warlike disposition of the Arab people, now united for the first time, and led by great generals, speedily achieved successes against the Romans and the Persians of which Mohammed had never so much as dreamed. This astonishing overturn is, when all has been said, not easy of explanation. It is indeed true that both empires were in a state of decay. Both were at the moment terribly weakened by the wars they had waged with each other during the first three decades of the century. The Persian empire, which had finally been vanquished after long years of victory, had, moreover, been shaken both before and after the conclusion of the peace by bloody struggles about the succession to the throne. On the other hand, both Byzantium and Persia had at their command genuine soldiers regularly armed and disciplined. The traditions of Roman warfare were not yet entirely lost, and the Persians still possessed their dreaded cuirassiers, before whom, in better times, even the armies of Rome had often fled. The reduction of the fortified towns must in any case have been at least as severe a task to the Arabs as it was to the Goths and Huns, who were by nature much more warlike peoples. Moreover, Persia, when the chief attack upon its territory was made, happened to have come once more under the rule of a firm hand. Its king,

indeed, Yezdegerd III., was a boy; but the royal power and the command of the army were held by a man of energy and bravery—Rustem, the head of one of the first princely houses of the empire. Yet these wretchedly armed Arabs, fighting, not in regularly organised military divisions, but by families and clans, and under leaders who never before had faced disciplined troops, after long struggle overcame Rustem and his mighty hosts (636); soon afterwards took the fortified capital, Ctesiphon (637); and, a few years later, by the decisive battle of Nehâwend (640, 641, or 642), brought the empire itself to the ground. How was such a thing possible? The Arabs' own explanation indeed was very simple: "God took away the courage of the uncircumcised;" "God smote the Persians;" "God slew Rustem." In such words, so thoroughly like those of the Old Testament, we can only recognise how great a force lies in the rudest religious conviction. Almost more marvellous are the conquests they gained on Roman territory. The emperor Heraclius was certainly the greatest man who had held the empire since Constantine and Julian. He was an astute diplomatist, a very competent general, and, as a soldier, bold even to rashness. How could it come about that he of all men was compelled to yield up to the sons of the desert the territories he had wrested back from the Persians? We certainly are aware of one or two circumstances which made their conquests easier to the Arabs. Most of the inhabitants of Syria, and almost all the Egyptians, were Monophysite heretics, and as such had experienced great oppression at the hands of the Orthodox Byzantines; they accordingly aided and abetted the Arabs as occasion offered, especially as they might promise themselves some relief of the burden of taxation through the latter. The Syrian Nestorians also, who formed the majority of the inhabitants of the richest lands of the Persian empire (those on the Tigris and on the

lower Euphrates), we may believe to have been more favourably inclined to the Arabs than to the Persians. But in connection with conquests like these, much weight is hardly to be assigned to the sympathies and antipathies of unwarlike peasants and townsmen. More important, perhaps, is the circumstance that the numerous Arab tribes, which had been subject to the Roman and Persian rule, although for the most part nominally Christian, appear to have gone over to the Moslems almost unanimously soon after the first victories. It would be possible to multiply explanations still further, yet the phenomenon continues mysterious as before. Rhetorical expressions about the decaying condition of both empires, and the youthful energy of the Moslems, are unsatisfying to the inquirer who keeps the concrete facts before him.

Omar, who became Mohammed's successor or "substitute" (*Khalífa*) after Abú Bekr's brief rule of two years, and who was the first to assume the title of "Commander of the Faithful" (*Emír almúminín*), organised a complete military-religious commonwealth. The Arabs, the people of God, became a nation of warriors and rulers. The precepts of the religion were strictly maintained; the Caliph lived as simply as the meanest of his subjects. But the enormous booty and the taxes levied on the vanquished supplied the means of giving adequate pay to every Arab. This pay, the amount of which was graduated according to a definite scale, and in which women and children also participated, was raised as the revenues increased. For the leading principle was that everything won from enemies and subjects belonged to Moslems collectively, and therefore all that remained over after payment of common expenses had to be divided. But in the conquered territories the Arabs were not allowed to hold landed property; they were only to set up camps. It was bad for Islam, but good for the world, that this military

communist constitution did not last long. It was contrary to human nature; and, besides, the receipts did not permanently continue to come in on such a scale as afforded adequate pay to every one. The principle also, that new converts of foreign nationality must be placed on a level with the Arabs, was not yet capable of being fully carried out; the aristocratic feeling of the Arabs long stood out against making a reality of that equality among its professors which Islam demanded.

