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**THE
ISLAMIC
REVIEW**

*&
ARAB AFFAIRS*

JULY—AUGUST 1969

THREE SHILLINGS



"(O ye who believe!)...and hold fast to the pact of God all together, and split not!"
(The Qur'an 3:103)

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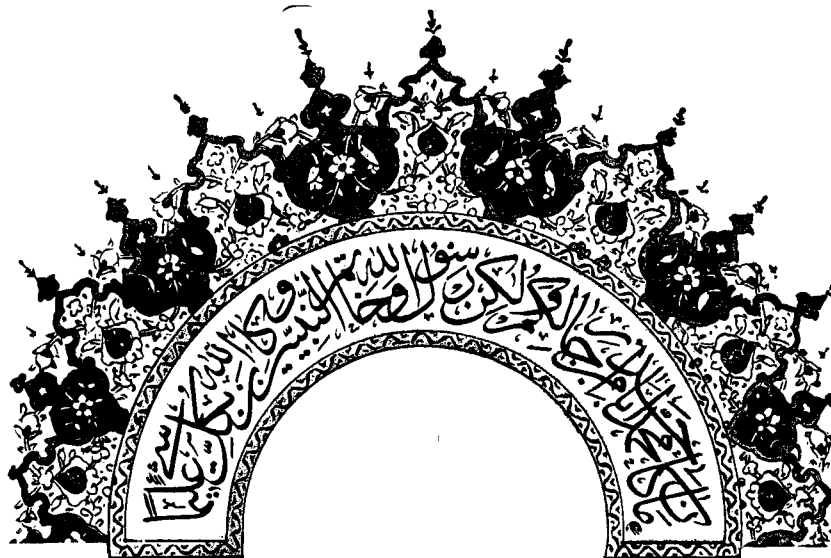
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THE ISLAMIC REVIEW & ARAB AFFAIRS

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



"Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of God and the last of the Prophets. And God has full knowledge of all things"
(The Qur'án, 33 : 40)

"There is no prophet after me" (The Prophet Muhammad)

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JULY–AUGUST 1969 C.E.

Rabi' al-thani – Jumada al-ula 1389 A.H.

A Memorandum to Muslim Heads of State by the Grand Mufti of Palestine and President of the *Mu'tamar al-'Alami al-Islami* (The World Muslim Congress), His Eminence Sayyid Muhammad Amin al-Husayni, on the Judaisation of Jerusalem

The occupation of Jerusalem and its ultimate Judaisation is undoubtedly the first objective of Zionism; because the Holy City constitutes the pivot of the Zionist idea, which is based on the reconstruction of the Temple of Solomon on the site of the Sacred Masjid al-Aqsá, the first *Qiblah* of Islam, and the ingathering of the Jews from the four corners of the world around the Temple, with the intention of further occupation and usurpation of new Arab territory — the portion which lies between the Nile and Euphrates Rivers.

No sooner did the Jews occupy Jerusalem (*Bayt al-Maqdis*) in June 1967 than they started carrying out their long drawn plans for the Judaisation of the city, by a number

of measures which could be summarized as :

1. Confiscation of the property of Muslim inhabitants, including the *waqf* property;
2. Destroying the houses and the removal of their dwellers; and
3. Subjecting the Muslim inhabitants of Jerusalem, particularly the religious and political leaders, to all kinds of persecution, with a view to compelling them to quit the city.

The Muslim States, however, co-operated successfully in bringing about the U.N. Resolution of 4 July 1967, which

insists on the illegality of the measures taken by the Jews to change the status of Jerusalem. But the Jews did not comply with that resolution and pursued their policy of Judaisation of the Holy City, by attempting to wipe out every trace of Islam in it.

The Jews have already constructed hundreds of dwelling units in Jerusalem and its suburbs, with the clear intention of surrounding the city and cutting it off completely from the western bank of the Jordan. Similarly, they are persistently pursuing their dangerous archaeological excavations around the Masjid al-Aqsá, and very lately they announced that they had started raising funds to build the Temple on the site of the Holy al-Aqsá Mosque.

In fact, the Jewish designs on Jerusalem have reached a dangerous stage, in which they are clearly aiming at presenting the world with a *fait accompli*.

This is definitely the most dangerous challenge to the Muslim nation in its long history. The regretful attitude of the Muslims, by limiting their action to words, is undoubtedly going to encourage the Jews not only to destroy (God forbid!) the Masjid al-Aqsá but also to carry out their long set plan of the occupation of *al-Madinah al-Munawwarah* (Medina), the City of the Prophet, as was expressly declared by General Moshe Dayan in June 1967 when he said: "We have occupied Jerusalem and we are now on our way to Yathrib (*al-Madinah al-Munawwarah*) and Babel (Iraq)."

The Jewish measures and aggressive attitude in Jerusalem lately drove the Jordanian Government to bring her complaint before the Security Council. We believe it is necessary to keep raising the question of Jerusalem continuously in the international circles, in order to overcome the factor of time lapse which the Jews cleverly exploit.

We may be permitted to say that the duty of the Muslim States is not limited to that alone. They are invited to show their deep concern about the Muslims of Jerusalem, who, in spite of all Jewish cruel measures, are holding their own in their city and are very bravely facing the Jews in defence of their Holy Places which the Muslims of the world have entrusted them with. Hence, it is the duty of the Muslims in general to support their brethren in the Bayt al-Maqdis and extend to them all financial help, to make their further resistance and insistence on their stay in the city possible.

The World Muslim Congress, however, sees that the time has come for the Muslim States to meet in an Islamic Summit, in order to study the critical and dangerous situation of Jerusalem and to draw up new plans to meet the situation, before it is too late, and also to specify the duties of each party to implement the resolutions.

The World Muslim Congress, further, requests the Muslim States to exert their best efforts in convincing the U.S.A. to change its biased attitude towards Israel, and to make her understand that the attitude of the Muslims towards the U.S.A. in the future shall be determined by her attitude towards the status of Jerusalem and Palestine, which the Muslims consider very vital and dangerous.

The Congress further requests the responsible Muslim States to try to use their good offices to make the American President change the present attitude of the U.S.A. to a favourable one, which does not infringe the rights of the Arabs and the Muslims in Jerusalem, and to convince him, for the sake of world peace, to exert pressure on the Jews to stop their radical measures aiming at the Judaisation of Jerusalem and also to withdraw from the Holy City.

Without Comment

Quotations taken from Marc Hillels's *Israel en Danger de Paix*, Paris, France, 1968

"The most cherished wish of mine is to see, one day, Israel peopled by 3 million Jews." (David Ben Gourion, standing at the foot of the Wailing Wall, June 1967.)

"Today, there exists a great Jewish State and it seeks its people, those who would settle down in Israel and live in it. When Israel would count 4 to 5 million Jews, nothing could hurt it or menace the reality of its existence." (General Ytshak Rabin, September 1967.)

"The thing which Israel stands in need of most is a massive immigration of the Jews. We must double our number before the end of the century." (Levy Eshkol, Jerusalem, October 1967.)

"If Israel had a million more Jews, the Sinai campaign and the Six-day War would have been certainly avoided." (Golda Meir, Kafr Saba, June 1968.)

"The inclusion of a great number of the Arabs in the State of Israel after the June 1967 war constitutes a real menace to the future of our country." (Moshe Dayan, magazine *Look*, April 1968.)

"To hold Nablus and Hebron would depend on the immigration. It will be easier to bring to Israel 100,000 Jews from abroad than to restart the war against the Arabs." (Z. Warhaftig, Minister of Religious Affairs, Jerusalem, April 1968.)

"Israel controls, since June 1967, 1,361,000 Arabs. Before the Six-day War the Arab minority in Israel consisted of 300,000 persons. The Jewish population, which consists of 2,371,000 persons, has not undergone any profound change for years." (Israeli journals, September 1968.)



*God is free from all defects. And (I begin) with His praise.
God Almighty is free from all defects.*

Initiation into the Holy Qur'an

Origin of the Qur'an

An examination of the theories that the ideas the Qur'an contains can be explained otherwise than by revelation

By the late Dr. M. A. DRAZ

The notion of the Divine origin of the Qur'án is the most fundamental part of the teaching of Islam

In the articles that have appeared in the previous issues of *The Islamic Review*, we have been studying the contents of the Qur'án rather than its sources. We are now turning ourselves to a study of its sources, a procedure not normally followed. But in the case of the Qur'án we are constrained to disregard this procedure. For not only does the notion of its Divine origin form part of its teaching, but it is the most fundamental part of that teaching. From one end to the other, the Qur'án speaks either to the Prophet, or about him — nowhere does it express the Prophet's own thought. Everywhere it is God who is presumed to express Himself, either to dictate, or enact, to relate or to warn. In the Qur'án we continually find such phrases as: "O Prophet! . . . ; O Messenger! . . . , We reveal to you . . . , We send you . . . , transmit this . . . , recite that . . . , do this . . . , do not do that . . . , they will say to you . . . , reply to them . . . " etc. Even when the text cannot explicitly include this didactic indication vis-à-vis the Prophet (as in the prayer-formula which is recited textually, Chapter 1), everything else is there to indicate it.

But how can we avoid attributing the Qur'anic language and the ideas which it expresses to the person who enunciates them albeit not as emanations of his own thought, nor as reproductions of what he has acquired from his natural sur-

roundings? How can we regard this person as being a mere "receiving-vessel" who has been handed his book "ready-made" by some external and superhuman entity? Such an assertion would certainly disturb the equilibrium of many. It seems to contradict the laws of psychology, at least in their ordinary manifestations.

By making this claim Muhammad was doubtless not the first to have raised the problem of Revelation. He was in this respect even more modest than Moses, who declared (confirmed in the Qur'án) that the Pentateuch was a direct communication from the Eternal, whose word he had heard. Whereas, in the eyes of Muhammad, the Qur'án was the word of a celestial messenger, an intermediary between God and him (The Qur'án 81 : 19-21). Apart from this difference, these Prophets had this in common — they both believed in the supernatural.

But for those who accept the principle of revelation in the general sense, it is quite permissible not to regard this or that phenomenon as a revelation until all the possibilities of a natural explanation have been exhausted. If, finally, one resigns oneself to the acceptance of the immediate Divine origin of a phenomenon, it will be as a last resource, the humble admission of the scientist, in despair of not finding his "scientific" cause.

So let us disregard the reasoning which might lead us to

attribute the glory of the Qur'anic style to its Divinity. And let us simply ask ourselves if the ideas which it embodies cannot be explained otherwise than by revelation. Throughout history there has never been any lack of research in this domain. And we should mention — to the honour of the Qur'an and Muslim tradition — that all the theories enunciated by the contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad in attempting to give an explanation of this kind, have been faithfully recorded in all their details. They were theories which covered not only every possible solution, but which also exhausted the absurdities which the scoffers did not fail to invent in order to pour ridicule on any new enterprise, no matter how serious it might have been, or how important for the human race. Thus we might say that modern researches in this domain are only developing, or repeating under another form, the same studies made many years ago.

In the next few pages our aim will be to examine these different solutions under their present-day forms. As a method of exposition we prefer the chronological order. So we shall divide them into two groups, those connected with the pre-Hegiran period, and those of the post-Hegiran period.

THE MECCAN PERIOD

The pagan milieu — Hanifites, Sabaeans, Judeo-Christian elements. The Prophet's travels and observations — readings — popular literature and legends — personal meditations.

An examination of the theory advanced by the French Orientalist Ernest Renan (d. 1892) that the elements necessary for the construction of the Qur'anic doctrine were in existence in the pre-Hegiran period

The most elementary, or the most naïve, of theories is the one according to which all the elements necessary for the construction of the Qur'anic doctrine were in existence within the limited region of the Hijáz, if not in the very birthplace of the Prophet himself. Ernest Renan gives us a typical example of this point of view. In his article on "Muhammad and the origin of Islamism",¹ the French scholar gives us a picturesque account of the Arabia of the 6th century. Instead of a people of idolaters, as so believed by the entire world, he shows us a people who had never conceived God as having variety or plurality, but who had always regarded Him as a being Who does not beget, and is not begotten. He rightly emphasises the refined literary taste of this people, and its keen sense of the real, but he makes no mention of its other less desirable qualities. In place of the arrogant and debauched materialism so little interested in speculation on the higher truths, he paints the picture of a society bustling with religious fervour, a society in which not only all religions and all civilisations find a common meeting-place, but where everybody "... argues about religion ...".² If we can believe his account, Muhammad, instead of anticipating the religious tendency of his time, merely followed it (*ibid.*).

But it is in the Qur'an that we find the true picture of Arab life at this period in history, the image offered us by Renan is quite different. We have seen, in fact, how the Qur'an describes the superstitious overlay with which the Arabs covered their primitive monotheism. The social and moral aspects were no less deplorable — infanticide (The Qur'an 6 : 140), prostitution (4 : 33), incest (4 : 22, 23), extortion of dowry, heritage of the wives of relatives against their will (4 : 19-21), the oppression of orphans (19 : 127), cupidity, neglect of the poor and contempt for the weak (89 : 17-20). Not even the famous Arab virtue *muruwah* (hospitality and generosity) was exempt from this category of social and moral

defects, for the Qur'an delineates it as a charity which was misplaced and tainted with vice, if, indeed, it was not vice itself, a vulgar display of extravagance and ostentation (4 : 28). In short, it was a life of "clear error" (3 : 164; 62 : 2), it was the "period of ignorance" (33 : 33; 48 : 26).

Renan over-estimates the importance of the Hanifs in the pre-Hegiran period

No doubt the Arabs of this period retained in their practices certain surviving elements of the patriarchal religion, for example, the rites of pilgrimage. But these same "survivals" abounded in errors and superstitions (2 : 189, 200).

From among this mass of misled and ignorant people there came into some prominence a small number of *élite*, known to Tradition as Hanifs, that is to say, "those opposing the generally-accepted opinion". It was this very limited number of people that Renan imagined as being representative of the spirit of the time. But we know, on the contrary, that it was an infinitesimal number that could be counted on the fingers, and that the great mass of the people remained impenetrable to such pre-occupations and considerations. We have only to consult pre-Islamic literature for confirmation of this. At the annual fair of 'Ukáz, the people competed among themselves, not about religion, but about worldly glories. Each tribe showed off its poetic genius, recounted its chivalrous exploits and evoked those of its ancestors. In the most famous of these poems, known as the "Golden Verses", there is "... hardly one religious thought ..." to be found.

But, after all, what was the teaching of these "reformers", predecessors of Muhammad? Actually, it was nothing at all, or at most, very little. These "reformers" were simply people who were dissatisfied. Since polytheism and the cruel, degenerate morals of their fellow-citizens did not satisfy their higher aspirations, they sought for a rational and wholesome religion outside of this atmosphere. But as to what form this should take they had no definite idea, nothing which would be likely to foreshadow in the slightest degree the teaching of the Qur'an. Zayd Ibn 'Amr Ibn Nufayl, the staunchest and most independent member of this group, solemnly admitted that he did not know how God should be worshipped.³

The only information we can gather about the Hanifs, or Hanifism, is, as Renan himself so aptly wrote, that there was at that time "... a kind of unrest and vague expectancy ...", which, in those "few privileged souls", expressed itself "... in the form of presentiments and desires".⁴

Sabaeism and the construction of the Qur'anic doctrine

Now at this stage men might certainly talk vaguely about God, religion, prophets, books and Paradise, but, in their minds, these terms had no clear and distinct meaning. With regard to fixed religious systems, and without going outside the native *milieu* with which we are now dealing, we should speak rather of Sabaeism than of Hanifism. Does the term "Sábi'ín" (Sabaeans) in the Qur'an (2 : 62; 5 : 69; 22 : 17) refer to a rather more refined pagan sect (the Sabaeans of Harrán, who claimed to be connected with Sábí, the son of Seth, to follow his religion, and to be in possession of his book in the Syriac language), or to a Judeo-Christian sect known as the Sabáites (the "Subbas" or Mandaean Christians of John the Baptist), or the same pagan sect disguised as Christians? The question is controversial, and al-Fayyúmi, in

1 *Revue des Deux Mondes* for 15 December 1851, pp. 1070-1.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 1089.

3 See Ibn Hishám, *Sírah*, Vol. 1, p. 144. Cairo, 1929.

4 *Revue des Deux Mondes*, *op. cit.*, p. 1090.

his Arabic dictionary (*al-Misbáh al-munír*), gives the last of the above definitions. In any case, two considerations seem to nullify the second theory, firstly, the difference between the root “*sb*” and the root “*sbh*”, and secondly, the fact that tradition makes no mention of the Sab’ite doctrines — emanation and incarnation — whereas the fundamental ideas and the principle practices attributed to the Sabaeans are well-known and refuted in the Qur’án and the Hadiths. Some of these ideas and practices were adopted by the Quraysh and became so widespread among them that it is difficult to isolate them from the paganism of the time, such as, for example :

- (1) The divinity of angles and stars and their influence on earthly events.
- (2) The “lion’s share” taken from the ritual offerings made to them, and shared among inferior divinities, rather than being given to God.
- (3) The “associationist” form of invocation which they used during pilgrimages, etc.

Certain other ritual or customary practices are distinguishable from pagan and Muslim practices. Thus, for the Sabaeans, the pilgrimage was made to Harrán, in Iraq, and not to the Ka’bah. Their ritual offerings had to be entirely burnt and could not be eaten.⁵ They prohibited bigamy, and did not observe circumcision.⁶ Even their prayers were manifestly a part of star-worship. They were performed three times a day, and had to coincide exactly with sunrise, the zenith and sunset — exactly the opposite of the Islamic precept on this matter. So that whether it was refined or vulgar, superstitious, sceptical or critical, the paganism of the Hijáz does not give us a satisfactory explanation of the origin of the Qur’án.

Judeo-Christian milieu and the construction of the Qur’anic doctrine

But let us leave this environment, and seek elsewhere. Perhaps among the Judeo-Christian people we shall find some light on the matter.

We will not dwell at length on the story of the Christian monk Bahírah, who, according to tradition, had seen Muhammad when he was twelve years of age, accompanied by his uncle during their journey to Syria. Common sense prevents us from regarding this brief meeting as an historical source. Besides, either this story is a legend, or we must take seriously into account the facts which it relates. It says, in fact, that this conversation took place in the presence of the entire caravan party, that the rôle of Muhammad was not that of a listener, but that he was the one who was being questioned, and that after the interrogation the monk regarded the incident as a sign of the future Mission of the young man. Thus the idea is self-contradictory.⁷

Ought we perhaps to make a more serious study of another theory of the same kind? We are told of the existence in the suburbs of Mecca of some people of the “petty trickster” type, Romans or Abyssinian Negroes, “wine-sellers”, “labourers”, “living on the outskirts of the city”.⁸ And we are told that it was “. . . in the taverns that the Gospel was preached to ignorant and uncouth people.”⁹

Could it have been in those places that Muhammad had his first contact with religious notions? We are left in a quandary on this matter . . . we have not been left any authentic document on early associations of this kind. On the other hand, we have several reasons for not taking seriously the possibility of such a report being true, or helpful.

