

the ancient MSS. of the Qur-án belonging to the early centuries of the Muslim era, in order to refute the baseless charges of Dr. Mangana. The Khwaja had in his possession a facsimile copy of the letter to Maquqis, and on examination he not only found that the substance of both the letters was the same, with the only difference arising from the necessity of addressing the two letters to two different rulers, but that both the letters seemed to come from the same handwriting and in the same character. The letter to Munzar has also been mentioned in the books of our Prophet's traditions. This wonderful preservation of the exact words of the letters, which the discovery of their original in Egypt and Syria proves, shows clearly that the reporters of the said traditions generally reported, not only the subject-matter in their own words, but the very words they heard.

**ADDRESS BY
MR. MARMADUKE PICKTHALL ON
THE PROPHET'S BIRTHDAY**

ON THE 6th JANUARY, AT THE HOTEL CECIL

BRETHREN,—The Prophet Muhammad is a historical character. There is no doubt but that he really existed; and the things that I am going to relate are facts of history.

Muhammad, son of Abdullah, son of Abdu'l-Mutallib, of the tribe of the Kureysh, was an Arab, a native of Mecca, and his parents were idolaters. His father died a few days before his birth. Though of good family he was left poor, and when he came to man's estate he found employment in the service of a wealthy widow named Khadijah. On her business he travelled into Syria, and even further, in charge of trains of camels bearing merchandise. In these journeys he no doubt fell in with Jews and Christians more enlightened than the Jews and Christians he had known at home in Mecca. No doubt he pondered much upon the subject of religion, and inquired especially about the faith of Abraham, because the Meccans claimed Abraham for their father and the founder of their temple, which was still called Beytu'llah (the house of Allah or the One God), although the objects chiefly worshipped there were a multitude of idols, which they called the daughters of

God and intercessors. No doubt the young Muhammad thought upon this subject, and early came to the perception that the Eternal Mystery is One and indefinable in human terms; that the Prophets—Abraham, Moses, Jesus—had proclaimed this truth to men; and that wherever God had been defined in human terms or represented as a number of deities, that was the result of human error and misguidance. These subsidiary mysteries were in the interests of priests and rabbis, a means of mystification and extortion whereby they made themselves the jealous guardians of the Source of Spiritual Life, which should be free to all. To the evil influence of these inventions Muhammad attributed all the senseless bloodshed, cruel rites and superstitions, all the disgusting orgies, which disgraced his people.

One can only conjecture that Muhammad thought in this way, for we have no access to his thoughts in those days, and the record of his early life is meagre and obscured by legends. We know that the rich widow, his employer, married him, her servant; that their married life was radiantly happy, despite the fact that she was fourteen years his senior; that this marriage raised him to a good position in the city; that it was his custom to withdraw into the desert for a month of every year for meditation, and that his conduct earned for him the surname Al-Amin (the trustworthy). And really we know very little more until he reached the age of forty.

Then he had a vision. He was in the desert place of his retirement; it was night; he was entranced. He saw a strange light in the sky, and heard a voice commanding him to cry aloud in warning to mankind.

What were his feelings on the occasion? Not those of a man who wished to be a Prophet; not those of an impostor, certainly! When he awoke out of his trance, with the words which had been spoken to him graven, as it were, upon his heart, still trembling, he went home to Khadijah and cried: "Cover me with cloth! Cover me with cloth!" And they covered him as he desired. And when the fear left him he spoke to Khadijah and told her what had happened. And he said: "I am afraid for my life."

Khadijah replied:—

"God is my protection, O abu'l-Câsim. He will surely not let such a thing befall thee; for thou speakest the truth,

thou dost not return evil for evil, thou keepest faith, art of a good life and kind to thy relations and friends. And thou art not a babbler in the market-place. What has happened to thee? Hast thou seen anything terrible?"

She urged him to be glad instead of sorrowful, for she believed with all her heart that he was called to be the Prophet of his people.

Then she took him to her cousin Waraka, an old, blind man, who "knew the Scriptures of the Jews and Christians," and he said:—

"I swear by Him in whose hand is the life of Waraka that God has chosen thee to be the Prophet of this people. The Namûsu'l-akbar—the message from on high—has come to thee. They will call thee liar, they will persecute thee, they will banish thee, they will fight against thee. Ah, that I could live till those days! I would fight for thee."

