

THE SAYINGS OF MUHAMMAD.

IT may appear alarming to many good Christians that the propaganda of other religions is assuming greater dimensions than has ever been anticipated. Some blame the Religious Parliament of 1893 for this reawakening of pagan religions, and the increased interest which they find in both Europe and America; but it seems to me that there is no cause for alarm, for the mission of other religions in Christian countries will in the long run only serve to arouse the Christian churches from their slumber and stimulate the religious life of the country. Competition is good, not only in business, but also in science and religion, as we have seen in Japan where Buddhism was apparently dead and was revived to renewed vigor only through the Christian missions, a fact which is interesting, not only to Buddhists but also to Christians. Christianity can only gain if new religions make attempts at proselytizing in Christian countries; partly because the church life will be thereby vitalized, and partly because a knowledge of other religions can only broaden and deepen our own faith.

Among all religions that of Islam is perhaps the least appreciated and the most misunderstood, while in truth it is, both in origin and in type, more akin to both Judaism and Christianity than any other religion in the world. Muhammad has been called the "lying prophet," and is even to-day branded as an imposter in many histories of great religions, and yet if we become better acquainted with his life, spiritual growth and aspirations, we can not but admire him and acknowledge that in his age he had indeed a divine mission for his people.

We have before us a booklet entitled *The Sayings of Muhammad*, edited by Abdullah Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy in behalf of the Pan-Islamic Society and published by Archibald Constable & Co., of London, which is intended to serve the purpose of making

us better acquainted with the life of the prophet. We frequently speak of Mohammedanism, but every true Moslem and faithful follower of the prophet Muhammad will object to the term. Mohammedanism is a Christian way of designating the religion of the great prophet of Arabia, which properly speaking should be called Islam, and Islam means an absolute submission to God's will, and incorporates all the ideals of religious life, which closely considered does not differ in any essential point from the ideal of Christianity.

The canonical book of Islam is called "the book," *Al Kur'an*; but the sayings and acts of the prophet called "the Sunnah" exercise no less an influence upon the life of the faithful. There is no unanimity among the Moslems about the utterances of their great leader, for there exist no fewer than 1,465 collections of them, among which the "Six Correct" collections are recognized by the Sunnis, and "The Four Books" by the Shiah.

The author of *The sayings of Muhammad* says in the foreword: "A Muslim may question the genuineness of an individual saying; but once its authenticity is proved it is as binding upon him as the injunctions and prohibitions in the Kur'an. What a powerful influence the example of the Prophet exercises over the hearts and imaginations of his followers may well be realized from the fact that to-day the approved mode of parting the hair and of wearing the beard, and the popularity of the turban and flowing robes in the East, are all due to the conscious or unconscious imitation of that great Leader of Fashion who flourished in Arabia at the beginning of the seventh century." The collection which he offers to the English speaking public is intended to be "An index to the mind of Muhammad":

"Perhaps one will miss in this collection the hyperbolic teachings of other masters, but the ethical sweetness, beauty, strong common sense, practicality, and modernity of thought of some of the utterances will not fail to appeal to the higher minds and also strike the attention of lower natures."

A brief sketch of Muhammad's life from the pen of Abdula reads as follows:

"The father of Muhammad died before his son's birth, and the boy having at six years of age lost his mother also, was brought up by his uncle, Abū Tālib, who, though not a believer in his mission, remained through life the Prophet's best friend. Until manhood, Muhammad was in poor circumstances, tending flocks of sheep and assisting his uncle in his business as a merchant. At the age of twenty-five, Muhammad, through the offices of Abū Tālib, obtained

employment as a camel driver with a rich widow named Khadijah, and took charge of a caravan conveying merchandise to Syria. Pleased with his successful management, and attracted by his personal beauty, Khadijah, though by fifteen years his senior, sent her sister to offer the young man her hand in marriage. Matters were promptly arranged, and Muhammad became a man of wealth and position. No great success, however, attended his own business enterprises. Religion and commerce sometimes require a good deal of reconciling, and Muhammad was not then an adept in the art of making the best of both worlds. Naturally reserved, and with a mind disposed to a poetic and dreamy mysticism, his mundane affairs were somewhat neglected. His religion assumed an increasingly earnest tone; he spent a large part of his time in lonely meditation in the desert and among the hills, and many an unseen conflict left its trace upon his soul.