First, it is historical truth itself which has placed on record, and definitely circumscribed, the details of the occupations of the future Prophet. It tells us that he was successively in three different places — in solitude, as a shepherd; or in trade, as leader or member of a caravan; or in the world of men, of society, among the leaders. And when we consider the Prophet’s exemplary morals, the status of his birth, and the terrain where he followed these early occupations, we are quite unable to imagine him ever visiting or frequenting taverns and places of that kind.

Secondly, a report of this kind was quite futile, not only because the “ignorant and uncouth people” were particularly ignorant of their religion,¹⁰ but especially — and it is in this that the Qur’anic viewpoint consists — their “foreign language” would be, for the Prophet, a natural barrier (The Qur’án 16 : 103).

Thirdly, and finally, if there had been in the report any real source which could have been of any value, would it not have been more natural and easier for his contradictors to have used it to produce all they wanted, in order to crush his ambition, instead of looking for more potent (and scientific) weapons at Medina, as we shall see later on?

We would rather talk about a *milieu* which is vaster than this, one which was fairly cultured and where religious ideas and practices might have played some part in the formation of the Islamic doctrine. We have seen that during his youth Muhammad had occasion to travel from time to time to Syria on affairs of business, and probably also to the Yemen for the same reason — *Rihlah al-Shitá’ wa al-Sayf* (The Qur’án 106). And we know that the Ghassanides of Syria and the Banú Hárih of Najrán (South Yemen) had embraced Christianity (we will not mention the Jewish tribes of Medina and Khaybar, with whom he did not come into contact until later, after the Hegira). Muhammad was an intelligent observer, one who by reason of his vocation would be alert to matters of morals. Would not our Arab traveller have been struck more by the more refined morality and the more wholesome ideas of the peoples whom he visited, when compared with those of his fellow-citizens, with whom he was quite disgusted? I. Goldziher, among others, is of this opinion. In fact, this Hungarian Orientalist thinks that the marked contrast between the life and customs of his compatriots and the lively impressions he received during his travels must have given the first impulse to his work of reform.¹¹

Up to what point will this explanation help us to settle the question? First, had Muhammad penetrated into Christian countries that were Christian in the real sense of the word? Some writers doubt this very much, in view of the absence from the Qur’án of any allusion to external signs of the Christian cult, whereas it speaks more comprehensively of the profound spirit of Eastern Christianity. This is in striking contrast with the opinions formed by Arab poets of the same period who visited those countries.¹² Other writers are more

5 Cf. G. Sale, *Observations Historiques et Critiques sur le Mahométisme*, pp. 30-31.

6 *Encyclopédie de l’Islam*, article on “Sábía”.

7 We can read the following conclusion in Huart, “Une nouvelle source du Koran” (*Journal Asiatique* for July-August 1904), p. 127. “. . . the Arabic texts which have been discovered, published and studied since that time preclude us from regarding the rôle attributed to this Syrian monk as anything but a pure invention.”

8 Massé, *L’Islam*, p. 21.

9 Huart, *Une Nouvelle Source du Koran*, p. 131.

10 Lammens, *L’Islam*, p. 28.

11 *Le Dogme et la Loi de l’Islam*, p. 4.

12 T. Andrae, *Mahomet, Sa Vie et Sa Doctrine*, pp. 37-38.

forthright — they assure us that the caravan expeditions made by the future Prophet did not take him beyond Sûq Hubâshah in the Tihâmah, and Ghurash in the Yemen.¹³

Modern Christian writers on the condition of Christianity at the time of Muhammad

But, supposing he had really come into contact with the Christianity of that epoch — would he have been more enchanted with the prospect, or charmed with it? Let us first hear some of the observations made by Christian writers. "If," says G. Sale, "we read ecclesiastical history with some attention, we see that, even as far back as the third century, the Christian world was ravaged by the ambition of the clergy, by schisms, by controversies over the most absurd and futile matters, by endless disputes, in which the participants became divided, and then sub-divided, *ad infinitum*. The Christians seemed to vie with each other so feverishly in perpetrating all kinds of malice, hatred and mischief that they had, so to speak, chased Christianity from the world by continual controversies about how to agree with each other. It was during these dark centuries that most of the superstition and corruption not only came into being, but became firmly established — after the Council of Nicaea, the Eastern church, was torn asunder by the disputes of the Arians, the Sabellians, the Nestorians and the Eutychians. The clergy saw fit to give 'protection' to officers of the Army and under this pretext justice was sold publicly, and all kinds of corruption were encouraged. In the Eastern Church, there was the dispute between Damascus and Ursiciana about the episcopal see of Rome, and so much bitter feeling was engendered that it led even to violence and murder. These dissensions arose principally through the fault of the Emperors, in particular Constantius. It was even worse under Justinian — who considered there was no crime in condemning to death anyone who thought differently from him. This debasement of morals and doctrine, which was as virulent among the princes as among the clergy, was inevitably followed by the general degradation of the people. The one aim of people of all types was to amass money in any way possible and then to squander it in luxury and debauchery."¹⁴

In his *Ancient Christianity*, Vol. 1, p. 266, Taylor wrote : "What Muhammad and his Khalifs encountered on all sides . . . was superstition so abject, idolatry so vulgar and so shameful, ecclesiastical doctrines so arrogant, religious practices so dissolute and so puerile, that strong-minded Arabs felt themselves newly-inspired, as messengers of God, to reprove the errors of the world . . ."¹⁵

In recalling the sufferings inflicted by the Persians on the people of Palestine during the lifetime of Muhammad, a monk-historian had no hesitation in saying that it was because of the wickedness of the Christians of that country that God had punished them through the cruelty of the Zoroastrian persecutors. Speaking of the same period, Mosheim drew up a comparative description, in which he emphasised the contrast between the last and the first Christians. During the 7th century, he concluded, true religion was buried beneath the mass of insane superstitions, and it was incapable of "lifting up its head".¹⁶

One might say that these pages were written with the object of explaining that very concise Qur'anic verse which appears in the chapter entitled "The Food", a verse which simply makes an allusion to a certain "deviation" or cleavage between Christianity and the Christians of the time, and which declares that the schism resulting from this cleavage will last until the day of resurrection (5 : 14).

Did the Arab converts to Christianity behave any better than the original Christians? No. In spite of their conversion, the Arab tribes of pre-Islamic Syria (the Ghassanides) nonetheless retained some of their paganism.¹⁷ 'Alî went so far as to say of the Taghlib that all they gained from Christianity was the habit of drinking wine¹⁸ and Huart concluded : "Although many were attracted by the idea that the sight of people practising the Christian religion in Syria had reacted strongly on the mind of the young reformer, it had to be abandoned because of the uncertainty of any historical basis."¹⁹

Such was the living scene as viewed by our observer. Wherever he went he encountered errors in need of rectification, deviations in need of amendment. Nowhere did he meet with that model of morality and religion from which he is supposed to have copied his work of reform. The materials found by him up to that time doubtless provided him with something to demolish, practically never with anything constructive.

Muhammad could not read or write

Let us widen our field of investigation. Outside of the visual and concrete world there is the auditive world and the world of books. If the example is not a very enlightening one, the lesson might perhaps be. From where will this lesson come? What vehicle will it use?

The first solution which springs to our minds is to postulate that Muhammad may have acquired his knowledge through the direct reading of previous Revelations, whether Judeo-Christian or otherwise.²⁰

But firstly, could Muhammad read and write?

The Qur'ân replies in the negative, and it gives this state of illiteracy as one of the proofs of the Divine source of the Prophet's instruction. Not only does it describe the Prophet as *ummi*, belonging to an *ummiyyûn* people (7 : 157; 3 : 164; 62 : 2), that is to say "illiterate", "without education" (and not simply, as Sprenger maintains, belonging to a pagan people, not having received revealed Scriptures),²¹ but it definitely affirms that he had ". . . never read a book before the Qur'ân, nor had he ever written (anything)" (The Qur'ân 29 : 48). His adversaries themselves must certainly have noticed his lack of education, since, when trying to explain the source where he might have gathered his knowledge of

13 Sprenger, quoted by Huart, *Une Nouvelle Source du Koran*, p. 128.

14 Cf. G. Sale, *Observations sur le Mahométisme*, pp. 68-71.

15 Isaac Taylor, quoted by Dr. Sinclair Tisdall, *The Sources of the Koran*, pp. 136-7.

16 See S. Tisdall (*ibid.*).

17 Cf. Massé, *L'Islam*, p. 17.

18 Noeldeke, *Geschichte des Korans*, p. 10. See also Zamakhsharî, who writes on the Qur'ân 5 : 5.

19 Huart, *Nouvelle Source* . . . , p. 129.

20 In fact, Dr. S. Tisdall goes so far as to maintain that certain Islamic conceptions are derived from Zoroastrianism, and he devotes a whole chapter to so-called Zoroastrian elements in the Qur'ân and the Sunnah. Without passing any kind of judgment on the origin, or even the authors, of the notions mentioned by him in this connection, we note that, with the exception of the idea of "hours", they do not belong to the Qur'ân itself, but to certain more or less doubtful traditions. They include such ideas as *nûr* ("the Light of Muhammad"), *Azrael* ("the angel of Death"), *Sirât* ("the bridge of Hell"), etc.

21 An interpolation which, though it may not be so absurd in certain passages, does not become less contradictory in others, where the word "ummi" is applied to illiterate Jews (the Qur'ân 2 : 78). Further, when the Prophet, speaking about himself and his people, said, "We are an *ummiyyah* people," he explained it in the following terms: "We neither write, nor do we calculate." (Bukhârî, *Kitâb Saum*.)

ancient history, did not dare to say that he had written it — *kataba-há* — but that he had *ordered* it to be written for him — *iktataba-há* (The Qur'an 25 : 5) — two very different forms which have confused certain Orientalists.²²

Even supposing that he could read, there is another insurmountable obstacle. It is the fact that, at that time, there was no Arabic version of the Bible, either of the Old or of the New Testament.²³ These documents in foreign languages were the monopoly of certain bi-lingual scholars, who guarded them very jealously. The Qur'an refers to these People of the Book as being so "... niggardly with their knowledge, that they would barely agree to show people a few pages of the Pentateuch, being very careful to conceal the larger part of it" (The Qur'an 6 : 91). Later on, at Medina, it condemned their other methods of dissimulation, both verbal (The Qur'an 3 : 78), or written (The Qur'an 2 : 79). In any case, there is no historical record of any contact between the Prophet and this world of letters and learning before the Hegira. So long as we confine ourselves to generalities which cannot be verified, we could doubtless suppose that such relations did exist, and here the imagination could run riot. But when it is a question of giving precise and exact details on this point, we are at once face to face with an anachronism of the most flagrant kind.

But if Muhammad did not gather his notions of religion from Biblical texts, either directly or by methodical discussion with competent scholars, is it not possible that he obtained them from certain Arab, Judeo-Christian or "assimilated" poets?

If Muhammad could not gather his notions of religion from Biblical texts, did he get them from certain Judeo-Christian Arabs?

The poetry of Umayyah Ibn Abi al-Salt

We recall that the Qur'an shows us the Prophet as being so little familiar with poetry, generally speaking, that it regarded it as a pastime "unworthy of him" (The Qur'an 36 : 69). We will not dwell on this, but will ask ourselves what kind of teaching could perhaps emanate from this kind of literature. We find that there are two kinds. Some poets, including one called A'shá, wrote especially about the customs and religious practices of the Church. In the Qur'an we find no trace, no reference, to this subject. These poets seemed particularly interested in the use of wine but, far from adopting the custom, the Qur'an categorically forbade it. Thus the Qur'an cannot possibly have had any kind of connection or relationship with this kind of poetry. But there was another kind of poetry, which was almost entirely devoted to ideas of religion. In this connection the verses of Umayyah Ibn Abi al-Salt are a striking example. The description of life after death and the stories from early religious history — these were the two favourite subjects to be met with, and often they were expressed in the same terms as those found in the Qur'an. Was not this the model from which the Qur'an was built up?

If we could succeed in verifying the conditions necessary for this relationship, it would certainly be a most valuable discovery, for it would relieve us, at least to a certain extent, of the need of having recourse to a supernatural explanation of the Qur'an. And this would justify those writers who regard the poetry of Umayyah as the link between the Qur'an and the Bible.²⁴

To support this idea no doubt the first task would be to confirm, or to postulate, the authenticity of the poetry in ques-

tion. But on this point we have no intention of raising difficulties. Although certain literary compilers, such as Hammád and Khalaf al-Ahmar, were suspected of having composed verses which they then attributed to ancient poets by mixing them with their own work, it would be an exaggeration to

22 See, for example, Leblois, *Le Koran et la Bible Hébraïque*. This writer, following the example of others, tried to prove the anti-thesis by mentioning a tradition according to which the Prophet, when on his death-bed, asked for writing materials to be brought, so that he could write down testamentary instructions regarding the Caliphate. But the argument is not conclusive. First, it does not say that the Prophet actually did write, and no conclusion can be arrived at from the non-fulfilment of such a project on the part of a dying person. Secondly, and specially important, the verb "to write", generally speaking attributed to prominent leaders, and all the more so to a leader known to his disciples as never having used a pen or read a piece of writing, can mean only one thing: "to dictate and affix his seal". Thus, in speaking about his diplomatic correspondence, we use this term: *Kataba 'ilá fulánin*, meaning: "by the intermediary of his secretaries". Similarly, for the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, we say: *Bayna-má yaktubu huwa wa Suhayl idh tala'a*, whereas it was 'Alí who wrote it at the dictation of the Prophet. Here is another line or argument which some people have tried to put forward in connection with an episode about this same Treaty. 'Alí had put, as title: "The Treaty of Peace between Muhammad, the Messenger of God, and ..." Whereupon the Qurayshite delegate objected that, if he had recognised Muhammad's title as Messenger of God, he would not have fought against him. With good grace the Prophet ordered the title to be crossed out, but the devoted secretary did not dare do this. Then the Prophet asked to be shown the word to be effaced and he himself crossed it out. Up to this point there are no problems. But one very concise — and elliptical — version of this episode adds: "and wrote in its place Muhammad Ibn 'Abdulláh". Apparently this attributes the writing to the Prophet. But, if we suppose this to be the gist of the story, the passage itself presents no difficulty at all. For on the one hand, according to the general rule, this attribution must be understood in a mediate sense. And on the other hand, this apparent equivocation is elucidated in the other versions of the episode, where it is stated that as soon as the Prophet had crossed out the title, 'Alí replaced it with the new one. To try to exploit this ambiguity in order to assert that the Prophet knew the art of writing, would be to overlook the fact that he had to rely on the scribe to show him the word which was to be crossed out. Further, it would be to ignore a reference made at this very place, in which this reliance on the scribe is explained by the fact that the Prophet "cannot write". (*Lá yuhsinu yaktubu*.)

Thus, by the admission of the Prophet himself, *má aná bi-Qari'in* and *nahnu ummatun ummiyyatun* by his activities and sayings during his lifetime, by the testimony of his disciples, by the objections of his adversaries, and finally, by the solemn declaration in the Qur'an, the illiteracy of the Prophet seems to us to be definitely confirmed. All the attempts made to prove or demonstrate the contrary are quite inadequate to disprove this fact. Muhammad did not live on another planet. His life is known down to its smallest details, and his people did not fall into error by being victims of a naïve credulity. If the Prophet could read, ought he not at least sometimes to have read and checked the subject-matter of his correspondence, or the copies of his Qur'an? Further, in spite of the ambiguity of certain stories, Noeldeke was able to formulate the following conclusions: (1) that Muhammad definitely regarded himself as being illiterate, which is why he asked others to read the Qur'an and his correspondence. (2) that, in any case, he did not read the Bible or other important book: (*Cf. Geschichte*, Part 1, p. 16.)

23 Cf. Leblois, *Le Koran et la Bible Hébraïque*, p. 35. Professor Graf makes an even more positive affirmation. It was not until several centuries later that there appeared an Arabic edition of the Bible, and it was not until the 9th and 10th centuries that the need was felt for an Arabic translation of the Gospel. (*The Moslem World* for April 1939, an article by Miss Padwick on "The Origin of Translations in Arabic".) In spite of his indefatigable research in a number of libraries, the Abbé Chidiac, referring to the oldest Arabic translation of the New Testament, reported that he was unable to find references to this work before the 11th century. (Chidiac, *Etude sur al-Ghazáli, Réfutation Excellente . . .*, Chap. 7.)

24 Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammeds*, Vol. 1, p. 78, quoted and developed by Huart, *Nouvelle Source du Koran*, p. 133.

generalise about this "suspect" character by extending it to all Arab poetry, or to pre-Islamic poetry in particular.

But it is not enough for a text to be authentic, it must be anterior to a similar text, before it can be considered as being the origin of the latter. And the problem of the anteriority of the verses of Umayyah vis-à-vis the verses of the Qur'án is, historically speaking, insoluble. For not only were Muhammad and Umayyah contemporaries and practically of the same age, but Umayyah lived and continued to Meccan chapters of the Qur'án, in which can be seen certain similarities with Umayyad poetry. So that it would be at least presumptuous to declare that the latter were the first to appear.

We should add that Umayyah never boasted of being original or of receiving prophetic inspiration, and that he often admitted his disappointment and regret because of this. This leads us to think that he might have been tempted to imitate, simply out of rivalry. In contrast to this, Muhammad solemnly reiterated that no man had imparted his doctrine to him. Let us look at the attitude of the Prophet's adversaries. They were continually on the watch for the slightest "mistake" or "doubtful" gesture which they could use to attack him and make him a laughing-stock. Would it not be easier for them to force the Prophet to admit that he had manifestly plagiarised such a recent document, than to look for all kinds of reasons and theories — even that of madness — in order to explain the phenomenon of the Qur'án?

From which we can assume, if not as a certainty, then at least as a strong probability, that it was more likely that the Qur'án served as the basis for the literature of its time, as it certainly did for the literature of the following epoch. And it will not be doing an injustice to the poetic art if we say that, unlike the religious aspect, it does not guarantee the exclusivity of its sources. The poet's problem lies not so much in the truth of the idea he expresses as in the more or less agreeable form under which he presents it. He can only gather his materials from wherever he can find them, in the wisdom of the ancients or the moderns, in the facts of experience, or in the popular opinion, in the most ridiculous sentiments or the most absurd flights of the imagination. And a careful study will show us, in the poetry of Umayyah, the presence of a whole series of different sources. Huart himself noticed this. Thus, when the poet speaks of hell, he borrows the language of the Bible. When he wants to describe Paradise he makes use of Qur'anic terms. And when he is dealing with sacred history he sometimes has recourse to popular legend and a type of mythology in which the same personage is presented sometimes as a man, and sometimes as an animal or a plant.

Can the popular ideas and notions of the day of the Prophet serve as a basis for the construction of the Qur'anic doctrines?

