

CHAPTER I.

MOSES, JESUS AND MUHAMMAD.

THESE three great Prophets, springing from the same stock and race, the Semitic, born and reared in the lands of Arabia and Palestine, have ever been regarded as the chief exponents of religion among the people of the Near East. There were numerous lesser teachers, but these are the chief ones as far as mission and importance go.

It is necessary to bear in mind that, according to the needs of the time and the requirements of the people concerned, the Prophets and messengers are sent by God for the purpose of revealing the truth to mankind and correcting the errors into which they have fallen. But rightly speaking and thinking one must not make any radical difference between them. They all play their allotted parts in the world's regeneration—at the Will of the Almighty so they give the messages and so we are instructed: truly we are the clay and the great Creator our potter.

God knows far better than man, the needs and the limitations that exist in poor humanity and He knows the Messenger required in every particular case.

Where Prophets and great men appear and carry on an important work of reclamation, man frequently exalts them above their station and clothes them with divinity, investing them with the attributes which exclusively be-

long to the Deity: others again regard them in the light of impostors and pretended Prophets. Both these aspects are wrong in their attitude. Due reverence and respect must be given to the Messengers of the Supreme and man must not conceive that he knows more of the inner workings of spiritual evolution and human destiny than the Creator, and must not judge between them and make exceptions, but regard each one with the reverence due to his particular station and Mission.

It is in this light, we view the lives and teachings of the three great Semitic Prophets, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. It should be borne in mind that there are two individual factors connected with Prophethood:—first, the pressing needs of the time which rendered necessary their presence on earth; and secondly, the thoroughness and comprehensiveness with which the mission was carried out. In dealing with the Divine Messengers, it is essential that the mind be kept free from personal distinctions of creed and racial prejudices.

God is the Absolute and Universal Truth, although He is seen under many different aspects, according to various limitations of the messengers coming to represent different view-points of the Universal Sphere of Truth, each according to the race and period to which he belongs. Hence it is that the majority of the great teachers focus one particular virtue or quality as the basis of their teaching, thus—the basis of Buddhism is *Compassion*; of Confucianism *social virtues*; of Christianity *Love*; and that of Islam *Submission to the Will of God*.

Without drawing any distinctions, it will be readily conceded that the last, Islam, includes or embraces all its predecessors because it is submissive to the Divine

purposes and takes the heart and the mind direct to the Throne of God.

It is my intention to recount simply what I read of these great Semitic Messengers in recorded history from three or four points of view—the condition of the time in which they appeared, the task they had to perform, the condition of the time under which they left the world—and the influence they exercised on the people around them.

MOSES.

Moses born in Egypt under the rule of the Pharoahs was a child of the enslaved Israelites who were in bondage. He was reared at the Court of Pharoah and was said to have been learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, which, judging from modern researches and discoveries must have been very profound indeed, and to have absorbed much knowledge of the modern sciences as well as of others with which we are but little acquainted and are now regarded as lost arts. We are told that the Egyptians were hard taskmasters, the Priest-Kings ruled with a firm hand and the yoke was heavy. Moses was deputed by God to free His people from their bondage, as the following text shows:

“And the Lord said: I have surely seen the affliction of My people, which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows.

“And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

“Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel

is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them.

“Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people the children of Israel out of Egypt.” (Exodus, Ch. 3, V. 7—10.)

Egypt, at this time was possessed of a highly developed culture and was in fact, the foremost civilized power in the world. Its rule virtually extended over the African Continent and it had trade relations with distant countries, notably along the Mediterranean sea-board. It had a highly elaborated code of Laws, Religio-Political and Social, which imposed on the people a high ethical standard together with a conviction and basing of action on the future Life, which was an important factor in determining human actions and conduct. The moral standard was high and uplifting.

The mission of Moses was to liberate his people from subjection and bondage and to lead them to the promised Land, under commands from God and he was endowed with power to aid him in his work. The wandering in the desert for forty years, during which, he received on Mount Sinai, the Commandments of the Law, a moral code sufficient for their requirements and spiritual needs. They, surrounded by nations sunk in polytheism and idolatry and not of a high moral nature, were selected as the Chosen People to carry the Torch of Light of the Unity of the Supreme Lord, but did not rise to the occasion and lapsed into the worship of many gods, fell in the moral scale, hence the calamities and disabilities and troubles under which the Jews have suffered. The setting up of the golden calf in the Wilderness, which was held as an object of worship and the falling off of the Israelites from the worship of One God, showed this most clearly.