Under Omar's successor, Othmán (644–656), the field of conquest was still further and greatly extended; but the purely warlike character of the State was nevertheless already somewhat abated, permission being now given to Arabs to hold landed property in the newly-acquired regions. The landed proprietor and the peasant are naturally less inclined for expeditions of distant conquest than is the mere soldier. The principle of at least relative equality in profit-sharing was violently broken through by the bestowal of crown domains on persons of prominence. The conversion of the religious into a secular State followed rapidly and inevitably. The secular State, it is true, still remained in relations of the closest kind with religion,—much closer than those of the so-called Christian State anywhere in modern times,—but the attempts to set up the empire of Islam again upon a purely religious basis ended in failure.

In the supreme command there was no hereditary succession. Abú Bekr was, as we have seen, chosen to be Caliph by the most influential Meccan Companions of the Prophet. Abú Bekr himself had finally nominated as his successor Omar, his right-hand man, and the second most intimate friend and counsellor of the Prophet. Omar, himself the ideal of a Moslem ruler, clearly thought none of his own companions quite worthy of the command. He arranged accordingly that after his death five of the most distinguished

of the old friends of Mohammed should decide as to who among themselves ought to succeed. After long deliberation they united upon Othmán. Now Othmán had been, it is true, one of the very first to acknowledge Mohammed as a prophet, and he had successively married two daughters of the latter; but he belonged to the Omayyads, one of the most prominent families of pre-Islamite Mecca, the head of which, Abú Sufyán, had for years been leader in the struggle against Mohammed and the Medinites. Preference for kinsmen is deeply seated in the blood of every genuine Arab, and the Prophet himself was not free from it. Omar, who in many respects was a more consistent exponent of Islam than Mohammed, never laid himself open to the smallest charge of nepotism, but Othmán was a weak man; he showed exorbitant favour to his relatives, and in a short time a number of the most important and profitable posts were in the hands of Omayyads—able men for the most part, but of an intensely worldly disposition. The good Othmán was not himself conscious of anything wrong in this; but many of his subjects saw the matter in another light. The righteous indignation of some strict Moslems, the tumultuary disposition of the mass of the people, and very specially also the instigations of three of the five men who had formed the electoral college after Omar's death,—Alí, Talha, and Zubair, —as also of Aïsha, daughter of Abú Bekr, and the intriguing favourite of the Prophet, resulted in a rebellion, in which the grey-headed Othmán was put to death (17th June 656). This deed of violence was an evil precedent for many subsequent scenes of terror, the beginning of bloody civil wars, and eventual schisms. The slayers of Othmán called Alí to the caliphate; Talha and Zubair also acknowledged him, but soon broke their word, and united with Aïsha against him. Alí's bravery was soon a match for these enemies; but already another and more formidable opponent had

arisen in the person of the astute Moáwiya, son of the Abú Sufyán mentioned above, who had long been governor of Syria, and held sway there like a prince. The struggle was carried on with animosity for years. Moáwiya came forward as avenger of his kinsman Othmán. As the powerful head of the family, he was, according to old Arab ideas, well entitled, and indeed bound to do this, and Islam had not abolished this view of his duty. But, as successor of Mohammed, the son of the man who had led the heathen against him at Ohod and in the battle of the Fosse, could, of course, set up no other claim than the unconditional attachment of his troops and the superiority of his own genius. Alí also was without hereditary right, and the proclamation by Othmán's slayers was a very doubtful title in law; but as kinsman, favourite, pupil, son-in-law of Mohammed, he might well seem better suited to represent the interests of religion than Moáwiya, who also, however, appears to have been an acceptable person with the Prophet in his declining years. The Moslems who were faithful to their convictions accordingly went over for the most part to Alí's side, especially the Medinites, who (or their fathers) had once fought Mohammed's battles, but were now being more and more thrust into the background by the lukewarm Moslems of Mecca. In the heat of controversy the view for the first time germinated that Alí had a divine right to the supreme power, and that even Abú Bekr, Omar, and Othmán had been usurpers. Those who hold this view are the Shíites proper, the partisans (*shía*) of Alí. The great majority of the Moslems, on the other hand, recognise, indeed, Alí's right as against Moáwiya, but also hold the first three caliphs for legitimate. And, indeed, many good Moslems stood by Moáwiya in this struggle, and by other sovereigns of his family thereafter, though since the fall of the Omayyads few Moslems would justify Moáwiya's appearance