In this exploration into external natural sources there remains one last subject of study — popular ideas and notions.

We will not go so far as to assert that Muhammad, in his youth, had absolutely no "knowledge through hearsay" of pre-Islamic religions. It seems to us futile to pretend that he lived in a "splendid isolation", thus making him on this point more ignorant than his people. And throughout the Qur'án these people appear to us to have had some knowledge, or at least certain ideas, about previous revelations. In fact, they demanded from the Prophet Divine "signs", similar to those which had been given by his predecessors (The

Qur'án 21 : 5). In opposition to his doctrine of the Unity of God they boasted that they would continue to adhere to their own interpretation of the last revealed teaching ("... the former faith") (The Qur'án 38 : 7). They compared the worship of Jesus with that of their own idols (The Qur'án 43 : 57, 58). It is easy to imagine that other items of Biblical knowledge became popular, thanks to this mixture of religions in the peninsula.

However, there are several reasons which set definite limits to the plan of our imagination: (1) the lack of propaganda and the dissimulation of religious leaders; (2) the fact that converts were few, they were ignorant and illiterate, and were widely scattered over the country; (3) racial prejudice among the early Arabs and the little interest shown by them in matters which did not affect either their immediate occupations or their own history; (4) the absence from their literature, with one exception, of religious subjects. In this connection it is very interesting to note how the attention of those who travelled and acquired knowledge was drawn elsewhere than to the religious aspect. And we hear now Nadhr Ibn al-Háarith, wishing to outrival the Qur'anic narratives, related to his listeners not the history of the Patriarchs and the Prophets, but the legends of the ancient kings of Persia and the exploits of its heroes Rustum and Isfandiyar²⁵—and what did the poet Nábighah al-Dhubaynī extol in his version? — King Solomon, Huart tells us.²⁶ Evidently it was always the splendours and the *éclat* of worldly activities which absorbed their attention.

In view of the total lack of historical information as to the degree of literary or "book" knowledge possessed by this illiterate and carefree people, all that we can reasonably credit them with must evidently be limited to a few ideas, as vague and as rudimentary as those mentioned above, ideas which can do nothing to enlighten us as to the origin of the Qur'anic themes, their scope, their accuracy and their depth. It would certainly be a strange idea — to imagine this people of the "period of ignorance" sharing, to some extent, the scientific knowledge reserved for its rare scholars. At no moment in history, and among the most civilised and the most educated of peoples have we seen a "*rapprochement*" of this kind between the profane and the expert. He alone can speak with accuracy and certainty of the "atomic bomb", who knows its secret. Others may repeat the name time after time, but without knowing the formula. But that is only deductive reasoning, valid because of the absence of positive information. This is the truth given us by the Qur'án. In fact, this book does not remain silent about the novelty, or the originality, of its teaching vis-à-vis the Arabs, including the Prophet. On many occasions, when mentioning this or that episode in sacred history, it does not fail to affirm that, before being invested with his Mission, neither Muhammad nor his people were in the slightest degree familiar with that history (The Qur'án 3 : 44; 11 : 49; 12 : 3, 102; 28 : 4-6). If it had been otherwise, what *riposte* would he have had from his enemies?

But supposing that certain details had infiltrated into the popular "credo", could Muhammad have not naïvely placed any confidence in the authority of the masses, he who always mistrusted the reports of the pundits? And since the ideas current in that Babylon of religions could not possibly all flow along the same stream, because the pagans, the Sabaeans, the Magians, the Jews and the Christians all presented the Truth in their own particular way, which of these communi-

²⁵ Cf. Ibn Hishám, *Sírah*, Vol. 1, p. 183.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

ties could the Prophet regard as being trustworthy, and likely to have given accurate narratives and renderings? In the face of these contradictory accounts, what was he to do? For if he had decided to preach or proclaim the beliefs held by each community, each sect, or each branch of a sect, what a monstrosity, what a glaring hodge-podge, would have come down to us in the Qur'án (The Qur'án 4 : 82).

At this juncture there arises the need of taking into account the "personal coefficient".

We may certainly suppose that during his short retreats immediately before the Revelation, or even during his periods of pastoral solitude in his youth, this "man of dreams" would meditate deeply in an endeavour to discover where the real truth lay in matters of this kind. After due reflection, he made his choice.

Nevertheless, we must here make a distinction between two spheres of human knowledge — the empiric and the rational. For the history of mankind does not "conform" to our logic, and there are historical absurdities which contradict our reason, or our sense of the logical. It was not by retiring within himself, or by meditation, that Muhammad was able to discover that such-and-such event took place on such-and-such a date. Now it is precisely on the parallelism of the religious history in the Qur'án and that of the preceding Books that we insist the most often when we try to discover the means whereby this concordance was carried out.

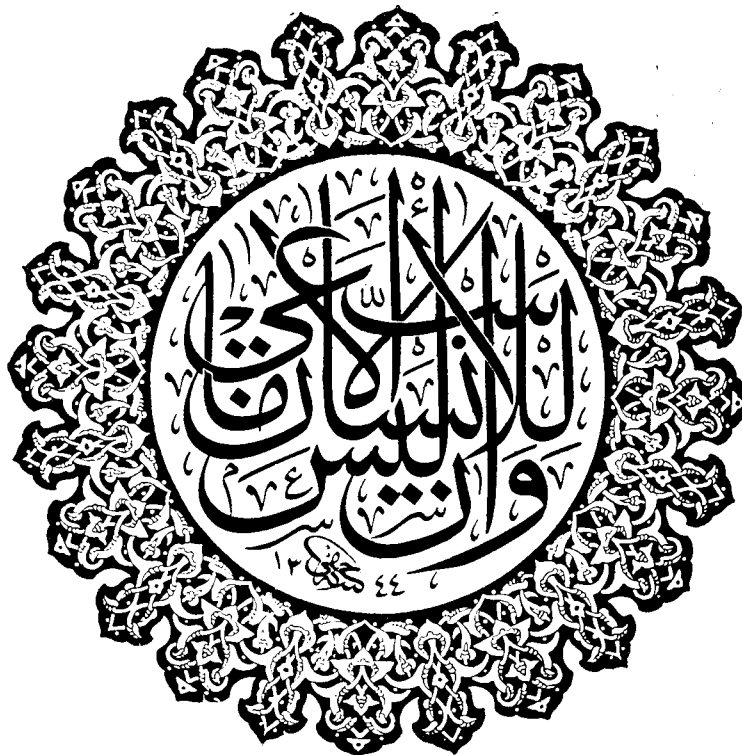
The rôle of meditation is limited in the matter of religion

Since rational meditation is ineffective in the empirical domain, it is doubtless a valuable help in the discovery of the eternal truths. What is the part played by pure reason in the matter of religion? We must admit it is a very limited one. Obviously it reveals to us the falseness, the futility, the madness of idolatry and superstition. But when we have elimi-

nated monstrosities of this kind, what should we build in their place? No doctrine was ever developed solely on negative ideas. At this first stage Muhammad must have found himself in the same situation as that of the Hanífs, that is to say, distressed and perplexed. At least that is what the Qur'án gives us to understand, when it depicts the Prophet, on the eve of the Revelation, heavy-hearted and groaning, as under the weight of a crushing burden (The Qur'án 94 : 1-3).

We will willingly agree that the first stage of the research was quickly accomplished, and the most fundamental truth soon discovered, or even acquired, at an early date. But to know God as Creator is not the whole of the religious science of the Qur'án, and the path leading to that science is quite long and tortuous, if not completely closed to intelligence, armed only with its human resources. Through what power was Muhammad able to discover the incalculable Divine attributes, the relationship of God with the different worlds, both visible and invisible, the destiny that He reserves for man after death — without ever changing his mind about some advanced truth, and at the same time conserving that striking concordance with the Scripture versions, versions jealously guarded by the scholars? It is clear that pure intelligence, which is not guided by positive teachings, is incapable of advancing with such a sure and far-seeing step on this path. And the Qur'án definitely confirms this truth in the situation we are studying, by declaring that at the time when Muhammad was mentally absorbed in the reception of Revelation, he did not know "... either what the Book is, or what faith is" (The Qur'án 42 : 52), not to mention the work of legislation under its various aspects, moral, social and ritual. In what way should God be worshipped? What is the best rule of conduct for the individual, for society, for humanity? On all these points Muhammad knew nothing. How could he have guided others along the path of religion when he could not guide himself (The Qur'án 93 : 7)?

*"For verily man there is
nothing but what he strives
after" (The Qur'an)*



The Revival of the *Maqamah* in the Modern Arabic Literature

The *Maqamahs* of Nasif al-Yaziji, Ahmad Shidyaq and al-Muwaylihi

The *Hadith 'Isa Ibn Hisham* as a milestone in the development of Native prose fiction in Egypt

By Professor Dr. MATTI I. MOOSA

The meaning of the word *maqámah*

The nineteenth century saw the emergence of two entirely opposite movements in Arabic literature. One, conservative in nature, sought to revive a medieval literary form, the *maqámah*; the other, liberal in nature and dominated by Syrians who had emigrated to Egypt after the Lebanese massacre of 1860, was characterized by the translation into Arabic of European prose fiction, primarily from English and French. In addition, the progressive writers tried to recreate the Arabs' heritage in the form of historical novels, and to create fiction which imitated Western models but maintained traditional settings and forms. The conservative Muslim writers, inhibited by their puritanical religious precepts, shunned Western fiction, and especially the novel, as frivolous, immoral, and detrimental to their way of life, while the Syrian Christian *emigrés* saw Western fiction not only as a source of entertainment but as an essential force in the revitaliation of a long stagnant literary tradition. The revival of the traditional *maqámah* is to be considered against this background.

The *maqámah* has frequently been defined as "an assembly" or "a place of meeting", and the term was used in this sense by pre-Islamic poets like Zuhayr Ibn Abí Sulma. Another pre-Islamic poet, Labíd Ibn Rabí'ah, used the term to signify the people who attended such an assembly. In the early Islamic era, *maqámah* denoted the audience of the Caliph, in whose presence a witty person would deliver a speech or tell a tale, and it came also to mean the tale told in the Caliph's presence. Later, it acquired the more general meaning of "a narration" or "an episode narrated by an eloquent individual", and it is properly applied to the tales of Badí' al-Zamán al-Hamadháni and his followers.

The *maqámah* takes the form of a short tale related by an imaginary *rāwí* (narrator), who describes the adventures of a fictitious hero. The hero is a rogue and beggar, generally endowed with the supreme talent of rhetorical speech, the

beauty of which not only leaves his hearers spellbound, but forces them almost involuntarily to reach into their pockets and shower him with money. This rogue, always restless, goes from country to country and from town to town, using his power of eloquence to beg more and more. The *maqámah* concerns a single event which may be either drawn from experience or invented by the hero. Although its theme is usually connected with begging, this is not always the case. Sometimes the hero chooses subjects such as poetry to entertain his casual audience and exact their money. At other times he roams into the realm of metaphysics to enchant his listeners with tales about ghosts and the devil. Or he may assume the rôle of a preacher to remind the people of the true precepts of their religion and inveigh against atheists and atheism. Badí' al-Zamán, for instance, in *al-Maqámah al-Máristániyyah*, supports the religious views of the Muslim Sunnites against the rationalist Mu'tazilah, whom he criticises bitterly. Again, the central figure may be an animal, as in *al-Maqámah al-Asadiyyah* (The Lion's *Maqámah*), in which the same author provides a detailed description concerning the lion's life and character and enumerates his various names in the Arabic language. Similarly, in the interesting *maqámah* titled *al-Maqámah al-Hamdániyyah*, named for Sayf al-Dawlah al-Hamdání (d. 964 C.E.), the founder of al-Hamdáníyyah dynasty in Syria and Mosul, the hero Abú al-Fath al-Iskandarí provides a copious description of the Arabian horse. Still other *maqámahs* elaborate the life in a particular city, such as Baghdad, as well as the character of its inhabitants.

Modern Arab writers — Shawqí Dayf and Fakhri Abú al-Su'úd — on the influence of the *maqámah* on European literature in the Middle Ages

By its nature and structure, the *maqámah* is more limited in scope and theme than the modern short story. Basically, it is a dialogue between the narrator and the central figure,

superbly framed in a highly rhetorical rhymed prose. It lacks not only a unified plot in the modern literary sense, but also a primary aesthetic purpose. The main objective of the writers of the *maqámah* is unmistakably didactic, to present to the Arab audience the quintessence and beauty of their language. Thus, it is generally characterized by the most eloquent, ornamental language, embellished with simile and metaphor. The narrative and its significance are of secondary importance. Because of its loose and episodic structure, its lack of plot and description, and its dialogue form, the *maqámah* can hardly be considered an antecedent of the modern short story. If it had been properly polished and improved, it might have developed into a viable literary genre. But the *maqámah*, which by nature exalted the form rather than the content, was born still. Furthermore, Arabic society, declining since medieval times, with its religious, social and literary conservatism, was unable to nurture the authors of first-rate talent needed to develop this and other viable literary models.

Some modern Arab writers seek to draw an analogy between the *maqámah* and certain European literary types, particularly of Spanish origin. One of these writers, Shawqí Dayf, asserts that the *maqámah* was introduced into Europe, along with other Arabic works, as a result of the intellectual interrelations between East and West in medieval times. He adds that several of al-Harírí's *maqámahs* were translated into Latin, German and English, and thus were made available for European readers. Dayf concludes reservedly that the impact of the *maqámah* upon European literature, unlike that of the *Thousand and One Nights*, is hard to trace because the *maqámah* concentrated on rhetorical style rather than on the narrative. Nevertheless, Dayf attempts to link the Spanish *novela picaresca* (rogue novel) with the *maqámah*, largely on the basis of similarities between the Spanish picaresque and the fictitious characters Abú al-Fath al-Iskandarí of Badí' al-Zamán and Abú Zayd al-Sarújī of al-Harírí.¹

The notion that the *maqámah* was introduced into European literature in the Middle Ages is highly speculative, and the translation of the *maqámahs* into European languages probably was a much later development than Dayf assumes. Similarities between the *novela picaresca* and the *maqámah* are, then, most likely accidental. Perhaps the only features which they have in common are the personality of the hero, an amusing itinerant scoundrel trying to make a living through devious schemes, and a loose, episodic structure. What is even more striking is that the personality of the hero provides each romance with a measure of unity despite its loose structure.

Fakhrí Abú al-Su'úd

Another writer, Fakhrí Abú al-Su'úd, believes that the *maqámahs* of Badí' al-Zamán occupy a place in Arabic literature comparable to that held by the works of Addison and Steele in English literature. In each instance Abú al-Su'úd perceives the emergence of a fictional form characterized by social consciousness, close analysis of individual characters, skilful use of artistic devices, and unity of thought. This analogy, however, is unworkable, because it rests ultimately upon the similarities between the narrators of the *maqámahs* and the invented personalities who populated the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*: Isaac Bickerstaff, Sir Roger de Coverley, Sir Andrew Freeport and Will Honeycomb, along with a few male characters. What Abú al-Su'úd does not see is that, unlike the restless, ever-wandering heroes of the *maqámahs*, the characters of Addison and Steele were static and stereotyped, except for Sir Roger, whom they endowed

with some measure of individuality and humour. Indeed, he maintains, quite unrealistically, that had the *maqámah* appeared in the eighth century, when Arabic literature was in its infancy, rather than in the tenth century, it would have been followed by developments which correspond to those in English literature after the time of Addison and Steele, and would have led eventually to a full-fledged Arabic novel.²

Obviously, Abú al-Su'úd ignores the complete disparity between the circumstances in which the *maqámah* arose and those in which Addison and Steele developed the fictionalized essay. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, England offered a substantial and growing body of readers who were delighted by the presentation of factual accounts in an exciting, imaginative manner. Journalism came in this period to be a potent force in the development of new modes and new tastes in literature, as is evident from the popularity of Sir Roger L'Estrange's *Observer* (1679), John Dunton's *Athenian Gazette* (1690), Pierre Motteux's *Gentleman's Journal* (1692), Ned Ward's monthly *London Spy* (1698), and Daniel Defoe's newspaper, *The Review* (1704-13). Furthermore, the rising commercial class, with more and more leisure time available, formed an indispensable reading public for English writers. These two elements, the ready audience and the means of reaching it, were lacking in Arabic society even at the height of its cultural development in the tenth century.

REVIVAL OF THE MAQAMAH IN THE MODERN PERIOD

In the modern period, the *maqámah* was revived by writers throughout the Arab world, among them Ahmad al-Burbáyer (d. 1811), Niqúlá al-Turk (d. 1828), the priest Hannáanyah al-Munayyar (d. ca. 1850), Abú al-Thana' al-Alúsí (d. 1854), Násif al-Yázijí (d. 1871), Ahmad Fáris al-Shidyáq (d. 1887), Ibráhím al-Ahdab (d. 1891), Muhammad al-Muwaylihi (d. 1930), Háfiz Ibráhím (d. 1932), and many others. Moreover, there were two distinct lines of development within this revival: while some writers, like the Lebanese al-Yázijí and al-Shidyáq, adhered tenaciously to the traditional form of the *maqámah*, Egyptian writers such as al-Muwaylihi and Háfiz Ibráhím attempted to experiment with it.

The *maqámahs* of Násif al-Yázijí (d. 1871), a keen imitator of al-Harírí

Násif al-Yázijí was, by virtue of his training and inclination, a perpetuator rather than a modifier of medieval Arabic literary models. Born at Kafr Shímah in the Lebanon to a Malkite Roman Catholic family, he learned the fundamentals of reading and writing at the local church school. In his youth he revealed a burning desire to master the Arabic language, which he loved and venerated. Probably because he considered Arabic sufficient for literary accomplishment, Násif never bothered to learn a European language, despite the fact that the Roman Catholic missionary schools of that time had made French popular in the Lebanon. He started his literary career by writing poetry, and one of his early poems, composed in praise of the Amír Bashír al-Shihábí (d. 1850), ruler of the Lebanon, won the favour of the Amír, who attached

1 Shawqí Dayf, *al-Maqámah* (Cairo, 1964), pp. 10-11. This work presents a concise yet very interesting study of the origin, theme and style of the *maqámah*.

2 Fakhrí Abú al-Su'úd, "Al-Qissah fí al-Adabayn al-'Arabí wa al-Ingilízi", *al-Risálah* (1937), No. 198, pp. 653-4; Muhammad Yúsuf Najm, *al-Qissah fí al-Adab al-'Arabí al-Hadith* (Beirut, 1961), pp. 223-5.

the young poet to his court as his secretary. After losing this position following the deposition of the Amír in 1840, Násif moved to Beirut and accepted several invitations to teach Arabic at various schools. He was also invited to revise the Arabic translation of the Holy Bible made by missionaries at the American Protestant College, later to become the American University of Beirut. In addition to teaching, Násif, who had eagerly read practically every ancient Arabic book, began writing on Arabic grammar, morphology and rhetoric.