“Not until he was forty years old did Muhammad receive his first “divine revelation,” in the solitude of the mountains near Mecca. Translated into modern language, this means that he then first became convinced that he had a mission to fulfil, viz., to arouse men from their sins, their indifference, their superstition, to thunder into their ears a message from on high, and awaken them to living faith in one indivisible, all-powerful, and all-merciful God. Prolonged fasting, days of ecstatic contemplation, and vigils of the night in the silent valleys and gloomy mountain caves had made him a visionary, with a firm faith that God had inspired him to be His messenger to mankind. This revelation, generally believed to be referred to in the short 96th sūrah of the Kur’ān, he communicated to none but his immediate relatives and a faithful friend, Abū Bakr. Painful doubts as to the reality of the vision oppressed him, but were dispelled by the sympathy of his friends. Haunted for a long time by these doubts of the divinity of his mission, his depression became so great that he was more than once on the point of committing suicide. Many of his friends called him a fool, a liar, a mad poet; and the city of Mecca for several years illustrated the proverb that a prophet hath no honor in his own country by a decisive rejection of his claims. When conviction, however, had once taken possession of his mind, it was unshakable. When his uncle begged him to cease his attempts to convert the Meccans, and so put an end to constant trouble, Muhammad said: “Though they gave me the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left to bring me back from my undertaking, yet will I not pause till the Lord carry His cause to victory, or till I die for it.” Turning away, he burst into tears.

and Abū Tālib replied: "Go in peace, son of my brother, and say what thou wilt, for by God I will on no condition abandon thee."

"The little body of believers grew slowly. In four years Muhammad had about forty proselytes, mostly of the lower ranks, and he then felt himself justified in coming forward as a public preacher and denouncing the superstitions of the Meccans. To establish a new religion was no part of his intention; he desired simply to recall them to the purer and truer faith of their ancestor, Abraham. Zealous for the worship of the Ka'bah, and dreading lest the profitable pilgrimages to their city should fall into decay, the people of Mecca showed the bitterest hostility to Muhammad, opposing and ridiculing him at every turn. So violent was their hatred that Abū Tālib thought it prudent to shelter him for a time in a place of security in the country. About this time his wife died, then his uncle, and changes of fortune reduced him again to poverty. He went to another part of the country, but found himself in danger, and barely escaped with his life. But a turning-point in his career was at hand. In a party of pilgrims from the rival city of Yathrib, afterwards called Medinah, Muhammad made several converts. On their visit the following year, their numbers were so greatly increased that Muhammad entered into an alliance with them, and on a certain night, when a plot had been made to assassinate him he left the city of his birth and took refuge in the friendly city. The Muslim era or Hegira (Hijrah) dates from this event.

"Muhammad was now among friends; his converts increased rapidly in number and the once despised Teacher was recognized as the ruler of a city and of two powerful tribes. Missionaries were sent to all parts of Arabia, and even to neighboring countries, including Egypt and Persia; and a year later the Prophet celebrated the pilgrimage in peace in the holy city of his enemies. The final conquest was followed by the submission of the tribes and the acknowledgment of Muhammad's spiritual and temporal supremacy over the Arabian peninsula. The vanquished marveled at the magnanimity of the victor. Only three or four persons, and those criminals, were put to death, and a general amnesty was then proclaimed. His strenuous labors, his intense excitement, the grief for the loss of his little boy Ibrahim, and the excruciating pain sometimes felt from the poison administered to him by a Jewess at Khaibar, further combined to weaken his frame. He became aware that his end was approaching; he addressed his followers in the mosque as often as he was able, exhorting them to righteousness and piety and peace among themselves. Each man, he declared, must work out his own

salvation. He read passages from the Kur'an, asked forgiveness of any whom he had wronged, appointed his successors, and prepared his weeping followers for his death. His head pillowed on the lap of his wife, his lips murmuring of pardon and paradise, the dying agonies of a great soul came to an end, and the Preacher of Islam breathed his last.