Moses died on mount Pisgah, in the sight of the Promised Land. The Promised Land may be referred to in a mystical sense, as the realization of the Divine Beatitudes and Ideals which are obtained and enjoyed by the observance of the Divine Commands. This was taught by Moses, but not accepted by the children of Israel. Their leader saw the Goal, the Promised Land afar off, just as the Soul sees the Divine beauties, also afar off. The subsequent history of the Israelites is a record of frequent lapses into polytheism and idolatry, for which they were punished. Various Kings and Prophets attempted and instituted reforms but in vain. The pride and stiff-necked nature of the Hebrews would not permit them to worship the Supreme with humility and resignation. They had absorbed from Chaldea a magical system which was highly elaborated in its ritual and detail, of which traces are to be found in the Book of Tobit and elsewhere, also they clung to externalism and their faith was mainly centered in formalism and the outer observances of the Torah or Law, rather than the inner or spiritual practices. They inclined towards material things and earthly sovereignty and they looked forward to a Messiah who should be regarded in the light of an earthly sovereign rather than a spiritual leader and guide.

JESUS.

Jesus of Nazareth came on his Divine Mission as a Reformer to his people, who had up to that time been under the Mosaic dispensation, of which they had in their lapses into externalism and formalism only absorbed the outer shell or husk, and not the inner spiritual mean-

ing. The time was one of stress. The peoples of Europe and western Asia were under the yoke of Rome, which, although it gave protection to the subject peoples and was the inheritor of a comparatively high culture, was a hard taskmaster. It was, under the Emperors the incarnation of material power and brute force. Judea was a Roman province, ruled by Herod as a tributary king. The Tower of Antonina at Jerusalem, was held by a Roman garrison. The old mythology was dying. Man no longer believed in the old gods of the pagan faiths and was looking and waiting for light. The western world was expecting a prophet, even the Romans expected one, who was said to be the Emperor Augustus. The Jews were the successors of those who had been chosen to be the transmitters of pure monotheism to the world, but had not risen to the occasion. To them came Jesus, to free their faith from the formalism and superficiality which had degraded it—and to spiritualize it.

He is said to have been taught by the Essene fraternity, who had a branch of their community at En-gedi, by the shore of the Dead Sea. This was the only one of the divisions of the Jews which had preserved the spirit of the ancient teaching. The Jews were to be given one more opportunity. He began his mission, but they were divided in faith, holding but lightly to the formalism of their creed and leaning to the various schools of philosophy of the time, which were clinging to the remains of the old faith. He endeavoured to inculcate into them spiritual truths, charity, humility, the love of God and their neighbour, and forgiveness of those who transgressed and repented—and he preached of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Jews adhered to the

letter of the Mosaic code which partook strongly of the old sacrificial spirit which prevailed in the worship of Jehovah (Tetragrammaton) which required a sacrifice to atone for the sins of the people. In very early times the Canaanites as well as the Phoenicians had offered human victims to Baal and Moloch, which custom was not unknown to the Jews and doubtless laid the foundation of the idea of the atonement represented in the Jewish offering of the Scape goat which was sent into the Wilderness as an offering to Azazel, the Spirit of the Wilderness. This is evidently the origin of the opinion that Jesus Christ was a sin offering to redeem the fallen Adam through the sacrifice of his blood as expressed in the words: "This is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins". It is not my intention to argue about the necessity for such sacrifices but to point to the similarity of methods used for propitiating the Supreme being at all times in the earths' history. Something had to be put to death or otherwise inconvenienced in order to keep ourselves in the good books of Heaven and in favour with the Almighty.

The Jesus of Paul does not harmonise with the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels the ideas of the one as to sin, death, reconciliation and atonement being widely different from those of the other. I judge His mission from his own attributed words in the four Gospels. He does not, according to His own words, come to give a new religious code, but to purify and spiritualize the existing one and free it from the shackles which have been thrown around it by the scribes and pharisees. He says that "They sit in Moses' seat". His object was to

create respect and submission for the spirit and not the letter of the ancient faith given by Moses. They had the Torah, it is true, but it was externally and not internally interpreted. He brought the Gospel of Love and Harmony instead of the Law of Retribution. His Mission was to the Jews, the scattered Sheep of the House of Israel, and not to the Gentiles.