Al-Yázijí was capable not only of imitating the medieval belletrists who invented the *maqámah*, but also of surpassing them in the production of this complex literary form.³ Thus it is that his volume *Majma' al-Bahrayn* (The Confluence of the Two Seas) contained sixty *maqámahs*, ten more than the number composed by al-Harírí.

In his *maqámahs* Násif appears as a keen imitator of al-Harírí not only in form, but in content as well. As medieval writers of the *maqámah* had done, al-Yázijí contrived two fictitious characters: Suhayl Ibn 'Abbád, the narrator, and Maymún Ibn Khuzám, the hero. Like al-Harírí, who always represented his hero, Abú Zayd al-Sarúj, as fighting with his wife or his disciple or his associate, al-Yázijí often portrayed Maymún Ibn Khuzám quarreling with his daughter, Layla, or his attendant, Rajab. Furthermore, his hero, like the hero of al-Harírí, was an eloquent scoundrel and beggar who used disreputable means to make a living. The other characters created by these two writers are no less alike in sentiment, nature, and objectives. Likewise, the style of al-Yázijí is a highly rhetorical rhymed prose, embellished intermittently with lines of poetry. However, the rhymed prose of al-Harírí, being natural and unpretentious, flows more smoothly than the forced and involved imitation by al-Yázijí. The Lebanese writer even quotes the Qur'án so profusely as to leave no doubt that, although he was a Christian, his outstanding and profound knowledge of sacred writings exceeded that of his Muslim predecessor. Moreover, he attempted to challenge, if not to surpass, al-Harírí's mastery of the types of rhetoric.

Unfortunately, however, the *maqámahs* of al-Yázijí were in large measure anachronistic, due mainly to his blind imitation of al-Harírí in the use of pre-Islamic and Islamic settings and themes. His hero travels between Mecca and Medina in the Hijáz, takes an excursion to al-Kúfah, al-Basrah, Baghdad and al-Anbár (an extinct town) in Iraq, or visits Alexandria, Cairo and Dumyát in Egypt and Damascus in Syria. For each of these places al-Yázijí provides an elaborate description of the customs and way of life, despite the fact that he never left his native Lebanon. He also provides the reader with detailed information about many aspects of pre-Islamic culture, such as food and its connection with Arab hospitality, the multifarious names and different characteristics of the Arabian horse, and the various types of Arab dwellings. He delves into astronomy to tell the reader about the names of the stars, the movements of the planets, and the different names of the nights, according to whether the moon is full, half, or new. He goes on to cite the names assigned to the sounds produced by the pen, the arrow, and the fire, and to those sounds related to laughing, chuckling, weeping and snoring. Of course, he does not fail to enumerate the endless names for the voices of many animals. In brief, the author digresses into numerous realms of the Arabs' knowledge. Yet, despite his meticulous and most commendable literary effort, al-Yázijí adds nothing to the development of Arabic prose fiction.⁴

While we may generally agree with some critics that al-Yázijí perpetuated rather than revitalized the static literary model of the *maqámah*, we must recognize that the very nature of the *maqámah* precluded its development into a viable form of imaginative literature. Its main purpose was to instruct the Arabs of medieval times in the subtleties of their language, and the adventures of its ever-restless, wandering hero were intended to render the didactic element more pleasant. Thus the element of romance in the *maqámah* was of secondary importance. Further, if al-Yázijí is to be criticized for describing places he never saw, the same criticism must apply equally to al-Harírí, who very probably did not visit all the places he describes in his *maqámahs*.⁵ Indeed, it is unfair to expect al-Yázijí to have written according to modern Western fictional models when his prime purpose, as his introduction to *Majma' al-Bahrayn* implies, was purely conservative and didactic.⁶

Ahmad Fáris al-Shidyáq as a prose fiction writer

While the contribution of al-Yázijí to the development of Arabic prose fiction was minimal, that of his contemporary Ahmad Fáris al-Shidyáq may be regarded as a distinct step, however awkward, in the direction of the Western short story. Born and raised in the Lebanon, and conversant with almost every branch of the Arabic language and literature, al-Shidyáq was, like al-Yázijí, conservative in style and literary outlook. Yet he had an advantage over al-Yázijí: his wide travels in the Mediterranean area and especially his contact with Europe, had broadened his intellectual perspective and to some extent refined his style. The discerning reader thus senses in the writings of al-Shidyáq a creativeness and originality lacking in those of al-Yázijí. But one should not be misled by the exaggerated views of Henri Pères, who zealously attempts to attribute al-Shidyáq's ideas, creativeness and lively style solely to his contact with European life and thought. He leads the reader to believe that in his monumental work *Al-Sáq 'alá al-Sáq fí má huwa al-Fáryáq* (Leg upon Leg in Explaining who is the Fáryáq, i.e., the author himself), Fáris al-Shidyáq was greatly influenced by French writers, particularly Rabelais.⁷ In this regard Fu'ád Afrám al-Bustání, a contemporary writer and critic, observes:

"It would have been more appropriate if Pères had been less precipitate in attributing whatever beauties are contained in *al-Sáq 'alá al-Sáq* to Western sources,

3 Al-Yázijí humbly states in *Majma' al-Bahrayn* (Beirut, n.d.), p. 3, that he is only an intruder in the realm of the great belletrists. Although he considered his output of no great worth, his motivation for writing the *maqámahs* was his desire to produce something novel.

4 For a discussion of the *maqámahs* of Násif al-Yázijí, see Dayf, pp. 83-109; Henri Pères, *Les premiers manifestations de la renaissance littéraire Arabe en Orient au XIXe siècle: Násif al-Yázigi et Faris as-Shidyáq in Annales de l'Institut d'Etudes Orientales de la Faculté des Lettres d'Alger*, I (1934-5), 233-56. The earliest biography of Násif al-Yázijí is by Sálím Effendi Dhiyáb in *al-Jinán* (1871), pp. 150-7, 190-6, and is based on the author's friendship and association with al-Yázijí. For comprehensive studies of al-Yázijí's life and works, see Fu'ád Afrám al-Bustání, "Násif al-Yázijí", *al-Mashriq* (1928), pp. 834-43, 923-39, and Ignaz Kratschkowsky, "Al-Yázidjī", *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (1934), IV, 1170-1.

5 Al-Bustání, "Shadharát fí al-Nahdah al-Adabiyyah: Násif al-Yázijí wa Fáris al-Shidyáq", *al-Mashriq* (1936), pp. 443-7; Ra'íf Khúrí, "Yaqdhah al-Wá'i al-'Arabí fí Maqámát al-Yázijí", *al-Makshúf*, Nos. 426 and 427, quoted by Najm, p. 332; Dayf, pp. 83-109; Najm, pp. 223-5.

6 Al-Yázijí, *Majma' al-Bahrayn*, introduction, p. 3.

7 Ahmad Fáris al-Shidyáq, *Al-Sáq 'alá al-Sáq fí má huwa al-Fáryáq*, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1855). Al-Fáryáq is a compound name denoting the full name of the author. For statements on the influence of French writers on al-Shidyáq, see Pères, pp. 250-2.

such as the author's remark to his wife, 'Let us now come back to the question of farewell,' which Pérès connected with Panurge's famous saying, *Retournons a nos moutons*, while the difference between the two sayings and their circumstances is obvious. Pérès should have been less outspoken in his evaluation of *al-Sâq 'alâ al-Sâq*, which, despite its amazing richness, minute observations, and imaginative style, still lacks many of the characteristics of Western story writing.⁸

In *al-Sâq 'alâ al-Sâq*, which is somewhat autobiographical, al-Shidyâq presents four *maqâmahs* written in the traditional rhymed-prose style and ornamented with bits of poetry. They are episodic in structure, and the narrative tends at times to be lengthy and boring. Following the traditional form, al-Shidyâq invents a fictitious hero whom he calls al-Hâris Ibn Hithâm, but he makes al-Fâryâq (the author himself) the narrator. Unlike the characters of the traditional *maqâmahs*, however, those of al-Shidyâq are living creatures with a clear identity and some degree of independence. Furthermore, the author's themes and settings are contemporary, reflecting the spirit and sentiment of the communities in which he lived and worked. The artistic element is most conspicuous in the work titled *Maqâmah Muqîmah*.

In this *maqâmah*, al-Hâris Ibn Hithâm leaves home after a fight with his nagging wife, full of bitter feelings against all women. While he wanders aimlessly, he meets a group of fourteen females whose physical charms win his attention and his admiration. His anger is allayed; he feels he is himself again, and even recites poetry in praise of their beauty. One of these women approaches al-Hâris and offers the reproach that he is not the only one of his kind among men. Then she recites to him a poem composed by her husband, and each of her companions in turn does the same. At this point al-Hâris, enchanted by the ladies' recitation of poetry, thinks highly of their husbands and wishes to make their acquaintance. He is told that they are at the seashore, and when he comes upon them, he discovers they have pitched a tent to protect themselves from the sun. Approaching, he enters into conversation with them about problems relating to women and marriage. Soon the quiet conversation turns into a heated but inconclusive argument, and al-Hâris, impatient, leaves these men to seek answers to the problems elsewhere. Finally, he meets al-Fâryâq in the market-place, carrying a shopping basket filled with dainty foods. Al-Hâris asks him his opinion regarding women and marriage, and amid the hustle and bustle of an oriental market-place, al-Fâryâq recites a poem expressing his views on these matters.⁹

The social and human elements in this and other *maqâmahs* of al-Shidyâq may seem vigorous, and the characters witty and eloquent, yet the absence of plot and the unrealistic portrayal of the characters' sentiments show the inadequacy of the *maqâmah*, however subtle its language might be, as a basis for developing new forms of prose fiction. Indeed, the main interest of readers of the *maqâmahs* of al-Shidyâq lies in the vividness of their poetry and the variety of amusing (though often trivial) details.

A comparison between the *maqâmahs* of Yâzîjî and Shidyâq

The *maqâmahs* of al-Yâzîjî were medieval in both form and spirit, and they lacked the primary purpose of creating an illusion of reality. Those of al-Shidyâq, by virtue of the relative independence of their characters, represented only a slight advancement of the form. But the romance *Hadith 'Isâ Ibn Hishâm*, by Muhammad Ibrâhîm al-Muwaylihî,¹⁰

was not only a modified form of the *maqâmah*, but also a genuine (though not quite successful) effort to create a new literary model in the Western manner. A conservative by education and social upbringing, but liberal in thought, al-Muwaylihî must have found it quite difficult to produce a modernized fictional work which would not enrage the Muslim conservative element and at the same time would not dissatisfy the modernists. In writing his *Hadith*, therefore, he sought to please the conservative Muslim readers by choosing the rigid form of the *maqâmah*, and to please the modernists by presenting liberal ideas in an established form.¹¹ The result was an interesting fictional romance which was neither a *maqâmah* in the medieval sense nor a full-fledged literary work in the modern sense.

THE MAQAMAH OF AL-MUWAYLIHÎ

Al-Muwaylihî was born at Cairo in 1858 to a conservative Muslim family, a number of whose members had achieved fame in literature, politics and public life. His grandfather, the chief merchant of Cairo during the rule of Viceroy Muhammad 'Alî, established a silk industry in Egypt. His father, Ibrâhîm al-Muwaylihî, was the private secretary of the Khedive Ismâ'il Pâshâ and achieved prominence as a public servant, writer and journalist. The young Muwaylihî was sent to the Kharanfash school, where he learned French. But, being an introvert, he shunned his schoolmates and showed little interest in his studies. Most of the time he did not even attend classes, but studied privately at home under the supervision of his father, and at the age of fifteen he stopped going to school entirely. In the meantime, he attended lectures at al-Azhar, especially those delivered by the celebrated Muhammad 'Abdûh, striving to perfect his knowledge of Arabic and of Muslim religious subjects. He attended the informal assemblies of eminent philologists, grammarians, Muslim jurists, and men of letters who called on his father, and in this way he kept within intellectual circles.¹² He also established contact with the reformer Jamâl al-Dîn al-Afghânî, by whose ideas he was strongly influenced. Moreover, his

8 Al-Bustânî, "Shadharât", pp. 446-7.

9 Al-Shidyâq, II, 107.

10 Muhammad al-Muwaylihî, *Hadith 'Isâ Ibn Hishâm aw Fatrah min al-Zamân*, 4th ed. (Cairo, 1964), with introduction by 'Alî Adham. See also Roger Allen, "An Annotated Translation and Study of the Third Edition of *Hadith 'Isâ Ibn Hishâm*" (unpublished dissertation: Oxford, 1968). Allen argues that the text of the *Hadith* has been considerably altered since the publication of the edition of 1927, and the result is almost a different work, with its critical tone greatly lessened. Essentially, Allen means that al-Muwaylihî's criticism of the Egyptian government has been removed from the edition he translated, probably because of fear on the part of the author. Even if we grant that Allen is correct, still the present text of *Hadith 'Isâ Ibn Hishâm* contains extensive criticism of various departments of the Egyptian government. While the removal of some political criticism from the original text may seem significant to those who consider the work merely as a political or social document, it does not alter the fact that the *Hadith* represented a daring step in the development of the modern Arabic novel.

11 'Alî Adham, Introduction to *Hadith 'Isâ Ibn Hishâm*; 'Alî al-Râ'î, *Dirâsât fî al-Riwayah al-Misriyyah* (Cairo, 1964), p. 20. The contemporary writer 'Abbâs Khidr, *al-Qissah al-Qasirah fî Misr mundhu Nash'atihâ hattâ Sanah 1930* (Cairo, 1966), p. 51; indicates that al-Muwaylihî wanted to introduce "the art of the story as it is known in the West today into modern Arabic literature, but did not do so. Instead, he searched for an Arab literary form to suit his purpose, and found that the *maqâmah* was most suitable".

12 Adham, *Ibid.*; 'Abd al-'Azîz al-Bishrî, *al-Mukhtâr* (Cairo, 1935), I, 229-34. According to 'Abd al-Latif Hamzah, *Adab al-Maqâlah al-Suhufiyyah* (Cairo, 1950), III, 32, the young Muwaylihî's burning desire to learn motivated him to seek knowledge from an apothecary who lived next door to his father.

Hadith reveals that he had acquired a fair knowledge of many different aspects of Egyptian society.¹³

Al-Muwaylihi's cultural horizon was further widened by his travels abroad, especially in Europe. After losing his position for supporting the revolution of Ahmad A'rabi Pasha in 1882, al-Muwaylihi went to Italy, where he studied Italian and French under the direction of an Italian lawyer, once a neighbour and friend of his father. He remained in Europe for three years, travelling between Italy, France and England. In France he became acquainted with Dumas fils and other leading French writers, and became involved in the literary activities of al-Afghani.¹⁴ In 1885, al-Muwaylihi accompanied his father to London and then to Istanbul, where his father held an appointment as a member of the Supreme Educational Board. His stay at Istanbul afforded him an opportunity to read and to transcribe ancient Arabic books. In 1887, he began writing a series of articles in the newspaper *al-Muqattam*. Later, he joined the service of the government, but resigned his post in 1895 to aid his father in publishing the newspaper *Misbah al-Sharq* (The Lamp of the East).¹⁵ It was in this newspaper that al-Muwaylihi published the first instalments of *Hadith 'Isa Ibn Hisham* between 1898 and 1900, when he left Egypt for Paris and London, in the company of the Khedive 'Abbas Hilmi II. But he kept publishing in *Misbah al-Sharq* until its demise in 1903. He contributed additional articles to different newspapers, although these did not attract as much public attention as his previous work. Chief among his non-fictional writings is an interesting work titled *'Ilaj al-Nafs* (The Remedy of the Soul), which contains deep meditations about life and morality. It is probably the outcome of the author's comprehensive reading of ancient and modern works, both Eastern and Western, and of his life experience.

A description of the contents of al-Muwaylihi's *Hadith 'Isa Ibn Hisham*

What is of primary importance to our subject, however, is his fictional romance *Hadith 'Isa Ibn Hisham* (The Narrative of 'Isa Ibn Hisham), whose title character recalls the narrator of the *maqamahs* of Badi' al-Zaman al-Hamadhani. In general, al-Muwaylihi restricts himself to the traditional rhymed prose of the *maqamah*, but when he writes naturally, the result is a refreshingly smooth, free prose style. He makes 'Isa Ibn Hisham not only the narrator but also the central figure of his tale, and uses him frequently to express his own attitudes. Unlike the medieval *maqamah*, whose objective was to instruct the young in the niceties of the Arabic language, al-Muwaylihi's *Hadith* attempts to diagnose and remedy the ills of Egyptian society, and to show the progress in the different aspects of Egyptian life since the era of Muhammad 'Ali.

Al-Muwaylihi introduces his narrative with the traditional phrase "Haddathaná 'Isa Ibn Hisham" ('Isa Ibn Hisham related to us) which began the *maqamahs* of Badi' al-Zaman. 'Isa Ibn Hisham recalls that he saw in a dream, as if he were wandering in a graveyard on a moonlit night. Touched by the tranquillity of the night and the stillness of the graves, he became preoccupied with deep thoughts about life and death, and especially about those who were lying in eternal rest and had been made equal by death. Only yesterday, he thought, there were among these dead great kings and rulers who controlled the destinies of their subjects, beautiful women who captivated and humbled men by their beauty, and many others who enjoyed the earthly vanity of pride, power and prestige. Today they lie here, not only helpless,

but sharing equally the same spot and the same destiny. While deep in contemplation, he heard behind him a sudden, violent convulsion which nearly shocked him to death. Despite his terrible fright, he had the courage to turn around to see what was happening. To his consternation, he saw that one of the graves had cleft and a tall figure with an extraordinary but noble appearance had sprung from it. The sight of the resurrected figure snapped him out of his trance, and he found himself walking faster. Trying to escape, 'Isa Ibn Hisham heard the figure, who now appeared as real as a mortal being, calling to him to wait. He obeyed, as he relates, to avoid the evil which might be inflicted upon him if he refused. The resurrected figure approached 'Isa and began talking to him, sometimes in Arabic and sometimes in Turkish. With this incident the author initiates the lengthy dialogue between the two characters which runs throughout the book. Subsidiary characters are also introduced to explain a given situation or to illustrate some aspect of Egyptian society, as circumstances may require.