Waraka died soon after, and there was a long period during which the Prophet, working for the cause of God and conscious of his mission, longed for the heavenly voice to speak again.

At length it came; the blessed vision was again vouchsafed to him, and for the remainder of his days it counselled him, with the result which the world knows as the Qur-ân, the miracle to which Muhammad himself so often appealed as proof of his divine mission. And a miracle, indeed, it seems, for the Prophet, though cultured, was illiterate, and there is no reasonable room for doubt that a large part, at any rate, of that strange flood of eloquence, so purely sane, came to him in states of trance. The book is like no other book on earth. Explanations of the mystery of its existence have been suggested by the sceptical, but none explains it. It remains a wonder of the world.

From the moment when he realized his mission Muhammad lost all thought of his own private interests. Thenceforth he was the messenger and slave of God. No other man in the whole history of the world, however mighty his enthusiasm for a cause, has ever served that cause more single-heartedly than did the Arab Prophet. In the hour of triumph as in that of adversity, he was the faithful slave of the Most High, doing his Master's work without a taint of private motives.

The first thirteen years of his mission were years of persecution and distress. The progress of the Faith was slow, the

Prophet suffered. Then came the Hijrah or Flight, the date from which the Muslims start their calendar. Muhammad, escaping from the daggers of the men of Mecca who had planned to murder him, fled, the last but one of all the Muslims, to Medinah, where the people hailed him as their ruler. He had now a little kingdom and an army. He was fifty-two. In the ten years remaining of his life he succeeded in reforming all Arabia; he destroyed idolatry, raised women from the utmost degradation to an honoured and assured position, abolished senseless bloodshed, made strict rules for war, and for the first time in the history of the world made universal brotherhood a principle and fact of common law.

Some people would persuade us that all this was accomplished by the sword alone—by violence. That is impossible. The works of violence are never permanent. The Prophet's work—God's work, he would correct me—endures until this present hour. The personal love with which his followers, in their ever-growing multitude, revered the Prophet suggests no thought of violence. The Muslims only fought in self-defence or for the punishment of treachery and wrong; and Muhammad's rules of war were far more merciful than any known to men before his time.

The Prophet was not pitiless nor overbearing. He was no mad fanatic, cruel through excess of zeal. Indeed there never stepped upon this earth a kinder man, nor one more sensible. Innumerable are the instances of his forgiveness. He forgave the Jewess who prepared for him a poisoned meal, from which one of his companions died and he himself derived a painful illness which eventually caused his death. He forgave the man who, by an act of brutal rudeness, killed his daughter. He forgave Hind, the wife of Abu Sufiân, who devoured the flesh of true believers on the field of Ohod like a ghou, when she declared repentance. He forgave the men of Mecca, his most cruel persecutors. He forgave, so far as I know, every one who ever wronged him personally. He never struck a human being in his life.

No, it was not by the sword alone Islam prevailed. The Prophet's cry to men was: God is One, the Merciful, the Friend of all who trust in Him and do good works. Use your minds which have been given you for judgment. Forsake

your superstitions and abominations and do right. All who believe are brothers, whether slave or free. Cast down your idols, leave your lying priests: God the Most High is One and altogether indescribable, accessible to all who truly turn to Him. This is the faith of Abraham and Jesus and all the Prophets since the world began. Trust in God and He will lead you out of darkness into light.

It was the light of human progress and emancipation—the light of free intelligence uplifted towards communion with the universal, all-creative Mind—divine light, truly—which led men in their thousands to embrace Islam. The priests and soothsayers, the vulgar-minded and ambitious rulers, were alarmed. They tried to crush the movement by the force of arms. The Muslims fought against them, were victorious, and each fresh victory brought crowds of willing converts, won over by the unexpected mercy of the conquerors.