Sacerdotalism, the enemy of true inner religion, had sapped the Jewish faith, reducing it to formalism and ceremonial which almost invariably bring unbelief and hypocrisy in their train: then followed a disbelief in and disregard for things spiritual together with the inevitable selfishness and self indulgence. This is clearly indicated in many passages in the New Testament, as for instance in the question of Nicodemus and the lack of knowledge respecting the spiritual re-birth.

The Jews were to have been the transmitters of Christ's teachings but, however, these teachings were handed on, in a perverted and misapplied form, by Paul, who was an adherent of the exclusive Jewish school of religion.

Jesus had in his reforming mission a much easier task than Muhammad. The Jews had been in direct touch with and influenced by the civilizations of Assyria, Egypt and the Mediterranean peoples, deriving much knowledge and culture from them. The accounts we read of Solomon show that he reigned over a more or less cultured people and, by his dealings with Hiram of Tyre, Tarshish and Sheba, that the Jews were not an isolated race. The trouble of the Jews was their pride, hypocrisy, materialism, and the tendency towards polytheism and idolatry.

They had an admirable code of morals and ethics framed for them by Divine inspiration which they had failed to take advantage of. The substitution of the letter for the spirit was the defect which Jesus came to remedy and to substitute for it a faith free from the errors which had crept in; also to preach charity, humility, forbearance and brotherly love. They were not given to moral lapses such as were found in the Arabs, and so the task of Jesus was much lighter and easier. Also, in the case of Moses, we are told that he was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and his code as embodied in the Ten Commandments which were received on Mount Sinai, was not directed against the errors and vices prevailing in Arabia, against which Muhammad had to struggle. From a comparison of the work and achievement of these two Prophets, it must undeniably be stated that Muhammad's task and achievements were far in advance of his predecessors.

MUHAMMAD.

It is necessary to eliminate what may be termed the "personal equation" when considering the life history of any of the Prophets. We should thus regard Muhammad and his life work quite independently of the opinion entertained of him by the Muslims, or the views expounded in the Qur-án. We want to regard him as a historical character, viewed simply as a man whose life and deeds may be judged from the point of view of a human being only.

Muhammad, the Prophet of Arabia, was sent at the most critical time in the world's history. The Roman Empire which was mainly responsible for the mainten-

ance of order in Europe, had fallen under the assaults of the Goths, Vandals, and Avars, aided by internal corruption.

Christianity had degenerated from the pure form taught by Jesus; formalism and the worship of angels and saints had crept in and the old faith had died. Christianity was, from the nature of its adherents and followers, not eligible to carry belief with it. The world was fast reeling towards the blackness of utter chaos. The Christianity of the time had developed many of the traits of the pagan faiths, some in an accentuated form, basing its ceremonial on the frame work of the solar worship and introducing the worship of the Divine Mother under the form of the Virgin Mary. As to morals, education, knowledge and culture of all kinds, they may truly be said to have been non-existent.

Europe was sunk in the most abysmal ignorance, and the more ignorant an individual was, the more spiritual he was deemed to be. Such was Europe.

The condition of Arabia at the time of Muhammad's birth was a reflection of the general condition existing in Europe and western Asia. The Byzantine Empire and its church were notorious for their ignorance, superstition and disorder—moral, social, and individual. Vice and immorality were rampant, in places high and low in the church and out of it. Among the Semites of Arabia, perhaps owing to the distance from the great centres, the lapse was greater, being intensified by tribal and racial customs. In short, the disorder was almost universal.

Prior to the advent of Islam, Arabia was in a deplorable state. The sense of morality was altogether

wanting, adultery and sex irregularities were practised and unblushingly and shamelessly published in immoral poetry. Step-mothers were inherited and marriages were contracted with them as well as with sisters and aunts. Drunkenness was very prevalent with its attendant profligacy and debauchery. Gambling and games of chance were favourite amusements and usury was freely practised. Female slaves were trained and instructed in the arts of singing and dancing and allowed and encouraged to dispose of their favours for money which was retained for their owners. Robbery, pillage and murder were of frequent occurrence. Females captured in wars or raids were made slaves by the victors. A superstitious belief in charms, omens, talismans, fetiches, and various forms of divination was wide spread.