Ahmad Pasha al-Manikly, the hero of al-Muwaylihi's *Hadith*

The resurrected character identifies himself as Ahmad Pasha al-Manikly, Minister of War under Muhammad 'Ali, and 'Isa identifies himself as a man of letters. When the Pasha asks to be led to his house, 'Isa answers that houses in Cairo are no longer identified by the names of their owners, but by a new system of numbers. To his indignation and utter bewilderment, the once prominent Minister discovers not only that his house cannot be found, but that the entire city has changed. Thus, the Pasha is immediately faced with new situations, different people, and drastically different social, cultural, judicial and administrative institutions. His inability to realize the changes causes him a great deal of trouble and brings him into conflict with both government and people. The series of predicaments which the Pasha encounters is obviously designed by the author to vindicate his criticism of Egyptian society. Each predicament leads to another one of a different nature, and in each instance we are given a remarkably adroit portrayal of the Pasha's reaction to his new situation.¹⁶

The first predicament the Pasha faces arises from social and judicial institutions. On his way to search for his house, accompanied now by his guide 'Isa Ibn Hisham, the resurrected Pasha pauses at the Citadel of Cairo to say a prayer over the tomb of his master Muhammad 'Ali. Immediately after leaving the Citadel, the two companions meet a donkey-driver whose slow-moving animal delays their progress. The donkey-driver, too, becomes impatient with the lazy beast. Craftily but jokingly, he invites the Pasha to mount the donkey since, he claims, the Pasha has for two hours blocked the way by walking right in front of him and his donkey. The Pasha feels insulted and retorts to this villain that he has not blocked the way, and that furthermore a man of his prominence would not so humble himself as to ride a braying donkey, when he had always had a thoroughbred stallion. The argument continues, however, and the donkey-driver

13 Adham, *Ibid.*

14 The influence of Western culture on al-Muwaylihi is most apparent in his literary criticism, particularly of poetry. See 'Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad, *Rijal 'Arafatuhum* (Cairo), pp. 78-91, and al-Muwaylihi's Introduction to the *Diwan* (Anthology) of Hafiz Ibrahim (Cairo, 1901-3). On al-Muwaylihi as a critic, see Hilmi 'Ali Marzuq, *Tatawwur al-Naqd wa al-Tafkir al-Adabi al-Hadith fi Misr* (Cairo, 1966), pp. 201-23.

15 According to al-Bishri, I, 224, *al-Misbah* opened an entirely new vista in Arabic literature and by itself constituted a new school of refined literature in Egypt.

16 Al-Muwaylihi, pp. 1-6.

grows excited. He complains that while the Páshá was walking and talking with his companion, he beckoned in such a manner as to indicate that he wished to hire the donkey. The donkey-driver insists that the Páshá must either hire his donkey or pay him on the spot for his delay. The Páshá, obviously losing patience, pushes the donkey-driver aside and wishes he had a weapon to kill him. Astonished by his companion's reluctance to give this base peasant a beating and rid himself of this nuisance, on the pretext that he cannot touch him because of the law, the Páshá decides to take the matter into his own hands. He begins beating the donkey-driver mercilessly, while the poor victim calls for aid from the police.¹⁷

From this point, the author leads the Páshá into various situations which reveal to the reader the different institutions of Egyptian society and their methods of operation. The Páshá's quarrel with the donkey-driver leads him to the police, to the prosecutor, and to the attorney; to the Civil Court, where he is found guilty and sentenced to six months in prison; and to the Court of Appeal, which dismisses his case and releases him. But despite his joy at his acquittal by the Court of Appeal, he is disappointed to discover that he still must pay his attorney's fees. But where and how will he get the money to pay these fees? As he is trying to explain the situation to the lawyer, the lawyer becomes enraged and begins to lecture the humiliated Páshá on how, in the old days, he and his powerful colleagues among the aristocracy pilfered public money, oppressed the poor, the widows, and the orphans, and practised every illegal method to amass wealth at the expense of the people.¹⁸ But the remorseless Páshá recalls that he had some property which he had retained during his lifetime as a *waqf* (religious endowment) and sees in it a new hope to solve his financial problems. At this point the author leads the Páshá to search for his property, while in the meantime he provides a detailed description of the uses and abuses of the *waqf*.¹⁹ The search for his descendants and beneficiaries brings the Páshá to the sad discovery that the only surviving beneficiary, a young man, has squandered the income of the property through profligate living. When next the Páshá seeks aid from three of his still living colleagues, the three old men, now living in apparent luxury, will not believe his story. Finally, when he sees they have no more patience for him, he leaves. As he does so, he notices that he has been followed by a businessman who has evidently recognized him as his former master. Approaching the annoyed Páshá, the businessman recalls the kind favours which the Páshá did for him during his lifetime, and which brought him wealth and social prestige. The businessman pulls out a purse and offers it to the Páshá in gratitude for his past favours. The desperate Páshá accepts the offer and asks his companion, 'Isá Ibn Hishám, to take him immediately to the lawyer, so that he may pay his fees. But 'Isá advises him first to find a religious lawyer and claim his *waqf* (which, according to the Islamic Sharí'ah, is a religious institution). Here the author transfers the reader from the civil courts to the religious courts, which have jurisdiction over matters of this nature. Al-Muwaylihí never misses an opportunity to expose the maladministration and the chaotic conditions of the religious courts.²⁰

Al-Muwaylihí's hero's travel to Europe

From this point on, the narrative of 'Isá Ibn Hishám becomes rather discursive and disjointed. 'Isá passes from one facet of Egyptian society to another, treating such topics as physicians and medicine and the plague with the confidence of one who has a thorough knowledge of his subject. He

studies the worlds of science and literature, of business and agriculture, of politics and civil service, and describes with equal care the social customs of his time, from Egyptian weddings to the functions of the 'umdah (village headman), which he treats at length and with great literary skill. Finally, after an exhaustive portrayal of city and village life in Egypt, the author abruptly transports the reader to Europe, the setting of the Second Journey, which occupies the rest of the book.²¹

The author regards the observations by 'Isá Ibn Hishám and the resurrected Páshá of the different aspects of Egyptian life and institutions as constituting a first journey. The second journey is suggested on the spur of the moment by the Páshá, who seeks an explanation of the drastic changes which have occurred since his lifetime. 'Isa tells him that these changes, and particularly the lower standards of morality, have resulted from the invasion of Oriental societies by the West, and from the Orientals' blind imitation of the customs and behaviour of Westerners.²²

Having thus provided the pretext for a journey to Europe, i.e., to investigate the nature of European civilization and its impact on Egyptian life, the author, after a brief general statement justifying this visit, abruptly transports the reader to Paris. The author, through 'Isá Ibn Hishám, shows marked astonishment at the crowded streets, the elegant shops and the magnificent edifices of the city.²³ The Páshá is likewise flabbergasted by what he sees and tries to compare Paris with ancient capitals such as Athens, Rome and even Surra man Ra'á (Sámarra), once the capital of the Abbasids. Meanwhile a subsidiary character, whom the author identifies as "a friend", is arbitrarily introduced. The newcomer starts immediately to degrade French civilization and to accuse Westerners generally of being arrogant, but especially the French, who he says believe their civilization is superior to any other. Wishing to be objective in his judgment of European civilization, however, the author interjects another character, a learned old sage and Orientalist, who accompanies the Egyptian visitors on their tour of Paris and explains to them the good and bad aspects of Western civilization. The visitors stop first at the international exhibition sponsored by the French government, and then at an art gallery, where the author provides a description of some paintings. 'Isá Ibn Hishám becomes upset when he notices a filthy old man whom he characterizes as a "lump of dirt" at the immaculate gallery. Asking what this filthy creature is doing in such a beautiful place, he learns that the old man is a famous artist whose paintings are worth millions of francs. He marvels at the way Westerners respect their talented men. When the visitors are shown a lady posing in the nude for an artist, the Páshá, utterly shocked, condemns

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 7-13.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 51-7.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 57-61.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 61-98.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 289-351.

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 284-5.

23 Describing the crowds and the shops in Paris, al-Muwaylihí says, p. 290, "Each one of the pedestrians was trembling in his walk like a sparrow and glancing like a frightened quail. If his sight failed him, death would be his lot, and if his foot stumbled, his blood would be spilled . . . They sought the sidewalks as the drowning man seeks the shore. On both sides of the streets the shops were adorned with fascinating merchandise and magnificent handicrafts which enticed the self-denying to crave for them and tempted the thrifty to buy them. Everywhere the bars were filled with people carrying a cup in one hand and a newspaper in the other. In such a state, we were about to lose our minds because of our complete bewilderment, fright and distraction. Even if Luqman the Wise had stood in the square where we stood, he would have lost his wisdom."

the sight as "debasement and vulgarity". But the old Orientalist interrupts to explain to him that what he has seen is a beautiful art gallery accepted in Europe, both because of its Greek origin and because of its support by Christianity. On the contrary, the Orientalist remarks, Islam has forbidden this kind of art and made it unpopular among Muslim nations.²⁴ The visitors' excursion subsequently takes them to a planetarium, an observatory, the Eiffel Tower, a night club with Egyptian belly dancers whom the author condemns as disgraceful to Egypt's reputation, and carnivals in which some Egyptian customs are lampooned.²⁵

When the journey to Paris is over, the Orientalist warns the visitors not to imitate Western civilization blindly, but to adopt what is good in it and reject the bad. With this advice, the narrative of 'Isá Ibn Hishám comes to a close. The author ends the book by stating simply that since there is nothing more to say, everyone should return to his country. He brings 'Isá Ibn Hishám and the Páshá back to Egypt without giving the slightest hint as to the destiny of the poor resurrected Páshá, whom he leaves suspended in this miserable life of reality.

The *Hadith* follows the traditional rhymed prose style of the *maqámah*, but with more vividness, simplicity and smoothness. The author's purpose, unlike that of al-Yázijí, is not to emulate the style of the medieval belletrists. Rather, he is simply reflecting his conservative sentiments and the very marked influence of traditional medieval Arabic style on his writing. Al-Muwaylihi must have believed, like many writers of his time, in the propriety and beauty of the rhymed prose, despite its redundant and repetitive nature. The dialogue of the *Hadith* is, however, more natural than the narrative portions and seems to be more effectual in expressing the ideas of the author. In general, the length or brevity of the dialogue depends upon the nature and magnitude of the situation to be treated. But in some parts of the *Hadith*, the dialogue is extended to cover issues not related to the main theme of the narrative.

Al-Muwaylihi's criticism of the state of medicine in Egypt

In the chapter entitled al-Tibb wa al-Atibbá' (Physicians and Medicine), for instance, the author goes far beyond the immediate problems of the illness of the Páshá, the search for a doctor, and the treatment needed for his recovery.²⁶ Al-Muwaylihi takes great pains to discuss quacks and quackery and the shocking ignorance and dishonesty among physicians in Egypt, whose ultimate objective was not to cure people, but to amass quick and easy wealth. In a naïvely artistic and colourful manner, he reveals the physicians' crafty practices, such as prolonging the treatment and scheming to gain access to the ladies of wealthy families. The result of such methods is, of course, the happy bond of matrimony, which brings the physician not only a wife, but financial security. Then the author digresses to discuss the branches of medicine, and the good and bad physicians. Particularly, he admonishes Egyptian doctors not to prescribe every kind of medicine employed in the West, since most such medications are ill suited to the physically soft Easterners. He never fails to castigate those physicians who take advantage of Egyptians whose imitation of Western habits has made them hypersensitive to hygienic living and eventually weakened their resistance to disease. Such men naturally fall prey to doctors who attempt to cure them by the use of potent compounds, poisonous substances and diets unsuited to their bodies, and all too often the result of this quackery is the death of the victimized patient.

Continuing his treatment of the state of medicine in Egypt, the author uses the convalescence of the Páshá as a pretext for discussing in another chapter the tragic results of the plague which struck Egypt in the years 1205, 1228 and 1260, claiming thousands of lives.²⁷ He also reveals the primitive methods practiced to fight the plague during the time of Muhammad 'Alí. The plague, he explains, was caused by a microbe which today can be seen with the aid of an instrument called the microscope. In order to satisfy the Páshá's curiosity, 'Isá Ibn Hishám leads him to a chemist's laboratory and shows him numberless infinitesimal creatures swimming within a single drop of water which, to the unbelieving eye of the Páshá, appears under the lens like a huge pond. He concludes this chapter by swearing by the Almighty and His angels that the Muslim learned men know nothing of such useful scientific information and inventions, and that until this day they have resisted the use of sanitary and medical techniques.²⁸

What is more striking in these chapters, however, is the author's sudden shift from the traditional rhymed prose of the *maqámah* to a freer-flowing, more natural style. This change, particularly conspicuous in the dialogue between the Páshá and the physician, prevails throughout al-Tibb wa al-Atibbá'. Its presence in other parts of the book as well has suggested to some contemporary critics the existence of an impetus that drives al-Muwaylihi's *Hadith* more in the direction of the novel than in that of the traditional *maqámah*.²⁹

Whereas the traditional *maqámah* treats a single event, the *Hadith* is substantially wider in scope and comprehends a variety of characters, scenes and settings. Although the characters may appear to move solely at the author's behest, one can detect in their actions the expression of extremely personal emotions, however stifled, as they react to one another or to a given situation. The author seeks, moreover, to ridicule with wit and wisdom various types of human behaviour. But his humour is generally grim and at times gives way to acrimonious sarcasm as he undertakes to expose man's foibles and his blind submission to his own whims. Basing his satire on the world of reality, the author admirably points out the follies of ordinary men and reveals hypocrisy, social chaos, and the exploitation of the masses in Egyptian society. An excellent example in this regard is the village headman

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 312-7.

²⁵ According to al-Muwaylihi, pp. 332-3, the visitors entered a section of the exhibition where they saw an ugly turbaned man behind a desk, on which stood an inkpot and paper. For those who paid this charlatan money, he scrawled a talisman or incantation, and some of the visitors were heard to say, "Come, let this shaykh of the Muslims write down for us a part of Muhammad's Qur'án." The dialect of this supposed shaykh, however, betrayed him as a native of Syria. 'Isá and his companions thought it was their Muslim duty to rebuke him for doing that which had been denounced by Islam, but the shaykh retorted that he had to make a living. Another turbaned teacher was reportedly discovered squatting on the floor, surrounded by French children in Egyptian costumes. He was reading the Qur'án to them in a loud voice and shaking his body, meanwhile striking them with a palm twig to discipline them, amid the laughter and ridicule of the people who had gathered to watch the methods of teaching employed in Egypt. He was no less sharply rebuked by 'Isá and his companions than the first charlatan had been. Like the other, however, this teacher of the Qur'án, a poor Egyptian, defended his action as a means of making a living. Apparently a private company, not the Egyptian government, sponsored the performance of these men in the Paris exhibition, for the sole purpose of making money.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 108-116.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-120.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

²⁹ Al-Rá'í, p. 20; Shukrí Muhammad 'Ayyád, *Al-Qissah al-Qasirah fi Misr: Dirásah fi Tahsil al-Fann al-Adabí* (Cairo, 1968), p. 79.

who, by sheer folly, falls a victim to a playboy panderer, a pretentious businessman, and a flirtatious dancing girl.³⁰ Moreover, the author never misses an opportunity to examine the different aspects of Egyptian life, from food and eating habits to horses, from police and court procedures to the press.

'Alí al-Rá'í's comparison between Don Quixote and the *Hadith*

In scope and form, then, the *Hadith* is more flexible than the *maqámah*. One modern critic, 'Alí al-Rá'í, regards it as a social satire intended to ridicule life in Egypt, comparing it with Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Cervantes, he says, presents a knight whose heart and mind are filled with dreams of past ages which refuse to die. So Don Quixote sets out, taking along a travelling companion, a horse, and a donkey, to search for truth and beauty, which have died in his world but still live in his heart. From the painful, yet humorous contrast between the world perceived by Don Quixote and that perceived by his society, Cervantes derives an extraordinarily brilliant criticism and moral lesson. In al-Muwaylihi's *Hadith*, a conspicuous contrast exists between the Páshá who has come back to life and the world around him, which has been drastically changed. Values which he thought were beautiful and eternal have been replaced by others of whose beauty and perpetuity he is most doubtful.

Al-Muwaylihi's criticism of Egyptian society

From the conflicts in attitude between the resurrected Páshá and the people among who he moves, al-Muwaylihi derives criticism of Egyptian society. Like Don Quixote, who sets out to search for the truth, the Páshá and his companion, 'Isá Ibn Hishám, set out on a quest for the spirit of Egypt. In their first journey, the author represents different aspects of Egyptian society; in the journey abroad, he attempts to assess the impact of European values on that society. From the author's criticism, al-Rá'í believes, we may realize that the "truth" these two companions hoped to find was a bourgeois Egypt. From the conflict of the Páshá and 'Isá Ibn Hishám with such bourgeois characters as the lawyer and the physician, we may deduce that the author considers the bourgeoisie the most progressive of the social classes in Egypt. Al-Muwaylihi may criticize the bourgeoisie at length and vigorously, but always constructively, for he desires to see it continue, despite its many faults. On the other hand, while 'Isá Ibn Hishám decries the rigidly anti-progressive attitude of the Muslim jurists and the inflexibility of the Muslim religious courts, never does he advocate the abolition of these courts or the dismissal of the judges. Instead, he suggests the reform of these courts and the establishment of civil courts to counter-balance them. In brief, the author expresses the hopes and expectations of the Egyptian middle class, which, since the time of Muhammad 'Alí, has seen in the various cultural, judicial, juristic and political institutions impediments to its own progress. Thus, the middle class has determined to wage war against the old institutions, while calling for the establishment of new ones which will reflect its own ideals and aspirations. Al-Muwaylihi also asserts his belief in constructive efforts and obedience to the law, rather than the individual's placing himself above the law as the feudal lords had done. The *Hadith*, then, shows the struggle of the rising Egyptian middle class to free itself from the Turkish aristocracy and from British imperialism, and from the feudal system they had perpetuated. This struggle, of course, manifested itself in a series of conflicts which ultimately brought the middle class to power.³¹

On the whole we must consider the comparison between *Don Quixote* and the *Hadith* 'Isá Ibn Hishám valid, since each work centres about the conflict of an anachronistic protagonist with a modern culture, and in each encounter between old and new the bafflement of the protagonist serves to highlight not only the absurdity but also the pathos of the human condition. What gives *Don Quixote* its timelessness is repeated in a lower key in the *Hadith*; it is not so much the satire as the great humanity the author reveals by his deep compassion and tolerance in the face of man's folly. We cannot predict what the critical judgment of the *Hadith* may be in later generations, but we must recall that to Cervantes' contemporaries, *Don Quixote* was little more than a comedy.

An evaluation of the *Hadith*

The *Hadith* 'Isá Ibn Hishám is plainly episodic in structure: indeed, its events are so disjointed that they could be arranged in almost any order without serious damage to the continuity of the work. But the narrative and descriptive elements are merely a frame for the expository dialogue, which depicts the ills of Egyptian society and explains the impact of the West on that society. The didactic moralizing which is its primary motive constantly reminds the reader that the importance of the *Hadith* lies in its meaning, not its story. Yet the discerning reader may observe that the author has sought to develop the central theme through a subtle, gradually intensified conflict of ideas rather than a conventional plot. Thus, it may be argued, al-Muwaylihi left the Páshá's fate unresolved for the simple reason that he had already achieved the moral and didactic purposes of his narrative.