Now, I could speak to you at any length about the Prophet's charm of character, his mercy, his gratitude to those who loved and helped him, his forgiving spirit, his sweet manners, patience, wisdom. My mind is full of all these things, for, from my reading, I have come to love him as one loves a friend. But supposing he were present in this room to-day, I know that he would be ashamed and grieved to hear such praises. His only pride was in the service of his Lord. He had no personal ambition and no self-conceit. He would say: "I was a man much like another. Praise God Who guided me and raised me in His service." So, in the spirit of his life and teaching, I leave the charm and virtues of his private character and dwell on his fidelity, his self-surrender. Though he rose to be, in fact, the Emperor of all Arabia, he never made himself a potentate. His position was that of the Imam before the congregation, foremost in obedience to the law which he himself announced. In the plenitude of his power he scorned those personal advantages which for most men are the charm and use of power. It was possible for him to gratify his every wish, to surround himself with pomp and luxury, to heap up riches. The people were prepared to worship him. Think of the temptations to a man of common mould. He never even saw them. He remained the faithful messenger and servant, bent only on obedience to his Lord's commands. He claimed the honour of a deputy, and nothing more.

Much has been made by his traducers of the fact that he did exact some measure of reverence from his people, that he did claim certain privileges. You have only to read in the Qur-án the injunction to the Muslims not to raise their voices loud in conversation with the Prophet, and not to throng his house unless invited, to realize how unassuming was the state he kept. That he allowed himself to have any number of wives while his followers might have but four at most has been produced as evidence of self-indulgence. That is most unfair. If he had announced his special privilege to have more wives than four and then proceeded to avail himself of that privilege, the charge might lie. As a matter of fact, the Prophet had already burdened himself with the charge of a number of women, mostly widows, left in need, when he was inspired to bid the Muslims marry only four at most. A relief was thus accorded to his followers which he himself, as head of the community, having the care of all its widows and the conduct of its policy, could not enjoy. He was not the sensualist portrayed by Christian writers of a bygone day. He was a man with all the passions of a man, a man of wonderful virility ; yet for twenty-five years of his life—throughout his prime of manhood—he had one wife only, Khadíjah, to whom he was devoted, although she was a great deal older than he was, and he remained devoted to her memory.

When Ayeshah, a young girl, the daughter of his closest friend, whom the Prophet married after the death of Khadíjah, said to him coaxingly :—

“What was she but an old woman? God has given thee a better in her stead,” Muhammad answered :—

“No, by Allah ! God has not given me a better in her stead. She believed in me when men derided. She gave me all her wealth to spend when men opposed me. So kind and generous was she to me.”

Ayeshah, frightened at his vehemence, murmured, “I will never speak of her again but with respect.”

The story comes from Ayeshah herself.

When Khadíjah died, the Prophet was fifty-one. His numerous later marriages, with perhaps two exceptions, were acts of charity or policy.

The privileges which he claimed, as head of the Muslim State, if you look into them, are really either cares of state or common

courtesy. He was accessible to small and great, was hospitable, charitable, generous—within the limit of his means, for he was never rich. The public income he expended for the public good. Authority he held not as a weapon of ambition, but a sacred trust to benefit mankind. He restrained the people from regarding him with too great reverence, and frequently rebuked their superstition. On the day when little Ibrahîm, the son of his old age, died, an occasion of great grief to all the Muslims, there happened to be an eclipse of the sun. What an opportunity for an impostor or for one puffed up with spiritual pride! The people were all saying, "It is for the death of Ibrahîm." Muhammad chid them for their foolishness. He said: "The sun and the moon are two signs of the signs of God. They are not eclipsed on account of the life or death of any one." Again and again he told them he was nothing but a man, deserving honour only as God's messenger. It was owing to this perfect self-surrender—which is the meaning of Islam—that when he spoke to the assembled tribes from Mount Arafât on the occasion of his "farewell pilgrimage" to Mecca, and saw the wonderful devotion and enthusiasm of those thousands who, but a few months or years before, had all been conscienceless idolaters, the Prophet was able to exclaim:—

"O Lord, I have delivered my message, and my errand is accomplished."

The multitude below made answer with one voice:—

"Aye, that thou hast!"

The Prophet said: "O Lord, I beseech Thee, bear Thou witness to it."

The faithful servant had performed his task.

No man ever served humanity as this man did, whose sole aim was to serve God. And his example shows us that to serve God truly is to serve humanity. Personal ambition, national ambition, tribal jealousy—all the passions which compose what we call patriotism—he abjured as criminal. Instead he preached the brotherhood of all believers.