against Alí. In the disorders of this time there now arose also a new extreme radical party, who denied the right of all claimants, and awarded the command to "the best." These people, the Kharijites (*Khawárij*, "dissenters"), certainly had hold of a fundamental idea of Moslem, which they developed to the utmost; they were in a certain sense in the right, but on such principles as theirs it would be impossible to establish any State, and least of all in the East. They were fanatics who sought to carry out their ideas with the wildest energy and the most desperate bravery, and to a certain extent they maintained a loyalty to conviction worthy of all admiration; but they only caused a great deal of suffering, and produced nothing. The controversy about the caliphate has long ago ceased to have any concrete bearings, but it still continues to divide the Mohammedan world. Historical tradition on the subject is very rich, but greatly coloured by party feeling. It is much too favourable to Alí, and fails to show Moáwiya quite in his full historical importance. Naturally it does not allow us to see, except dimly, that at bottom the struggles really had reference merely to the plunder, and were only the expression in another direction of the same wild warrior spirit which shortly before had gained the mastery over Persians and Romans. In the older time, however, people were sometimes able to see rather more clearly how much of human passion —very often passion of the lowest kind—was at work in these civil wars in spite of all the religious party cries. To a truly pious Moslem it must often have caused the gravest reflections to see how unworthily such persons as Talha, Zubair, Aïsha, and, essentially, Alí also had conducted themselves, while yet the Prophet had long before promised a place in heaven to them all.

Alí was a thoroughly brave man, but could hardly be called a general, was certainly wanting in true insight, and

in no sense whatever born to be a leader. He fell (22nd January 661) by the dagger of one of three Kharijites who had brought themselves under an oath to remove both the rivals, and also Amr, the powerful governor of Egypt, so as to make a free choice possible; but the attempts on Moáwiya and on Amr failed. By this deed of blood Alí was delivered from the humiliation of living to see everything fall to the clever Omayyad. The death of the rival left the road clear; Moáwiya assumed the title of Caliph. Alí's incapable son, Hasan, gave in his submission without much difficulty, in consideration of a handsome pension. The governor of Syria, now universally recognised as chief of the Believers, paid every regard to the stricter Moslems; his outward demeanour was entirely that of a spiritual prince (he preached, for example, every Friday in the mosque, as the Prophet and previous Caliphs had done, and as was also the practice of provincial governors and of generals), but he was none the less a secular ruler. The support of himself and of his house were "the people of Syria,"—that is to say, not, of course, the old inhabitants of the country, but the Arab troops that had settled there. The Omayyads, accordingly, were compelled to retain Damascus, the most important town in Syria, as their capital, although it had no such religious nimbus as invested Medina, the residence of the Prophet and his first successors, and although it lay too far to the west to be a good point from which to keep watch over the numerous subject countries in the east. The Omayyad rule set up by Moáwiya had to encounter many storms. The unchurchly and even frivolous demeanour of some members of the dynasty embittered the Faithful and encouraged a variety of pretenders, as well as the wild Kharijites, to repeated outbreaks, which were not suppressed without much bloodshed. Twice was the holy city of Mecca desecrated by troops of the Omayyad Caliphs (683 and 692);