Not only do the characters of the *Hadith* exist without a plot, but they are not seriously presented as complex human beings, and for this reason they have sometimes been regarded simply as stock figures to be manipulated by the author.³² In one critic's view, al-Muwaylihi uses the Páshá to symbolize the old values of Egypt under Muhammad 'Alí, and 'Isa Ibn Hishám to explain and evaluate the changes in these values resulting from Egypt's contact with European life and thought. Though he is a keen observer of the actions of his characters, the author never fully explains their nature or reveals their emotions and reactions to their surroundings and the behaviour of other characters.³³ Yet, crude and primi-

Continued on page 40

30 The author devotes seven chapters to describing the village head man ('Umdah) and other institutions of Egyptian society. See also Mahmúd Hámíd Shawkat, *Al-Fann Qasá'í fi al-Adab al-Misr al-Hadith* (Cairo, 1956), pp. 46-7; and 'Ayyád, pp. 72-3.

31 Al-Rá'í, p. 19. 'Ayyád, p. 70, states that in his *Hadith* al-Muwaylihi reflected the state of Egyptian capitalism, which began showing its impact in the time of the Khedive Ismá'íl, and which supported the A'rabi revolution but later was overwhelmed by foreign capital during the British occupation. This judgment is not shared by Ghálí Shukrí, who in *Thawrah al-Kikr fi Adab al-Hadith* (The Revolt of Thought in Our Modern Literature: Cairo, 1965) states that al-Rá'í was too anxious to demonstrate similarities between Arabic literary works and the great classics of the West, in order to give the former more prestige.

32 Cf. Mahmúd Tímúr, *Fann al-Qasas* (Cairo, 1948), p. 37, and Nushí' al-Qissah wa Tatawwuruhá (Cairo, 1936), pp. 46-7; 'Umar al-Dasúqí, *Muhádarát 'an Nash'ah al-Nathr al-Hadith wa Tatawwuruhá* (Cairo, 1962), pp. 137-8.

33 'Abd al-Muhsin Táha Badr, *Tatawwur al-Riwayah al-'Arabiyyah al-Hadithah fi Misr* (Cairo, 1963), p. 37. According to 'Ayyád, pp. 73-4, since al-Muwaylihi's purpose was to expose and criticize social problems in Egypt, he chose to voice his opinions through several different characters rather than a single character. Thus his characters should not be faulted for lacking co-ordination of action or unity of values.



Children's Page

THE LETTER FROM HANIF



By OLIVE TOTO

Akram had come from South Africa. He now lived in England with his parents. He went to school a few miles away and there he had a Nigerian boy friend called Málik. Akram was just rushing off to school when his mother called out, "Akram! Here is a letter for you from South Africa."

Akram quickly looked at the address on the back of the envelope. "Mamma," said he, "this letter is from Hanif. I will take it with me and read it in the morning break. Assalámu 'alaykum, mamma!"

Off went Akram with the letter from his friend, who was twelve years old — the same age as himself. In the morning break he and his Nigerian friend sat down together to have their usual talk.

"Oh!" said Akram, "please excuse me, Málik. I must read this letter from my friend Hanif."

Akram opened the letter. He turned to Málik and said, "Hanif sends his greetings to you and I am sure he remembers how we all used to talk together when he was on a holiday here. Let me read you his letter."

"My dear Akram and also Málik (if you are anywhere near when Akram opens this letter),

"I am sure you will notice my new address. You know the nice house that my father had built in the part of the country which we coloureds were told we could live in. Well, now it has been declared as a part for whites only and we have had to move out. Oh! my lovely house and garden have gone. My daddy had to take what money was offered him and he says that I must be happy with this house, which is not as nice as the old one. Now we are in the house I feel so unhappy. I ask myself, why did God make me coloured? Why? Why?

"Yes. I am a Muslim and I know it is wrong to say such things. But, Akram, my Christian coloured friends have also had to move and they have been turned out by the so-called Christians.

"Please, do not let my daddy know what I have told you. He says that we should have preached Islam to all the people who would have listened and surely become Muslims. But we were too busy with business and gave not enough time to Alláh (God). Daddy says that we had a great chance and missed it. But, of course, dear Akram, I know in my heart that God loves all colours. Please, Akram and Hanif, do pray for us. I thank God that daddy is so true to his belief and is always telling the family about God and the Last Prophet Muhammad. I must tell you what happened the other day.

"I was in the same kind of mood as I am today. In fact, I must say a worst kind of mood. So I went to visit a friend of mine whose father is a worker on a farm. I think, perhaps, you remember this friend, Qásim, who is the same age as we.

"Well, when I got to his house he was in great spirits. 'Why are you so delighted?' I asked him. 'Well,' said he, 'my father has gone out to buy me a shirt and I am waiting for him to come back.'

"His mother was busy cooking some food. She told me that I must stay and eat with them. We waited for Qásim's father but he did not come. At last his mother said, 'Qásim, you must eat now with your friend.'

"We all sat down and thanked God for our meal. Then in walked Qásim's father. He put a parcel on a chair and washed and then sat down with us.

"When the meal was over and we had thanked God for it, Qásim said, 'Have you got my shirt, daddy?'

"Yes, son,' said his father, 'It's in that parcel on the chair. Go and open it.'

"Qásim got up, opened the parcel, took out the shirt. He felt the material and looked at the price ticket and then sat down.

"How do you like the shirt, son?' asked his father. Qásim replied, 'Daddy, it is not good enough for the money mother gave you.'

"Son,' said the father, 'you should be glad you have a shirt. I bought two shirts and gave one to your little friend whose father is out of work.'

"Qásim said nothing, but, Akram, you should have seen his face. I could see he was angry.

"Qásim's mother said, 'You have a wonderful father.'

"Qásim then said, 'No one else would have done this to his only son.'

"Don't be selfish and silly,' said his mother. 'This shirt is of great value to me because when I look at this shirt I shall think of another happy little boy. And now I am thinking of a great man who lived 1,400 years ago.'

"Well, here I chirped in and asked whom Qásim's mother was talking about. She said, 'Our dear Prophet, whom I think Qásim's father was trying to copy.'

"I then asked her to tell me what she was referring to. She said, 'Shall I tell you a true story?' I said, 'Please

do.' And so, dear Akram, I am going to tell you what she told me, and here it is.

"The Prophet used to keep his clothes as long as he could and not buy new ones, but now he really needed some new shirts and so the Prophet Muhammad took with him some money (it was eight dirhans) and went out to buy two long shirts. You know, I call them shirts but really they were more like robes because they reached almost to the ground. So he went to do his shopping. He had told his wife what it was he was going to buy with the money and, I can tell you, dear boy, that, as I have already remarked, he really needed those shirts. His own were very old and worn, but clean and tidy. And so he walked along breathing in God's good air. He had not gone far when something in front of him caught his eye. It was a bare shoulder that had caught his attention, a torn shirt and a bare shoulder. This was more than the Prophet could bear to see, and he became very upset to see such a thing.

"Oh, some poor old man! I must get him a new shirt,' the Prophet must have thought. And so he gave the poor man some of his money to buy a shirt. Knowing the Prophet and his kindness to others I am not surprised at this. But what about the two shirts he was going to buy for himself? Well, you will find out soon enough. Now this is really what happened. Feeling quite happy that this poor man would now have a decent shirt, the Prophet continued on his way. Obviously he would now be able to afford only two very cheap shirts. Ah! but did he? Oh dear no! And the reason was because he had come across a servant girl belonging to some Ansárs. She was crying very much and beside her on the ground lay a broken glass jar in a pool of oil. 'I can't go back to my mistress,' she sobbed as she looked at the broken jar and the spilt oil. 'What has happened?' asked the Prophet. The poor maid told him how she had let the jar of oil slip from her hand and how she dared not go back to her mistress and tell her what had happened. The kind Prophet gave her some of his money so that she was able to buy another jar of oil. But still she was frightened, saying that she had been so long getting the oil that she feared that her mistress would still scold her. The Prophet felt so sorry for her that he offered to go with her to the place where she worked and to tell her mistress what had happened. And, of course, we all know that everyone believed what the Prophet said because he was known never to tell an untruth. Well, dear boys, he took the maid to the house where she worked but there was no reply to his knocking. Sadly he turned to go away and he must have felt very sorry that after all he would not be able to explain things to the girl's mistress. But as he turned away he heard voices calling out to him. He turned and saw the women of the house coming out. They explained that when they saw that it was the good Prophet outside they had wanted him and his goodness around for as long as possible, so they had kept hidden, feeling happy that he was near the house. Such a good man as he was would have a good influence on it. Then the mistress of the house came out and everything was explained to her. She turned to the maid and told her that for the Prophet to come to her house was a great honour and that because she had brought the Prophet to the house, she (the maid) would be set free.

"The Prophet went away quite happy but he still had to buy his shirt, and now it would have to be just one shirt and the cheapest possible.

"The Prophet arrived back home and showed his new shirt to his wife. 'Eight dirhans and only one shirt of poor quality! What a bad buy!' she exclaimed. 'Oh, no! Those eight dirhans have brought happiness to three people,' replied the Prophet. And I am sure that he must have said *Al-ham-du-lill-láh* having finished a good day's work of kindness; for he truly believed that it was better to give than to receive.

"Now, dear Akram, when the story was finished Qásim rushed to his father and hugged him, saying, 'What a wonderful shirt I have, daddy, and how good you are!' And so I went home in a fine mood.

"Dear Akram, I hope you enjoyed this story as much as I did and whilst I have been writing this true story for you, I realize that just losing a house is nothing. I have my Prophet Muhammad to learn about goodness from and Almighty God to thank and worship, and so, Akram, I feel better now having written this letter and I am no longer depressed. Please tell Málík not to be unhappy about Nigeria, his beloved land. I have just seen on the television how well the Federal Government is treating all Ebos (or the Biafrans) who come over to them. Well, let us pray for Málík's country and hope the Ebo (Biafran) rebels will come to terms of peace and that he will be able to go for a holiday to a peaceful Nigeria. Oh! It is a funny world. I don't understand enough about it. But when I grow up I am going to let the whole world know about my religion.

"Please write to me and tell me what you think about all the things I have written about. Soon we will be thirteen years of age. I am sure you can tell me about your adventures in England.

"Assalamu 'alaykum, HANIF."

Akram turned to Málík. "I hope you have not been bored with Haníf's letter, I myself have enjoyed it."

"Bored?" said Málík, "Don't you dare say such things. I have learnt such a lot and, as Hanif says, we are growing up and must think for ourselves."

"Come along, Málík," said Akram, "back to lessons and let us pray for Haníf's happiness."

When lessons were over, Akram and Málík walked home together. Akram told his mother about the letter and she said, "What a valuable letter! What Haníf says is very true. I am truly sorry for him and also about his house, but I think he is learning that worldly goods are not the only things in life and as he looks around and sees so many Muslims suffering, he and others will pray for help and they will get it."

Akram looked at his mother. "Mamma! I believe you," said he. "I must now go and write to Haníf but most likely I shall come down after my homework and hear about some more of your thoughts, which I shall put in my letter."

With that, Akram went upstairs thinking to himself, "What a lot I have learnt in one day!"

Scholasticism and Mysticism in Islam

Mysticism is germane to Islam

Al-Ghazzali, Sufism, the Mu'tazilah and Ash'ari Schools of Thought

By Professor SAYYID 'ABD AL-WHAHHAB BUKHARI

The two concerns of Muslims after the death of the Prophet Muhammad

After the demise of the Prophet Muhammad in 11 A.H. (632 C.E.), the first concern of the Muslims was the compilation of the Qur'án into one single volume. This was done during the Caliphate of the first Caliph, Abú Bakr. The third Caliph 'Uthmán, appointed a "High Powered Committee", with Zayd Ibn Thábit, the celebrated scribe of the Prophet's revelation, in charge of it and the verbal differences in the various readings of the Holy Qur'án were composed and one standard version of the Book was prepared and sent to all the principal cities of the Islamic realm.

The second immediate concern of the Muslims was the Hadith — the Traditions of the Prophet; most of these were not written down in the lifetime of the Prophet as it was feared that the revelations would get mixed up with the Prophet's own statements. This work was started in right earnest under Caliph 'Umar II towards the close of the 1st Century of the Hijri era. The Imam Ibn Shaháb, familiarly known as the Imam Zuhri, was the first to work on this compilation of the Hadith and though his work has been lost to the world, he, nevertheless, gave the lead in this branch of knowledge. This work assumed great proportions and eminent scholars arose in the second and third centuries of Islam and devoted their lives in collecting and sifting the genuine Hadith from the spurious. Thus the six Canonical works on the Traditions of the Prophet were produced, of which the *Mu'attá'* of the Imam Málik and the *Sahih* of the Imam Bukhári are the most outstanding. The canons of criticism and biographical notes on the lives of the transmitters of the Hadith, the *Asmá al-Rijál*, were laboriously prepared, thus meriting the remark that of all peoples, "Muslims made a science (*Ilm*) of their religious traditions". There is hardly any person in history whose words have been so scrupulously recorded as the Prophet Muhammad. By the end of the first century of Islam, by a unique fortune of history, the Muslim sphere of influence had extended far and wide on the globe. But their achievements in the realm of the intellect had far eclipsed their political or military gains and were far more calculated for the good and enlightenment of humanity. "From Granada to Delhi", to use the words of that famous writer Carlyle, they had "blazed heavenward", establishing colleges, libraries and observatories wherever they went. Even Basrah and Kúfah, originally founded as military cantonments, had be-

come humming centres of literary activity. The Prophet's injunction, "seek knowledge, even though it were in China", had mentally prepared his early followers to embark upon a voyage of intellectual and scientific discoveries.

The expansion of Islam brings new problems

The expansion of Islam and the inclusion of different races and cultures in its warm belt necessitated the reinterpretation of the law in the light of the Qur'án and the Traditions of the Prophet. Society is progressive and in an ever-widening empire, new problems were bound to arise clamouring for a solution. It is a truism that great needs give rise to great men. Thus it was that great men like the Imam Abú Hanifah, the Imam Málik, the Imam Sháfi'i, the Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, arose and founded the four great schools of Muslim Law and Jurisprudence. Two more sources of Muslim law, of course arising out of the first two, e.g. the Qur'án and the Hadith, were added. There were the *Ijmá'* — consensus of learned opinion and the *Qiyás* — analogical deduction. These two were pressed into service in order to meet the new situation. The right of interpretation of the sacred law was thus guaranteed to the Community on the authority of the Prophet himself, making the Muslim law and legislation flexible and progressive.

With the fall of the Umayyads in the year 132 A.H. (750 C.E.) a new situation arose. The Umayyads had usurped the heritage of Islam and had established Arab imperialism. Nonetheless, the spiritual and intellectual spirit of Islam could not be curbed and even during the Umayyad hegemony, the religion of Islam was working out its own destiny. Luckily, even among these Arab imperialists, there was a good and pious man, 'Umar II, under whose direction the work of collecting the Traditions of the Prophet was first started. But with the fall of this dynasty, Arabism fell. The Prophet had declared that :

"*Lá Fakhr li 'Arab 'alá 'Ajam wa lá li Ahmar 'alá Aswad. Kullu-kum min Adam wa Adam min furáb.*"

"There is no superiority for the Arab over the non-Arab, nor for the white man over the black, all are children of Adam and Adam was made of the earth."

Thus it came to pass that when the Arab hegemony fell, and the Abbasids came to power, the Persian influence began to be felt at the new capital of the Islamic empire, Baghdad.

The Abbasids, though Arabs themselves, had succeeded in their dreams with the help of the Persians and hence it was that the Persians became prominent at the new capital and therefore in the empire. A Persian Vizirate came into being — that of the celebrated Barmakids, who were great patrons of learning and the learned. A new era had now dawned.

Under this new impact, the age of translations began. Mansúr, the second Abbasid Caliph, founded a Translation Bureau which was to assume such gigantic dimensions under his illustrious successors, the great Hárún al-Rashíd and his equally illustrious son, Má'mún al-Rashíd. It was in the days of Mansúr that the famous Indian classic, *Panchatantra* was translated into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffa'. The Great Prophet had laid down the dictum :

"Al-Hikmah Dhállah al-Mu'min. Fa-haythu wajada-há, fa-huwa ahaququ bi-há."

"A thing of wisdom was the lost she-camel of the faithful; therefore wherever it is found, he has a greater right over it."

And the master had made no discrimination between what subsequently came to be known as secular and religious, in matters of knowledge. His tradition :

"Utlubú al-'Ilma wa lau bi al-Sín."

"Seek knowledge, even from China."

is clearly corroborative of this position; for China at that time was not a centre of Islamic religious learning. Thus the Abbasids were well fortified in the position they had taken up, with regard to the establishment of the Translation Bureau. Even under the Umayyads, Basrah and Kúfah had become centres of not only Islamic religious lore, but, what was significant, of the so-called secular sciences as well. Greek logic and philosophy were freely taught and Aristotalian metaphysics were discussed in Arabic seminars, along with the Qur'án and the Hadith. In the heyday of Islam, *this distinction between religious and secular learning was not known.*

The effect of translations during the Abbasid period from foreign languages on Muslim thought

The Translation Bureau thus established by Caliph Mansúr and perfected by Hárún, took up the work of translations from different learned languages of the world, the Greek and Syriac, Hebrew and Sanskrit and others. The Caliphs instructed their envoys in the different countries of the world to collect works of merit in different languages and scholars were invited to Baghdad from different lands. They were given the status of Cultural Ambassadors. Thus the Dár al-Hikmah (*The House of Wisdom*), as Hárún called the Translation Bureau, became a humming centre of intellectual activity at Baghdad. The example thus set by the Caliph, caught the imagination of the governors of the provinces and other rich citizens. Thus Nayshapur, Merv, Samarqand and Bukhara, not to speak of the other great centres like Kúfah and Basrah, became great centres of literary and scientific activity. As a result the Arabic language became so enriched that it became the vehicle of learned thought throughout the Islamic and the rest of the then civilised world. This position that language retained for well over six centuries both in Asia and Europe. The knowledge of Arabic became a hallmark of culture, both in the East and in the West.

The emergence of the Mu'tazilah School

Now this mighty influx of learning into Arabic from the different learned languages of the world had its own

reactions. This resulted in a tremendous impact of cultures. Already at Kúfah and Basrah, Greek thought, through Aristotle, had set people thinking on questions like the freedom of will, pre-destination, the extent of man's responsibility and so on. Aristotle was held in such esteem that he earned the surname *al-Mu'allim al-Awwal* (the first Teacher of Philosophy), while Ibn Sáná (or Avicenna), his commentator, *al-Mu'allim al-Thání* (the second Teacher). The Imam Hasan of Basrah, a disciple of the celebrated Imam Ja'far al-Sádiq of Medina, became the pioneer of free thought. His disciple Wásil Ibn 'Atá' founded a regular Mu'tazilite School, devoted to free thinking, derived from the Arabic word *i'tazala*, i.e. "he differed from". Wásil is said to have differed from his master on a question in metaphysics and this situation gave the name to his school. This simple difference of opinion ultimately developed into the great Mu'tazlite movement in Islamic History which has very vitally affected its course. It was truly said that great and prolific actions are almost always simple in the beginning. It will be of interest to know some of the doctrines of the Mu'tazlah :—

- (1) God alone is eternal.
- (2) The miracle of the Qur'án is in its teachings and not in the language.
- (3) The words, face, hands and eyes with reference to God and His sitting on the throne on high, must be taken in the metaphorical sense.
- (4) Man has a free will and is the author of his own actions. He is a free agent of his destiny.
- (5) God does not pre-determine man's actions.
- (6) Evil cannot be ascribed to God. It is human.
- (7) Theology should be subjected to investigation and based upon realistic foundations.
- (8) The Mu'tazlites deny the vision of God on the day of Judgment.

