

THE LIGHT.

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Correspondence of literary nature may be addressed to the Editor. Short articles, letters and questions will also be welcome. Non-Muslims are also invited to send questions to be answered.

NOTES.

Islam the Religion of Tolerance.

"The religion of the Turk," said Khalid Shel-drake, an English Muslim "is alleged to be intolerant. Let us examine this :

"Thirteen hundred years ago a great charter was delivered to mankind through the lips of the great Prophet of Arabia. A new message was given to the world the like of which was up to that time unknown and which sounded the death-knell of religious intolerance. Allah reveals to us in the Holy Koran those words : ' *La ikraha fiddin* ' (Let there be no compulsion in religion). If Muhammad (on whom be peace) had brought no other revelation to mankind yet this was sufficient to render his claim to Prophethood incontrovertible. Wherever Islam extended its boundary for the first time people of all shades of religious belief breathed freely."

The Mosque in Paris.

The Moslem World writes :—

The newspapers gave an account of the foundation of the Mosque in Paris under such titles as,

"French hearts beat in unison with Islam," "An everlasting covenant," etc. "The foundation stone was laid yesterday of the Moslem Institute and Mosque in the presence of M. Coirat, Under-Secretary of State, of Marshal Franchet d'Espèray, M. Peretti de la Rocca, the Prefect of the Seine and of the representatives of nearly all the Moslem countries. S. E. Benghabrit, President of Habbous, made the first speech. He stated that the monument is proof to the world of the insoluble friendship between Islam and France, whose humane and wise policy he praised. The President of the Municipal Council and the Prefect of the Seine declared that Paris would never forget the heroism of the Moslem soldiers who had helped to save her. M. Coirat, in the name of the Government, reminded his hearers that this was a friendship of long standing. Misunderstandings between Turkey and France were only transient and could never shake the foundations of a friendship based on the nature of the French and Moslem character. France wishes to ensure to her 25,000,000 Moslem subjects the development of their economic intellectual future, but she makes it a duty to respect their traditions and their faith. He concluded with these words; "Seeing this minaret Paris will remember the thousands of tombs of Moslem soldiers fallen on French soil."

The French Government have set an example which should be followed by England, as she rules over the largest number of Muslims in the world. If the "British hearts beat in unison with Islam," it will go to consolidate the British Empire.

Denies Divinity of Jesus.

The Rev. Dr. Samuel Davie McConnell, once rector of Holy Trinity Church, Brooklyn and for half a century a widely-known clergyman of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in a book published recently renounces the faith on which Christian churches are founded, dismisses as incredible the miracles recounted in the New Testament and denies the Divinity of Christ.

The jacket of the book bears the following :—

"I have been for 50 years a minister in the church. I entered the ministry with enthusiasm, believing as I did that the church was the one organization in the world of Divine institution, that it owes its origin to Jesus Christ, and that He was the unique Son of God. I have been reluctantly led to the conclusion that none of these things is true."

The church, Dr. McConnell believes, has in it much more of paganism than of the life of Christ, and asserts that many, if not most of the ceremonies of the church, are far older than Christ, some of them springing, he says, from the time of primitive man.

The known facts of the life of Jesus Christ, Dr. McConnell says, in a chapter entitled "Jesus of the Gospels," would fill less than a column of newspaper space, and that far less is known of Him than of several other personages of the time.

In summarizing the contents of his book Dr. McConnell says;

"The educated and practical world both alike are steadily drawing away from the church. I have watched this movement for 50 years.

"Can anything be done to reverse it?"

"First of all, the church must open her eyes and look but she must not look at things as they were in the Fourth Century the Twelfth, or the Eighteenth. She should no longer rest in a fool's paradise."

Dr. McConnell's explanation of his book is brief.

"Far too long, I have been silent," he said. "I wanted to be sure of speaking. Fifty years is surely long enough for consideration. Now I openly avow my convictions, and leave it to the church to do with me as it sees fit. But I confess I do so with the hope that, after I have said all I have to say, the church may decide that I and such as I, have a place in its ministry."

THE LIGHT.

Dated the 16th March 1923.

The "Ummi" Prophet.

—AND—

THE MIRACULOUS CHARACTER OF THE QURAN.

Dr. Zwemer, the Editor of the "*Moslem World*," has in a lengthy article discussed the question whether the Holy Prophet (may peace and blessings of God be upon him) could read or write. The subject, however, has not been dealt with from the historical point of view. The writer's object is not to find out truth. He is anxious only to refute the "argument" for miraculous character of the Holy Quran. He frankly admits that it has been, for centuries, a controverted question. He also recognises that some Muslims affirm it, while others deny it, yet he "is especially interested in the denial; because it is generally used to fortify their arguments for the "miraculous character of the Kuran." This reveals the spirit with which a typical Christian missionary studies Islam. He would not care to find out reality. He would not examine the matter properly; he would not sift the chaff from grain, but he would gather together the material, whatever it may be, to strengthen his own perverted view. He would like to be feasted on fallacious arguments in order to satisfy his appetite for laying unfounded charges against Islam. In a word, in the study of our religion he would reject facts and take up fiction. He would,

when the occasion demands invent stories; and would draw far-fetched inferences from simple and ordinary things. Dr. Zwemer's article under review forms a typical illustration of this generalisation.