and the unruly sons and grandsons of Mohammed's most faithful champions, the Medinites, were cut down by the soldiers of Yezíd, Moáwiya's son, in their native place, the city of the Prophet (28th August 683). It was against this same Caliph, a man pretty much without religion, that Alí's second son Husain also rose in rebellion. The rising, like most others that proceeded from the family of Alí, was begun and carried on in a headless way, and was suppressed with little trouble. To all appearance it was an affair of absolutely no consequence; but the way in which men regard a matter is often more important than the matter itself. Even contemporaries were deeply impressed to see the grandson of the Prophet put to death by the satellites of the profane Caliph, and his bloody head set up to open show after the common fashion of the East. Husain, the thoughtless rebel, was in the eyes of pious Moslems metamorphosed into a martyr, and his glory grew with time. The cry of "vengeance for Husain" contributed much to the downfall of the Omayyad throne. To this day the Shíites observe the anniversary of Husain's death as a day of mourning, which never fails to stir up deep emotion and wild rage in their bosoms; and with them Kerbelá, where he perished on 12th October 681, is a site almost as holy as Mecca and Medina. The non-Shíite Mohammedans also acknowledge Husain to have been a holy martyr, and hold in the deepest abhorrence the light-living but by no means wicked Yezíd.—If the dynasty of the Omayyad Caliphs was imperilled by the hostility of the stricter Moslems, it received injury from another quarter through the religious zeal of the only really pious man among them, the honest but narrow idealist Omar II. (717–720), who sought with all his might to bring the Koran into practice, and to restore once more the constitution of Omar, but of course brought about dire disorganisation as the sole result.

Although the Omayyads produced great rulers, they failed,

for various reasons, to establish an enduring empire. Their fall was inevitable when they themselves, and with them the Syrian troops on whose support they were wholly dependent, began to quarrel; and a rival family came upon the scene, that of the Abbásids. The descendants of Mohammed's uncle Abbás, who became a convert to Islam only on the capture of Mecca, and who never had any conspicuous *rôle*, lived for a long time in obscurity. But now they had the wit to turn to account the powerful apparatus which the descendants of Alí had prepared for the undermining of the empire. Much was made of ambiguous expressions, such as "the right of the house of Háshim" (which included Abbás as well as Alí) and "the right of the family of the Prophet" (which might suggest his uncle quite as readily as his cousin and son-in-law); there was word also of an alleged transfer of the hereditary right by one of the descendants of Alí to the Abbásids. The chiefs of the latter family succeeded in winning over to their side a large portion of the troops in the remoter part of Eastern Persia (Khorásán), which could not be kept under firm control from Damascus. These troops consisted for the most part of Persians who had accepted Islam, but were anything but friendly to the Arabs. After severe struggles the Abbásids were victorious (750). Few members of the fallen house escaped the terrible massacre.

The triumph of the Abbásids made an end of the purely Arab, and at the same time of the purely Semitic, State; in it we see, in a great measure, a reaction of the Persian element, and a repristination of the old Asiatic world-empires, the structure of which had been at least a little more stable. It was not a mere casual circumstance that forthwith and from the first the seat of government was transferred to where it had been held successively by Achemenids, Arsacids, and Sásánians,—the plains of the lower Euphrates and Tigris. There arose the proud city of the

Caliphs, Bagdad. The Abbásids paid more external respect to religion than the Omayyads had done, but they were in reality quite as worldly-minded. Over and above this, there showed itself in them a very unpleasing strain of insincerity. The first two Caliphs of the family were nevertheless very considerable men. The second in particular, Mansúr (754–775), was one of the greatest princes, one of the most unscrupulous also, that ever have guided a mighty empire. He it was who established the Mohammedan empire on a firm basis.[1] Under his grandson Hárún ar-Rashíd (786–809) the caliphate unquestionably enjoyed its period of greatest splendour, although Hárún himself was very far from being a great ruler. In his day almost all the lands from the Jaxartes and the Indus to near the Pillars of Hercules obeyed the Caliph. The Arabs had ceased to be the props of the empire, but the Arabic language had spread far and wide; it was the language of religion, of government, of poetry, and of the science that was just rising. On the banks of the Tigris there flourished a civilisation more brilliant than under the best of the Sásánians. A fair measure of quiet prevailed in most of the provinces, and thus the enormous prodigality of the court did not press upon the subjects beyond endurance. Syria and the adjoining lands found themselves in better circumstances than they had for a long time experienced. True, the administration was very defective if judged according to modern ideas; but good government in the East must be measured by a very modest standard. The Christian population had gone over to Islam *en masse*. The desire to stand on an equality with the conquerors in the eye of the law, and to pay diminished taxes, was, of course, a powerful motive to this; but no less strong an influence was the suitability of Islam

[1] For a fuller treatment of Mansúr and the establishment of the Abbásid empire, see next essay.