An argument on the vision of God on the day of Judgment will reveal the nature of discussions. The Mu'tazlites hold that if vision of God is accepted, then God, the limitless, becomes limited and that is a fallacy. The Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, taking his stand on the Tradition of the Prophet, who said, "You will see God on the Day of Judgment even as you see the full moon", declared that the Prophet had said it and that conditions would be different in the world of spirit, when there would be no time, circumstance or limit, and as one does not know those conditions and, therefore, any argument, on insufficient data, is unscientific (cf. weightlessness in space and so forth, which prove that the conditions in the other world would be different).

The Ash'arite School

As opposed to the Mu'tazilah, arose another school, called the Ash'arite School, after the name of its founder, Abú al-Hasan 'Alí, son of Ismá'il, known as al-Ash'arí. He was a descendant of Abú Músá Ash'arí, the famous companion of the Prophet. Abú al-Hasan was himself a Mu'tazilite, but, later on, got disgusted with some of their conclusions and their metaphysical dialectics. A typical example of the futile hair-splitting of this school is to be met within one of their theories given below : Children ought to occupy an intermediary place (the *Barzakh*) between hell and heaven; for they had actually committed no sin. This was obviously an intellectual libertinism, pure and simple, leading people nowhere. Another such subject was "whether a sinner (*fásiq*) continued to be a Muslim or not". Under this topic one comes across

hair-splitting arguments for and against almost puerile in their substance. It was mere sophistry and intellectual gymnastics, leading the reader nowhere and bewildered. Ash'arí therefore established his own School, wherein he tried to effect a compromise between orthodoxy and Mu'tazilite rationalism. He opted for a middle path, between orthodoxy and philosophy. This gave rise to scholasticism, which aimed at explaining religion in the light of reason. The Arabic word for it is *al-Kalām*, which literally meant a "discussion", but technically it stands for a branch of knowledge that seeks to interpret religion in the light of science and philosophy.

The Ash'arites rejected the Mu'tazilite theory of man's complete freedom of will. They held that man was free to a degree but not completely free. Complete freedom belongs to God alone. They asserted that things in themselves possess no power, though they do appear to have some power. Fire burns. It has the power of burning. But that power is vouchsafed to it by God. If that power is taken away from it, it becomes charcoal, which does not burn. So they argued that the ultimate power and absolute freedom belong to God alone. They introduced the concept of *Kasb*, which meant acquisition. This word became common among the Ash'arites. The idea behind it was that man acquired his creative faculties through God. Thus a compromise was sought to be effected between the two conflicting ideologies by asserting God's complete creative Power and man's limited responsibility. This school also taught that man cannot attain the knowledge of God through reason alone, as reasoning faculty is limited and is liable to err, and so, man must follow the revelation which, in essence, is the highest form of reason. They held that the word of God is eternal and the words of the Qur'án are in their origin also eternal. The Mu'tazilites held the view that the idea of eternity of the Qur'án would involve the belief in two eternals, God and the Qur'án, which would be tantamount to *shirk*, i.e. associating another with God. But the Ash'arites held that the Qur'án, as word of God, was co-eternal with Him. The word and the Being are not two separate entities and therefore, they argued, that the question of two eternals did not arise at all, in ascribing eternity to the word of God.

According to the Ash'arites, the belief in the eternity of the Qur'án could never postulate *shirk* — polytheism. The Abbasid Caliph Má'mún, who was a scholar rather than a ruler, was a great protagonist of the Mu'tazilite ideology. He propagated, to the point of persecution, their theories and particularly that of the well-known *Khalq Qur'án*, the created nature of the Qur'án. He had even established the notorious inquisition called *Mihnah* ("the trial") to try people's beliefs. All officers of the State had to subscribe to the Caliph's views. Thus it came to pass that the Caliph, who advocated free thought, was intolerant of free thought in others. He was vehemently opposed by the great Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, the founder of the fourth School of Muslim Law. Má'mún's argument was :

The Qur'án is created
All created things must die
Therefore the Qur'án must die !

The Imam rebutted as follows :
All which is *Nafs* must die
God refers to Himself as *Nafs*¹
Therefore God . . .

He asked the Caliph if he could subscribe to that position. The Imam was mercilessly flogged and imprisoned by the Caliph. Mu'tasim, who followed Má'mún, continued the

persecution unabated. The Imam died in prison during the days of Mu'tasim's successor, al-Wáthiq. It is a truism that the blood of the martyr is the seed of the Church. The Imam's sacrifices bore fruit and a great reaction to the Mu'tazilite theories set in. Mutawakkil, who followed Wáthiq as Caliph, went over to the Ash'arites.

Rázi and al-Ghazzáli

Two other great writers of the Ash'arite or the scholastic school, which attempted to interpret religion from the point of view of reason and thus to bring about a compromise between religion and philosophy, were the Imam Fakhraddin Rázi and the Imam Muhammad Ibn Muhammad al-Ghazzáli. Rázi was a follower of the Sháfi'i School of the Muslim Law and was one of the greatest of scholasts (d. 606 A.H. — 1222 C.E.). His commentary of the Qur'án, one of the most voluminous of the works on the subject, is very well known.

But by far the most celebrated of the scholastic teachers was al-Ghazzáli. He is known to the Islamic world as the *Hujjah al-Islám* — the Argument of Islam — even as Thomas Aquinas was known to the Christian world. He was born in 450 A.H. (1058 C.E.) and died in his 55th year in 1111 C.E. For a time he served as a Professor in the famous Madrasah Nizámiyyah founded by Nizám al-Mulk, the great Vizier of the Saljuq dynasty of Baghdad. Later he resigned and spent his life in wandering and seclusion. He wrote voluminously on ethics, logic, theology and philosophy. His famous book *Ihyá' 'Ulüm al-Dín* (the Revivification of the Science of Religion) is a monumental work, in which he has interpreted religion from the rational point of view. Several of his works have been translated into French and German.

Al-Ghazzáli started with theology and scholastic philosophy. But his soul yearned for something more than these wordy battles which, no doubt, satisfied the intellect, but afforded insufficient food for the soul. Thus he turned to mysticism and sufism for solace and refuge. It is to this period of his life that his famous treatise, *al-Munqidh Min al-Dalál* (The Saviour from Error), belongs. This is a brochure on mysticism, and though difficult to understand, is yet a masterly treatise on mysticism.

Al-Ghazzáli based his doctrines, as most of the Muslim scholastics had done, on God, as the Supreme Will, the Supreme Thought, Who created man, a compound of matter and soul. This soul has been breathed by God in Man, as the Qur'án had declared :

"*Wa nafakha fí-hí min Rúhi-hí.*"

"And He breathed in him out of His Soul."²

Therefore al-Ghazzáli argued that God can be realised by the soul only, and not through the intellect. He declared that He could be seen by the inward eye, *Basírah*; the outward eye, *Basárah*, which includes all reasoning, is incapable of catching the Divine Beatitude. From scholasticism, Ghazzáli had gone over to mysticism. He had, by his unequalled scholarship, set at naught the arguments that militated against religion. The Imam al-Ghazzáli was to Islamic Law and Jurisprudence.

¹ The reference was to the verse of the Qur'án
"*Wa yuhazziru-kum Alláh Nafsu-hú. Wa Alláh Ra'ufun bi al-'Ibád.*"

² "And God warns you by *Nafs* (Himself) and God is Affectionate towards people." (3 : 30).
2 32 : 9.

The Buwayhid and Seljuq Periods of Baghdad produced many scholastic writers in Persia, Arabia, Egypt, India and Turkey, but none attained to al-Ghazzálí's intellectual eminence or popularity. He deserved well of Islam and the Muslims by common consent call him the Argument of Islam (*Hujjah al-Islám*) and an argument indeed he was.

That great work on scholasticism now accomplished, al-Ghazzálí turned to mysticism and sufism for the enrichment of his soul. Scholasticism satisfies the intellect, but man in his essence, was something more. He was also possessed of spirit Divine and the soul also clamoured for its sustenance. Therefore al-Ghazzálí now left the intellect where it was and turned inward. The following verse of the poet Rúmí would amply bring out al-Ghazzálí's spiritual urge :

"*Sad Kitáb-u wa sad Waraq dar Nár kun,
Sínah rá az Yád-i ú Gulzár kun.*"

"Set on fire a hundred sheaves or even a hundred books ; illumine your heart with His thoughts and His remembrance."

He had come to realise that the wordy warfare of the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites, good enough to an extent, could not help the Soul. As Mauláná Rúmí would have it :

"*Gar ba Istidlál Kár-i Dín bude,
Fakhr-i Rázi Ráz-dár-i Dín bude.*"

"If religion could be fathomed by argument then Fakhruddín Rázi (the well-known scholast) would have been the knower of the secrets of religion."

The solution therefore lay in sufism. God had got to be realised through His own spirit which is in Man. The Great Caliph 'Alí is reported to have said :

"*'Araftu Rabbi bi-Rabbí.*"

"I realised my Lord, through my Lord" (i.e. I knew Him through the spirit that He breathed in me).

Such a realisation of God alone could satisfy al-Ghazzálí's or anybody else's soul ; to that mystic experience he now turned.

In the human breast, there is the love of the One Supreme Being. It is in the heart of man that God resides.

"*Qalb al-Mu'min 'Arsh Alláh.*"

"The heart of the believer is the Throne of God."

Sufism is germane to Islam

Sufism and the Qur'an

Sufism provided the path of this quest of the human soul after God. Thus sufism is the essence of the spiritual life in Islam. Sufism is not alien to Islam, as some people imagine, judging from what is and has been practised in that name. If Islamic mysticism, which is another name for sufism, is the path of God's realization, as it certainly is, then its main teachings must be found in the Qur'an. Here are some mystic verses in the Holy Book :

"*Nahnu aqrabu 'Ilayhi min Habl al-Warid.*"

"We are nearer him than his jugular vein."³ ("We" in the Qur'an invariably stands for God.)

"*Fa-nafakhná fi-hi min Rúhi-ná.*"

"We breathed in him, from out of Our spirit."⁴

And again :

"*Lá tudrik-hu al-Absár wa Huwa yudrik al-Absár;
wa Huwa al-Latif al-Khabír.*"

"Vision comprehendeth not, but He comprehendeth all vision: He is subtle — the Aware."⁵

Mark the mystic tone of this verse !

"*Alláhu Núr al-Samáwát wa al-Ardh; Mathalu Nuri-hi ka-Mishkátin fi-há Misbáh; al-Misbáhu fi Zujáatin, al-Zujáatu ka-anna-há Kaukabun Durriyun yuqádu min Shajaratin Mubárákatin Zaytúnatin lá Sharqiyyatin wa lá Gharbiyyatin yakádu Zaytu-há yudhi'u wa lau lam tamsas-hu Nár. Núrún 'alá Núr yahdí Alláhu li-Núr-hi man yashá'u wa yadhribu Alláhu al-Amthál li al-Nás wa Alláh bi-Kulli Shay'in 'Alím.*"

"God is the light of the heavens and of the earth. The similitude of His light is as it were a niche, wherein is a lamp; the lamp within a glass, the glass is as though it were a bright star. It is lit from a blessed Tree, the Olive, neither of the East, nor of the West, the Oil whereof is likely to blaze forth, though no fire has yet touched it; Light upon Light; God guideth to His Light whom He will. God speaketh to mankind in allegories for God is Knower of all things."⁶

Then again :

"*'Idh 'aradhná al-Amánata 'ala al-Samáwát wa al-Ardh wa al-Jibál Fa'abayna an yahmilna-há, wa hamala-há al-Insán.*"

"Surely We offered the Trust unto the Heavens and the Earth and the mountains, but they shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it. And man accepted it."⁷

"*Sa-nurihum Ayátu-ná fi al-Afáq fi Anfusi-him hattá yatabayyana la-hum anna-hú al-Haqq. A wa lam yakfi bi-Rabbika anna-hú 'alá kulli Shay'in Muhít.*"

"We shall presently show them our portents on the horizons and within themselves, until it shall become manifest unto them that it is the Truth. Does not your Lord suffice, since He is witness over all things. But they are still in doubt about meeting the Lord. Lo! Surely He encompasseth everything."⁸

"*Fa-ayna-má tawallú fa-thamma wajh Alláh.*"

"And whithersoever ye turn, there is God's countenance."⁹

And :

"*Huma al-Awwál wa al-Akhir wa al-Záhir wa al-Bátin.*"

"He is the First and the Last; the Manifest and Hidden."¹⁰

And again :

"*Wa huwa ma'a-kum ayna-má kuntum.*"

"He (God) is with you wherever you are."

Sháh Valí'úlláh of Delhi, the great Scholast of India, possibly had this verse in view, when he asserted : "If I wish to prove the Pantheistic theory of the 'Unity of Being' I can do so by a reference to the very text of the Qur'an and Hadith."

And again :

"*Wa Idh qála Rabbu-ka li al-Mala'ikati Inni já'ilun fi al-Ardh Khalifah wa 'allama Adam al-Asmá'a kullahá.*"

"And when thy Lord said to the Angels : Lo! I am about to place a vice-regent in the Earth . . . And He taught Adam all the names . . ." (Here names refer to His attributes.)¹¹

And still,

"*Wa má ramayta idh ramayta, wa-lákin Alláhu ramá.*"

"And you (Muhammad) threw not when you didst throw, but God threw . . ."¹²

3 50 : 16.	8 41 : 53.
4 66 : 12.	9 2 : 115.
5 6 : 103.	10 57 : 3.
6 24 : 35.	11 2 : 30.
7 33 : 72.	12 8 : 17.

Verses such as these, highly mystical in their content, are strewn throughout the Holy Book — the Qur'án. Therefore, it will not be true to say that mysticism is alien to Islam or that it was foreign to its message and teachings.

The Hadith and mysticism

Now let us examine a few Hadith relating to this subject. The Prophet of God is reported to have said in a Hadith *Qudsi*, a category of Hadith not mentioned in the regular categories of Hadith, but it is a special type used for mystic utterances. Though it is not counted for purposes of law, and indeed it was not intended for it, the mystics, however, lay great store by it. They consider it as being the word of God, though not the Qur'án as such.

The Prophet said :

“*Má wasa'ani Ardhi wa lá Samá'i wa lákin wasa'ani Qalb al-Mu'min al-Kháshí.*”

“My earth and My heavens could not contain Me; what contained Me was a believing and tender heart.”

Yet again :

“*Idhá taqarraba 'Abdi illayya bi al-Nawáfil, fa-kuntu Basaru-hú alladhi yubsiru bi-hi. Wa sam'u-hú alladhi yasma'u bi-hi wa yadu-hú allatí yabsutuhú bi-há au ka má qála.*”

“When My servant seeks My nearness through prayers then I become his eyes, by which he sees, his ears, by which he hears and his hands, by which he grasps.”

Again :

“*Al-Sájid yasjudu bayna Qadamayy al-Rahmán.*”

“The man who prostrates in prayer, he does so between the two feet of God.” (This Hadith refers to the nearness of God to man.)

Mark the following prayer of the Prophet of God, which he usually recited when he went out for prayers :

“*Wa idh kharaja li-Salátin. Qála Alláhahumma a'jal fi Qalbi Núran wa fi Basari wa fi Sam'i Núran wa 'an yamini Núran wa 'an Shimáli Nuran wa khalfi Núran wa a'alni Núran (Bukhári, Muslim, Abú Dáwúd, al-Nasá'i, Ibn Májah); wa fi 'Asabi Núran wa fi Lahmi Núran wa fi Damí Núran wa fi Sha'ri Núran wa fi Bashari Núran (Bukhári, Muslim, Abú Dáwúd, al-Nasá'i wa Ibn Májah). Alláh-humma a'jal fi Qalbi Núran wa fi Lisáni Núran wa a'jal fi Sam'i Núran wa a'jal fi Basari Núran wa a'jal min Khalfi Núran wa min Amámi Núran wa a'jal min Fauqi Núran wa min tahi Núran. Alláh-humma á-ti-ni Núran*” (Muslim, Abú Dáwúd, Nasá'i.)

“O God pour Thy light into my heart. Pour it into my eyes, and into my ears. Pour it to my right and left. Pour it in front of me and behind me and give me light. Pour light into my nerves and into my flesh, and into my blood and into my hair and into my skin, and into my tongue and into my soul and increase my light and transform me into light and surround me with light. O ! God bless me with Light.”

What a yearning of the “believing and tender” heart does this prayer reveal ! The *mí'rāj* (the heavenly ascension) of the Prophet speaks volumes about the flight of the human being to regions beyond and beyond, beyond time, space and circumstance. And the Prophet indicated that prayer was the *mí'rāj* of the faithful. And if mysticism of sufism is knowledge of the spirit and the way to fathom its mysteries to the extent it is possible, in order to realise the Divine Beatitude and Grace, then certainly the Qur'án and Hadith throw abundant light on the path. The accretions to Islamic mysticism may have been many, it is conceded, but to say that this

teaching is not germane to Islam is not tenable in the light of the above quotations from the Qur'án and the Hadith.

The Prophet Muhammad is the first Muslim mystic

The first period of Islamic mysticism began from the Prophet himself, for if mysticism means divine knowledge and God's realization, there was no greater mystic in Islam than he was. When the words he uttered during his divine ecstasy, during the periods of *Wahy*, or inspiration, were the words of God, though physically uttered by him, there is indeed no proof needed that mysticism is of the very essence of Islam. Then his mystic ascension to the various heavens and then on to the Throne of God popularly known as the *Mí'rāj* (the Ascension) unmistakably point to a very pronounced element of mysticism in the Prophet himself. It is interesting to note that Tradition describes his dromedary — the famous *Buráq* of the Prophet that carried him heavenward — was so swift that on its journey, its swift foot lay on the extreme point of its vision. The Prophet repaired heavenward and came back and the latchet of his door was still in motion and his bed warm ! Whatever the difference of opinion whether the *mí'rāj* was with his body or only the flight of the Master's soul, one thing is clear that it must have been an unusually illuminating spiritual experience. That it provided material for Ibn 'Arabí's *al-Futúhát Makkiyah* or Dante's *Divine Comedy*, is not so germane to our purpose here, which is only to reiterate the fact that there is so much of the mystical element in the life of the Prophet and therefore it is most assuredly reflected in the religion that was revealed to him. Opinion was divided among his companions as to whether the *mí'rāj* was with his body or not, but he did not make a belief in it as a condition of Islam. But most of his senior companions held the view that it was a bodily ascension, for there would be no particular merit if it was only spiritual. And modern discoveries in a sense, lend support to this view. But be that as it may, the Prophet's well known Hadith : “Prayer is the *Mí'rāj* of the *Mu'minún* (the faithful)”, is a clear enunciation of the fact that the Master desired to share this experience with the faithful according to their spiritual evolution. The Prophet's *mí'rāj* provided them also with the means of direct communion with the Lord. Thus it is crystal clear that mysticism is not only germane to Islam, but it is, indeed, the essence of it. If in the course of its history, accretions from sources other than Islam, have accumulated in it, or its provisions have been abused or misused by its later adherents, it is certainly not the fault of Islamic mysticism. It is so, not because of it, but in spite of it. Note the remarks of Alfred Guillaume in his *Islam*, London 1962, page 142, on the subject. He says : “To what extent they (early Muslims) were influenced by factors and forces outside Islam is of no moment. What is certain is that Islam itself, with its doctrine, fasting and litanies (*dhikr*), provided the authoritative background of their lives.”