I

In the first section of his article, the writer lays stress on the point that reading and writing was fairly common at Mecca at the time of the Holy Prophet's birth. He quotes Muir who says: "It is evident that writing of some sort was known and practised at Mecca long before A. D. 560." However, the historical evidence which he has produced on the point, does not show that reading and writing was "common" at Mecca at the time of the Prophet. For instance the tradition that Abul Abbas, the uncle of the Holy Prophet, "left behind him a camel-load of Mss" does not necessarily prove that writing was "commonly" practised in Mecca, nor does Ali's, Jaber's and Yaser's "being in habit of reading the Taurat and the Injil" prove it. Almost in every society, however illiterate it may be, some people are found who do the clerical work, but their existence does not establish that reading and writing is commonly practised in that society. The expression, "camel-load of Mss," may appear, at the first glance, to a prosaic mind a strong argument in favour of the writer's conclusion; yet those who are familiar with the hyperbical terms of the Oriental languages will not take it literally. The writer himself is an Arabic scholar and appears to be guarded against exaggeration of the chroniclers. It is for this reason, perhaps, that he questions the accuracy of the report that "only seventeen men were able to write" at Mecca at the time of the Prophet; as he thinks this number to be under-estimated, nor is he prepared to accept the report that the amanuenses of the Prophet "numbered no less than forty two"; because he considers it to be too large a number. Now, the safest course to determine the truth is to take the average of these two numbers, by summing them up together and dividing the total by two. It will be something about 29. Thus, if there were only 29 men who could read or write in the whole city of Mecca—the place which was the commercial centre of the trade going on between Arabia, and Syria,—no impartial man will say that "the art of reading and writing was not uncommon." Yet Dr. Zwemer has got the audacity to arrive at such a strange conclusion; because his only motive is to attack the "miraculous character of the Koran." The suggestion that among the wives of the Prophet "Ayesha and Hafza could read and write,"

and therefore "he might have learned the art from two of his wives," as he was "himself an intelligent man" is a mere conjecture, without any positive proof. There is not a single occasion in his whole life on which the Holy Prophet wrote a document or a letter with his own hand.

II.

What, then, is the basis of Dr. Zwemer's supposition that the Holy Prophet knew reading and writing? It is, I think, the different significances which the word "*ummi*" conveys. His whole argument hinges on the point that the word "*ummi*," on which the general denial of the Prophet's ability to read and write is based does not necessarily mean *illiterate*. He quotes Palmer, and Radwell to show that the word is used in the sense of *gentile*—i. e. the people who are not acquainted with any revealed book. This is, however, contradicted by the Holy Qur'an itself, because in II; v 71 we find that the Jews, who are spoken of as the "People of the Book" throughout the Holy Quran are called "*Ummi*." I will quote here Palmer's Translation:—"And some of them (Jews) are *illiterate folk* they knew not the book but only idle tales." This is enough to prove that the word *Ummi* is not an equivalent to the English word *gentile* or non-Jew.

The word, in fact, carries three significances: (1) one who himself does not know reading and writing (2) an Arab, or belonging to Arabs, because they were generally illiterate people and (3) one belonging to *Um-ul-Qura* mother of the cities, i. e. Mecca, hence Meccan. The Holy Prophet was an "*ummi*" in all the three senses. He did not know how to read and write, he was an Arab; and he lived at Mecca. The fact that the Prophet was unable to read and write before revelation came to him cannot be disputed. The Quran is conclusive on this point:—"And you did not read before it any book, nor did you transcribe with your right hand" (29:48). The point, that he learnt the art of reading and writing after revelation, is controversial; and on *this* the Christian propagandist has concentrated his force of criticism. But there is no historical evidence to prove that the Holy Prophet took lessons in reading and writing after his call. Such a thing would have been quite conspicuous. During his whole life the Prophet always ordered his attendants to read and write letters for him; even the verses of the Holy Quran for whose preservation he was very particular, were written by others. It seems impossible for a man