The old Law, "An eye for an eye" or "blood for blood" was the cry in all cases of murder or homicide. Cruelty and savagery existed in every direction and numerous cases are recorded of exceptional brutality even among the women. Hinda, the wife of Abu Sufyan, ate the heart of Hamza, the uncle of Muhammad, who had fallen in battle, out of hatred for him. The women used to wear rosaries round their necks with the hearts of slain enemies as the beads. Idolatry was the religion of the Semitic tribes. Within the Ka'aba was the image of Abraham with the divining arrows in his hand and the ram standing beside him, also the statue of Ishmael. The pantheon of Mecca consisted of 360 idols, one to be worshipped on each day in the year, shaped into animal and human forms. Human sacrifice was practised, parents sacrificing their own children, even dragging them by force to the sacrificial altars. Female children

were not considered worthy to be sacrificed but were buried alive instead.

Judaism and Christianity had sought to introduce reforms but failed in the attempt to bring about any improvement or departure from the existing errors, as even Sir William Muir acknowledges, and the general condition of things temporal and spiritual was appallingly bad, in fact all centres of civilization were more or less decadent.

India, Persia, and Europe were degenerate and corrupted to a deplorable degree, but Arabia was by far the worst. The Roman world had some redeeming features, but Arabia had none. Tribal wars, feuds and vendettas were a constant source of trouble, unrest and strife.

Briefly, there were no factors which could be looked to for building up a settled civilized community—no code of law to guarantee individual rights and nothing to inspire confidence in any of those interested either in the arts or commerce of the country.

There was a very complete tradition as to certain tribal and clan ordinances, which however, did not serve to bind the tribes and clans together, but rather tended to separate them; of course this was probably peculiar to the people of a nomadic race.

Muhammad's task of improvement and reform was rendered peculiarly hard on account of the proud and sensitive nature of the Arabs; there were hundreds of difficulties he had to overcome and thousands of obstacles blocked the road he painfully traversed before he achieved his many wonderful successes. The results of his efforts were stupendous in their far-reaching effects

and when we consider that his mission lasted little over ten years and that what he did was single-handed, by his own unaided efforts during his own lifetime, we are astounded at the magnitude of his work and are forced to admit that he was a man towering—both in ideals and achievements—far above any of his contemporaries, predecessors or successors. As a merchant of strictest honesty and ability; as a warrior, in his campaigns and victories; as a statesman, by his wise and far seeing enactments; as a law-giver, by the code of laws which he laid down and which still forms the basis of the Muslim law; and as a Prophet by his insight and intuition as to the forces and influences ruling in the spiritual realm and shadowed down here as a reflection from above and demonstrating the laws which should rightly influence and guide human life and conduct, representing the Will of God towards man and the duties of man towards God. These gifts and attributes have not been denied to him by both his critics and opponents.

Apart from the mission to the separate races, which all prophets undertake there is the transmission of the idea to the surrounding nations. Moses came to teach the Hebrews, Jesus to reform the Jews, Muhammad, to lift up humanity of all nations and peoples. They also came as standard bearers to the world at large. Muhammad, after years of opposition and persecution, saw in his lifetime the results of his labours and the extension beyond the Arabian border. Their subsequent spread is a matter of history.

Reform in religion, if genuine, must necessarily be accompanied by a change in the mode of the outer or practical life. The one is only useful if followed by the

other. It would be like a shell without a kernel, or a shadow without a substance. Therefore the religious reform introduced by Muhammad accompanied as it was by a change in the nature of a transformation, reached its entelechy in the Arab life and character.

In Muhammad's last pilgrimage to Mecca, the year prior to his death, his Sermon on the Mount at Arafat, although less poetically beautiful than the one delivered by Jesus as well as less mystical, nevertheless appeals by its practical nature and strong common sense to developed minds, and is also adaptable to the requirements of inferior natures seeking positive and clear directions for moral and spiritual guidance. It embodies injunctions to safeguard life and property; it forbids usury; abolishes blood-feuds; enjoins kindness and equity to slaves and particularly emphasises that all Muslims are Brothers, and counsels that they should be strictly just in all their dealings with their fellow creatures.