"His people were moved to keen distress. Omar, half-frantic, drew his scimitar, rushed among the crowd, and declared he would strike off the head of any one who dared to say the Prophet of God was no nore. Abū Bakr calmed him, and preached resignation to the will of God.

"Muhammad was a man of imposing presence, of medium height, broad-shouldered, and strongly built, with fine features, coal-black hair and eyes, and a long beard. His mental powers were of a high order, his manners reserved yet affable and courteous; his speech laconic and often humorous; a man of strong passions but noble impulses, capable of great love, great generosity, altogether a character of surprising force, capacity, shrewdness, and determination. Temperate and prudent in youth, he gained in manhood the name of 'al-Amin,' or 'the faithful,' from his fair and upright dealing. Just and affectionate in private life, he lived in the humblest style in a poor hut, eating the plainest food, lighting his own fire, and mending his own clothes and shoes, having given his slaves their freedom. For months together he would seldom eat a hearty meal, always sharing it with those whose need was greater: a number of the poor lived entirely on his generosity.

"The following beautiful story is worth passing on: 'Sleeping one day under a palm tree, he awoke suddenly to find an enemy named Du'thūr standing over him with drawn sword. "O, Muhammad, who is there now to save thee?" cried the man. "God," answered Muhammad. Du'thūr dropped his sword. Muhammad seized it, and cried in turn: "O, Du'thū, who is there now to save thee?" "No one," replied Du'thūr. "Then learn from me to be merciful," said Muhammad, and handed him back the weapon. Du'thūr became one of his firmest friends.' "

There can be no doubt about the earnestness in which the Moslem believes in Allah as the only true God. It is well known to travelers that the Moslems, especially the people in the lower walks of life, laborers, farmers and small traders, are more honest and more sincere in their belief than Christians of the same class.

The four rules which according to Abdullah are indispensable for the religious guidance of man, read as follows:

“Actions will be judged according to their intentions.

“The proof of a Muslim’s sincerity is that he payeth no heed to that which is not his business.

“No man is a true believer unless he desireth for his brother that which he desireth for himself.

“That which is lawful is clear, and that which is unlawful likewise, but there are certain doubtful things between the two, from which it is well to abstain.”

From the “Sayings of Muhammad,” of which Abdullah has collected 451, we select the following as especially characteristic, and worthy of quoting:

“He dieth not who giveth life to learning.

“Whoso honoreth the learned, honoreth me.

“Pray to God morning and evening, and employ the day in your avocations.

“He who neither worketh for himself, nor for others, will not receive the reward of God.

“Those who earn an honest living are the beloved of God.

“Charity that is concealed appeaseth the wrath of God.

“He is not of me, but a rebel at heart, who when he speaketh, speaketh falsely; who, when he promiseth, breaks his promises; and who, when trust is reposed in him, faileth in his trust.

“Thus saith the Lord, ‘Verily those who are patient in adversity and forgive wrongs, are the doers of excellence.’

“They will enter the Garden of Bliss who have a true, pure and merciful heart.

“No man is true in the truest sense of the word but he who is true in word, deed, and in thought.

“What actions are the most excellent? To gladden the heart of a human being, to feed the hungry, to help the afflicted, to lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful, and to remove the wrongs of the injured.

“God hath made a straight road, with two walls, one on each side of it, in which are open doors, with curtains drawn across. At the top of the road is an Admonisher, who saith, ‘Go straight on the road, and not crooked;’ and above this Admonisher is another who saith to any one who would pass through these doorways, ‘Pass not through those doors, or verily ye will fall.’ Now, the road is Islām; and the open doors are those things which God hath forbidden; and the curtains before the doors the bounds set by God; the Admonisher is the Kur’ān, and the upper Admonisher God, in the heart of every Muslim.

“To the light have I attained and in the light I live.

“Then the child (of Zainab) was brought to Lord Muhammad, dying; its soul trembling and moving; and both the eyes of the Apostle of God shed many tears. And S’ad said, ‘O Messenger of God! What is this weeping and shedding of tears?’ He said, ‘This is an expression of the tenderness and compassion, which the Lord hath put into the hearts of His servants; the Lord doth not compassionate and commiserate His servants, except such as are tender and full of feeling.’