who could read and write always to avoid it. What for then did the Holy Prophet take the trouble of learning the art after the age of 40, because he was forty when the revelation came? Did he learn reading and writing never to make a use of it? Dr. Zwemer says that "he had his own wise reasons for not reading and writing himself." But after indulging in the indolent habit of ascribing motives to others, the writer forgets his own argument, and quotes the single occasion on which the Holy Prophet is reported to have *written or erased* some words as a conclusive proof of his literacy. Here perhaps the writer has no "wise reasons" to expose the hollowness of his wicked suggestion that the Holy Prophet used to conceal his ability to read and write with a set purpose. It is true that in the treaty between the Prophet and the Quraish at Hudaibiyya, when Ali refused to erase the words رسول الله (Apostle of Allah) the Prophet himself took the document and erased the words. The report given in the Bukharee only mentions the erasing of the words رسول الله (Apostle of Allah); while that given in the Muslim adds that he wrote the words ابن عبد الله (Son of Abdulla) in stead. Now, let us take the latter case i. e. in which the Holy Prophet erased some words and wrote others in stead. Dr. Zwemer, will not I think, hesitate in admitting that the words which are said to be erased and written by the Prophet are the part of his name. The words رسول الله (Apostle of Allah) form the permanent epithet of the name of the Prophet, and the words ابن عبد الله (Son of Abdulla) are also a part of his name; as according to the Arab custom a man always wrote the name of his father with his own. The Holy Prophet was not only a divine teacher, but also the head of the Muslim commonwealth; and as such he stood in need of signing important documents, written on his behalf. It is but natural, therefore, that he could read or write his name. But this does not show that he knew the art of reading and writing. There are hundreds and thousands of people who are illiterate and yet can read and write their own names.

The report of Waqidi; which says that the Prophet wrote, at the foot of the treaty, about two lines with regard to the encumbency of its terms on both the parties may be rejected as unreliable; because (1) the most authentic works of Hadis i. e. the Bukharee and the Muslim, do not mention it and (2) because Waqidi is admittedly an untrustworthy reporter.

III.

Finally the writer makes a mention of the Prophet's letter to the Makaukus or Governor of Alexandria. A photographic reproduction of this letter has already been published in various Islamic Journals. Dr. Zwemer is of opinion that the letter is "supposed to have been written by Mohammed himself," but he does not tell us on what ground his "supposition rests. It is true that after the truce of Hudaibiyya, the Holy Prophet sent a number of letters to the various rulers of the world; and the letter in question is one of them; but like others it was written by any of amanuenses of the Prophet. There is nothing to show that he wrote this particular letter with his own hands. There is a general concurrence on the point that the Holy Prophet could not read nor write. "The most generally accepted view is" says the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "that he could do neither.....and the most probable theory is that he could do both but unskillfully."

IV.

But with the editor of the "Moslem World," it is not the point whether the Holy Prophet could not read nor write; or could do both unskillfully. His point is to attack the "miraculous character" of the Holy Qur-an. His argument is that; because the Prophet could read or write, however *unskillfully* it may be, it is no wonder that he has produced a miraculous book like the Qur-an.

But perhaps he has forgotten the simple fact that every literate man cannot be a peerless author, and every author cannot claim the uniqueness of his production. The Holy Qur-an is admittedly the finest piece of work in the whole Arabic literature; and even the hostile critics of Islam have recognised the wonderful beauty of its language. The Quran openly challenged its opponents to produce a chapter like it; and none among the educated so far, has been able to come out successful in this test. Is it not this miraculous?

Again, the Holy Book brought about a unique reformation first in Arabia and then in the whole world. It raised the "children of the desert" to such an eminence that the great empires of Rome and

Persia crumbled down under their feet. It spread light and learning throughout the old world—even to Europe which at that time was labouring under darkness of ignorance and superstition. Is not this the miracle of miracles?

It should, however, borne in mind that the Muslims, do not base the miraculous character of the Quran on the illiteracy of the Prophet. It is the matchless beauty of the language, the profoundness of philosophy, the purity of teachings, and above all the great reformation, brought about by it, that make the Holy Quran a *unique* Book in the world.

Questions and Answers.

Mr. Muhammad Ali Effandi :—

Q 1. Is it necessary and permissible to follow a *Peer*?

A. No, it is not essential that we should follow a particular man and pay homage to him. We should only follow the teachings of Islam. The priest craft has proved detrimental to Islam and hence the system of following "*Peers*" should be avoided.

Q 2. What is the Babi religion?

A. The chief doctrine of this religion is that the Islamic law is *not* final and that the teachings of the Qur-an also like the teachings of the previous scriptures are subject to changes and alterations. Consequently *Babis* believe that new prophets can appear who can modify the Islamic law.

Q 3 Will you kindly send me a photo of the late Mirza Ghulam Ahmad?

A. Sorry, I have not got it.

Q 4. How many are the pillars of Islam?

A. Five, *viz.* belief in the unity of God and apostleship of Muhammad (may peace and blessings of God be upon him) (2) prayer, (3) fasting (4) pilgrimage (5) poor rates *i.e.* Zkat.

Q 5. Is it permissible to draw a photo?

A. Yes, there is no harm in the legitimate use of the art.

Q 6 What is the difference between a *Sunni* and a *Ahl-i-Hadis*?

A. The followers of Imam Abu Hanifa, and other Imams are generally called *Sunni*; while those who stick to *Hadis* are called *Ahl-i-Hadis*.

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MANAGER.