“Remember and speak well of your dead, and refrain from speaking ill if them.

“Torment not yourselves, lest God should punish you.

“Men will be liars towards the end of the world; and will relate such stories as neither you nor your fathers ever heard. Then avoid them, that they may not lead you astray and throw you into contention and strife.

“I am no more than man; when I order you anything respecting religion, receive it, and when I order you anything about the affairs of the world, then am I nothing more than man.

“What is Islām? I asked Lord Muhammad. He said, ‘Purity of speech and charity.’

“An hour’s contemplation is better than a year’s adoration.

“Charity is a duty unto every Muslim. He who hath not the means thereto, let him do a good act or abstain from an evil one. That is his charity.

“Hell is veiled in delights, and Heaven in hardships and miseries.

“Every child is born with a disposition towards the natural religion (Islām). It is the parents who make it a Jew, a Christian or a Magian.

“All actions are judged by the motives prompting them.

“This world is a prison for the Faithful, but a Paradise for unbelievers.

“When the bier of any one passeth by you, whether Jew, Christian, or Muslim, rise to thy feet.

“This life is but a tillage for the next, do good that you may reap there; for striving is the ordinance of God, and whatever God hath ordained can only be attained by striving.

“Trust in God, but tie your camel.

“The world and all things in it are valuable; but the most valuable thing in the world is a virtuous woman.

“A Muslim must not hate his wife; and if he be displeased

with one bad quality in her, then let him be pleased with another which is good.

“The thing which is lawful, but disliked by God, is divorce.

“It is not right for a guest to stay so long as to incommode his host.

“Guard yourselves from six things, and I am your security for Paradise. When you speak, speak the truth; perform when you promise; discharge your trust; be chaste in thought and action; and withhold your hand from striking, from taking that which is unlawful, and bad.

“The most excellent of alms is that of a man of small property, which he has earned by labor, from which he giveth as much as he is able.

“God is a unit and liketh unity.

“What did Lord Muhammad do within doors? ‘He used to serve his family, such as milking goats, mending shoes and stitching; and when prayer-times came, he would go out to perform them.’

“God saith, ‘I was a hidden treasure. I would fain be known. So I created man.’

“Lord Muhammad used to wait upon himself.

“The holder of a monopoly is a sinner and offender.

“The bringers of grain to the city to sell at a cheap rate gain immense advantage by it, and whoso keepeth back grain in order to sell at a high rate is cursed.

“A martyr shall be pardoned every fault but debt.

“Do you love your Creator? Love your fellow-beings first.

“To listen to the words of the learned, and to instil into others the lessons of science, is better than religious exercises.

“The ink of the scholar is more holy than the blood of the martyr.

“One hour’s meditation on the work of the Creator is better than seventy years of prayer.

“God is pure and loveth purity and cleanliness.

“The acquisition of knowledge is a duty incumbent on every Muslim, male and female.

“It was said to the Rasūl, ‘O messenger of God! Curse the infidels.’ Lord Muhammad said, ‘I am not sent for this; nor was I sent but as a mercy to mankind.’

“Usāmah bin Zaid, relates from the Rasūl, in the word of God, ‘After that I gave a book of laws, to those that were selected from My servants; then some of these injure their own souls, some of them observe a medium in their actions, and some of them are

swift in goodness.' Lord Muhammad said, 'All of them are in Paradise, agreeable to their difference in eminence and degree.'

"What is Paradise? Lord Muhammad said, 'It is what the eye hath not seen, nor the ear heard, nor ever flashed across the mind of man.'"

We conclude our collection of the sayings of Muhammad by quoting verse 59 of the second Surah of the Kur'an:

"It matters not whate'er ye name yourselves—
Believing Muslims, Jews or Nazarenes
Or Sâbians—whoe'er believe in God,
The last e'erlasting Day, and act aright,
Their meed is with their Lord; no fear nor care
Shall come upon them, nor the touch of woe."