'Alí Ibn Abí Tálib, the foremost mystic amongst the companions of the Prophet Muhammad

Thus, as I said, the first period of mysticism in Islam begins with the Prophet himself. His companions, those who became his successors, to wit, the first four Caliphs, the Persian Salmán — the first fruit of Islam from Persia about whom the Prophet used to say, “Salmán is of us”, “*Salmán min Ahl al-Bayt*”, then the socialist among his companions, Abú Dhar, who used to say that nothing should be provided for the following day as God would look after it; then 'Ammár Ibn Yásar and a host of others were all known for their deep piety and ascetic life. The foremost of these was the fourth Caliph of Islam, 'Alí Ibn Abí Tálib, who was

noted, even among the companions of the Prophet, for his sound scholarship and deep piety and ascetic life. The saying of the Prophet :

"Kun fi al-Dunyá ka anna-ka Gharibun au 'Abiru Sabílin au ka-má qála."

"Live in the world as if you are a stranger to it or merely a passer-by — a traveller."

was exemplified in the life of this great Hero of early Islam. He owned nothing. When he sought the hand of the Prophet's daughter, Fátimah, he had no wherewithal to provide for the occasion. The Prophet ordered him to sell his coat of mail and with its scanty proceeds he purchased a few bare necessities for his marriage. And he went through life as he started it, even when he was the Caliph of the Islamic world which, by his time, had stretched out from Morocco in Africa to Kashgar in central Asia. He subsisted only on hard dry bread of barley, though he was an absolute ruler of a vast empire. He had a definite mystic bent of mind. Almost all the Sufi Orders of Islam look upon him as their second spiritual teacher, the first being the Prophet himself. Among the Prophet's early admirers was one great mystic, 'Uways Qarní, well known in Sufi literature for his piety and his unbounded love and devotion for the Master. So were 'Ammár, and Kumayl Ibn Ziyád at Kufah and the celebrated Hasan of Basrah, popularly known in the history of Sufism as Hasan Basrí. And there were several others besides. This was the first period in the history of mysticism — the period of the Prophet and his Companions. This was a period when Islam and mystic experience went hand in hand; one was not distinguishable from the other. Due to the impact of the overpowering personality of the Master, the Muslims lived as the Prophet intended them to live — in the world and yet outside it. Their one thought was God, whom the Prophet had enshrined in their hearts. They kept up their usual prayers and never even neglected the nocturnal prayers, the post-midnight prayers called the *Tahajjud*. Their condition is graphically described in the Qur'án thus :

"Tatájáfa Junúbu-hum 'an al-Madháji'."

"Their bodies wriggle out of their beds to prepare for their prayers (the *Tahajjud* prayers)."¹³

They were described as :

"Bi al-Layl Ruhbán wa bi al-Nahár Fursán."

"Hermits in the night and heroes by the day."

Thus Islam and mysticism went hand in hand. Empires came to them by an accident of history; that was only circumstantial. They remained — what the Prophet intended them to be — "the soldiers of God", with the motto :

"Qul Inna Saláti wa Nusuki wa Mahyá-yi wa Mamáti li al-Alláh Rabb al-'Alamín."

"Say: Lo! My worship and my sacrifice and my living and my dying are for God, the Creator of the worlds."¹⁴

After the demise of the Prophet and the age of his Companions, this movement continued side by side with the development of Hadith, in the period of the *Tábi'in*, i.e. the disciples of the Companions of the Prophet. Indeed their ascetic lives and their devotion to the study of *al-Kitáb* (the Qur'án) and *Sunnah*, the Traditions and usages of the Prophet, marked them out as mystics, though the word had not gained currency by that time. Their ambition was to mould their lives on the Sunnah of the Prophet of God. Their motto was the famous verse in the Qur'án :

"Radiya Alláh 'an-hum wa radhú 'an-hu."

"A people whom He (God) loves and they love Him."

These pious men earned the subsequent suffixes to their names : *Radiya Alláh 'an-hu* (God was pleased with him). They did not concern themselves with the nature (*Dhát*) of God, whether He was Transcendental in His Essence or Anthropomorphic or Pantheistic, ideas developed under the influence of Greek philosophy. The Prophet had asked his followers not to discuss about the *Dhát* — Essence of God — but rather to concentrate upon His Attributes and to assimilate them,

"Takhallaqu bi Akhláq Alláh."

"Imbue yourself with the attributes of God."

and they did so.

Glimpses into the lives of early Muslim mystics

The vast conquests of Islam created a new situation. It naturally resulted in levity and luxury, pomp and grandeur at the Courts of Damascus and Baghdad. The more serious among them kept away from the Courts. A classical example is provided in the annals of the times. The Imam Abú Hanífah was offered the post of the Chief Justice of the High Court at Baghdad by Caliph al-Mansúr, the Abbasid, which he politely refused. On being asked for an explanation, he pleaded inability. This threw the Caliph into a rage and he called him a liar. Thereupon the Imam quickly came out with a repartee, "Then how can a liar be a judge?" The Caliph was caught on the horns of a dilemma and gave orders to flog him for insubordination, and to imprison him. The Imam, of course, coolly accepted this indignity, rather than serve the Government. The case of the Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal and Caliph Má'mún does not require reiteration. And there were several others besides. The members of the House of the Prophet, like the Imam Ja'far al-Sádiq and others, as a rule, kept themselves away from the Government of the day and devoted their energies to learning and dissemination of knowledge and to the ascetic way of living recommended by the Prophet Muhammad. Some of these devoted men took to wearing a sort of coarse, undyed wool called the *súf*, and were therefore nicknamed as *súfi* by their compatriots. Hence came the word "sufi" — one who wears the *súf* — an ascetic or a mystic.

Ibráhim Ibn Adham, Ma'rúf Karkhi

Though this group of people were scattered throughout the length and breadth of this vast empire of Islam, a large number of them belonged to Persia. Among these mention may be made of Habíb 'Ajámí (d. 738 C.E.), who was originally a money-changer but, discarding his lucrative business, took to the way of God. He was a disciple of the well-known Hasan Basrí.

But, by far the most important and well-known of these mystics of Islam was Ibráhim Adham (d. 777 C.E.). He was a nobleman of Balkh, in central Asia, who gave up his all and took to asceticism. He said, "Two loves cannot exist in one heart, God and the world." He is reported to have said of a man who was learning grammar. "It would be better for him, if he studied silence." He attracted many an earnest soul to his way of life. The great poet Sa'dí presumably refers to him in his verse :

"Shunídam kih Mard-e baráh-e Hijaz

Ba-har Khatwah Kard-e do Rak'at Namáz."

"I heard of a man on his way to the pilgrimage to Mecca offering two genuflexions of prayers for every step of his journey."

There were several others besides, of whom a few merit mention here. The mystic Ma'rúf Karkhí was from Khurasan and a disciple of the Imam 'Alí al-Ridhá, the eighth Imam of the family of the Prophet and a contemporary of Caliph Má'mún. There was another, the famous Báyzid Bustámí, who, in his ecstasy, had declared: "*Subhána má 'azamu Sháni*" "Glory be unto me. How exalted am I!" Yet another was Abú Bakr Shibli, but the most renowned of them was al-Mansúr al-Halláj (d. 922 C.E.), who had declared in his ecstasy, "I am the Truth" — meaning "God" — for which he was hanged till he died. He was a disciple of the great Junayd of Baghdad, who is called "the leader of the Sufi's order" (*Sayyid al-Tá'ifáh*). He had a firmer grasp of theology and mystical experience. He took his stand on the Qur'an and taught that the struggle of man was to fulfil the covenant between man and God referred to in the Holy Qur'an:

"*A lusta bi-Rabbi-kum? Qálú bálá. Shahidná.*"

"Am I not your Lord (was the question put to the soul of men in their primeval state). They replied: How else could it be? We bear witness."¹⁵

Thus he taught that though man has no separate and distinct existence from God, still he did not cease to be an individual charged with responsibilities. Thus he enunciated a via media between what is known as the *Sharia'h* (the law of Islam) and the *Haqiqah* (absolute Truth). His system offers a happy synthesis and was the nearest approach to what the Prophet himself had taught. That is why he had been called the leader *par excellence* of the Sufis (*Sayyid al-Tá'ifáh*).

Al-Ghazzálí

By far the most important of the sufis was the celebrated Imam Abú Hámid Muhammad Ibn Muhammad al-Ghazzálí, known to the West as al-Gazel. He was born in Tus in 1058 C.E. and died in 1111 C.E. Earlier he had been a scholast, as pointed out above. He had distinguished himself in all the philosophical, legal and other disciplines of his age and was recognised as the greatest contemporary authority on theology and law. He was convinced that God could not be realized by mere scholastic speculation, and therefore he abandoned his post of a Professor at the Nizamiyyah *Madrasah* (University) at Baghdad and took to solitude and travel. He taught that true knowledge came through revelation. His book, '*Ihyá 'Ulún al-Dín*', is in four parts and is unrivalled in the theological literature of Islam. Nicholson says about him in the *Legacy of Islam* (page 222): "To a large extent he succeeded in making orthodoxy mystical; it was impossible in the nature of things that equal success should attend his efforts to make mysticism orthodox." Then followed the Spaniard, Ibn 'Arabí (1165-1240 C.E.), 'Abd al-Karím Jílí and others who attained great name and fame in this branch of knowledge.

In this short dissertation it is not possible to give an account of the stages in this Path (*Tariqah*), its stations (*Maqámát*) and states (*Ahwál*). The sufi orders that grew in Islam towards the sixth and seventh centuries of Hijrah have elaborated these to perfection. Of these sufi orders, the Qádiriyyah *Tariq*, founded by the celebrated saint of Islam, 'Abdul Qádir al-Jílání (d. 1166 C.E.) is the most widespread. He flourished at Baghdad. He taught that *Zikr*, the remembrance of God, led to concentration of the mind upon Him. Then there were other Orders like the Naqshbandiyyah, Shádhiliyyah and Christiyyah, the last mentioned having been founded by Mu'inuddín Chishtí, the celebrated saint of

Ajmer. He allowed music in his order, to make it more acceptable to India, seeing that music was intertwined into the fabric of Hindu society. In the south of India there flourished sufis and mystics like Nather Qalander at Trich-nopoly of the Suhrawardiyyah order and Shahul Hamid of Nagore. These saints and their followers, as a class, have been tolerant, pious and peace-loving men and it is to them that, to a large degree, the spread of Islam in India or elsewhere is due. It was not through empires and kingdoms that the word of God and His Prophet was brought to the hearts of people, but it was through these men of God that God's message spread on the earth. I shall end this brief treatise by quoting a *Rubá'i* (quatrain) of a sufi. Mark how deeply this thought of the all-embracing unity of the mystical approach to God is enshrined in it:

So long as Mosque and Madrasah still stand,
The dervish's work lies still to hand.
While faith and unfaith stand apart,
There is no Muslim true of heart.

Mark here the expectations of a Muslim — and remember the oft-quoted verse of that mystical poet Jaláluddín Rúmi:

"*Tú bará'e wasl Kardan ámadí*
Nay bará'e Fasl Kardan ámadí."

"You come to the world to unite and not to divide."

15 7: 172.

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Shaykh al-'Alawi

My Reminiscences of the late Shaykh al-'Alawi, of Algeria (d. 1934 C.E.)

A Muslim Saint of the 20th Century

By Dr. MARCEL CARRET

"Woe, woe to those who base their convictions on reason! They are for ever at the mercy of contradiction. The real faith is instinctive, the faith of the heart, which is above all contradiction." — IBN al-'ARABI.

"The man who is athirst for God, and who takes Reason as his guide, is led by Reason to wander in a state of perplexity, where he is left to his own devices. He grows old in the uncertainty of his states of mind, and ends up by asking, still perplexed: 'Does HE exist?'" — al-HALLAJ.

"The Infinite, or the world of the absolute, which we imagine as being external to us, is, on the contrary, universal, and exists both within ourselves and outside of us. There is only one world, and that it is.

"What we take to be the world of the senses, the finite or temporal world, is only an ensemble, a series of veils, which hides the real world underneath. These veils are our own senses. Our eyes are veils covering our real sight, our ears form a veil over our real faculty of hearing, and similarly with our other senses.

"Then what is there left of man?"

"There remains a faint gleam which, in man, appears as the lucidity of his consciousness. There is perfect continuity between this gleam and the effulgent light of the world of the Infinite.

"The world has a soul, and this soul is God. God has a body, and this body is the Universe.

"O my heart! listen to God and understand Him. Be not heedless, or indiscreet, lest God's holy secret be divulged." — AHMAD IBN al-'ALAWI.

I met the Shaykh al-'Alawí for the first time in the spring of 1920 C.E. It was not a chance meeting, for I had been asked to visit him as a doctor — at that time I had been in practise at Mostaganem for only a few months.

What could have induced the Shaykh to consult a doctor? For in his eyes our everyday bodily ailments held such little importance. And why had he chosen me, a newcomer to the district, when there were so many other doctors available?

Later, I was to find out from the Shaykh himself. Shortly after my arrival at Mostaganem I had set up an infirmary in the Arab quarter of Tidjidd¹ for the exclusive use of Muslims. There, for a small nominal fee, I gave consultations three times a week. The Muslims have an instinctive dislike for municipal dispensaries. But my modest establishment had been installed in their own quarter, and it was administered in harmony with their own tastes and customs. It was a great success and in time the Shaykh came to hear about it.

This enterprising initiative on the part of a French doctor who had only just arrived in the country and who, unlike most Europeans, did not look down upon Muslims with

¹ Mostaganem is one of the few Algerian towns where the European quarter is totally separate from the Arab quarter. In Morocco this arrangement had been carried out systematically under Marshal Lyautey, who had been careful not to repeat the mistakes made in Algeria. In the case of Mostaganem it was the geography of the region which decided the layout of the town. The two quarters, Arab and European, are separated by a deep ravine, each quarter having its own particular appearance and character. The Muslim town has a population of some 12,000 to 15,000 souls, in 1920 C.E. It is called Tidjidd and this is where the Shaykh al-'Alawí lived. It was here, facing the sea, that the Zāwiyah was built — the Zāwiyah which he made famous, and where his mortal remains now lie.

contemptuous pride, attracted his attention. Unknown to myself, and without the slightest attempt on his part to make an investigation, he had from time to time been informed by disciples regarding myself, my actions and demeanour, my relations with the patients, and my sympathetic attitude towards Muslims generally. So that really the Shaykh already knew me very well, though, up till then, I had never even heard of him. A rather serious onset of influenza in the spring of 1920 C.E. was what decided him to ask for my professional help.

I was in the presence of no ordinary man — a Christ-like figure

On meeting him my first impression was that I was in the presence of no ordinary person. The room into which I was shown was, like all rooms in Muslim households, bare of furniture; for there were only two chests, which, as I discovered later, contained books and manuscripts. But, from one end to the other, the floor was covered with carpets and mats of alfa. In one corner was a mattress covered with a blanket. On this blanket sat the Shaykh, his back supported by cushions, his body upright, his legs folded beneath him. He sat motionless, his hands resting on his knees, in a priestly posture which seemed quite natural.

What struck me immediately was the resemblance of his face to the one by which Jesus Christ is usually represented. His clothes, so similar, if not identical, with those which Jesus must have worn, the head-veil of very fine white cloth surrounding his features, his posture — in fact, everything seemed to accentuate this resemblance. I thought that this could well have been Jesus Christ receiving his disciples when he was staying at the house of Martha and Mary.

I stood for a moment, surprised, on the threshold of the room. The Shaykh glanced in my direction; it seemed with a far-off look. He was the first to break the silence by offering the customary words of welcome and inviting me to enter. His nephew, Sidi Muhammad, acted as his interpreter. For although the Shaykh understood French quite well, he had some difficulty in speaking it, and when in the presence of a stranger, pretended to be totally ignorant of the language.

I asked for some sandals to put over my shoes, to avoid soiling the carpets and the mats, but he told me that this was of no importance. At his request a chair was brought me, but this article of furniture seemed so out of place in such surroundings that I declined the offer, preferring to sit on a cushion. A smile flitted over his face, and from that moment I felt he was well-disposed towards me.

His voice was soft, a little husky. He spoke little, in short sentences, and his *entourage*, who were attentive to his slightest request, to his every gesture, obeyed in silence. I could see that he was treated with the greatest possible respect. I already had a certain acquaintance with Muslim custom and, suspecting that my patient was a personage of some importance, I took good care not to be too hasty in broaching the matter about which he wished to consult me. So I waited for the Shaykh to open the conversation, and this he did through the intermediary of Sidi Muhammad. He asked me about my stay at Mostaganem, the reasons for my coming there, the difficulties I might have encountered, and what success I had found.

During the conversation a young disciple had brought in a huge copper tray, on which was some Arab tea flavoured with mint, and a few cakes. The Shaykh did not eat, but when the tea had been served he invited me to drink, pronouncing

on my behalf the customary "*Bismillah!*" ("In the name of God!"), as I raised the glass to my lips.

It was not until after the accomplishment of this ceremonial custom that the Shaykh decided to speak to me on the subject of his health. He told me that he had sent for me, but not necessarily for the purpose of prescribing medicine. He would certainly take some medicine if I thought it absolutely essential and useful, but he was not over-enthusiastic about the idea. He simply wished to know if the illness he had contracted a few days previously was serious. He would rely on me to tell him, frankly and without reservation, what I thought of his condition. Nothing more than that.

I was all the more intrigued and interested, for a patient who has not got an obsession about "medicine" is a rare enough phenomenon these days. But one who is indifferent about getting better and simply wants to know about the clinical state of his health is rarer still.

I gave the Shaykh a thorough examination, to which he submitted with good grace. My discreet manner and my circumspection in carrying out this overhaul seemed to give him increased confidence. He was amazingly thin, as though the life in his body functioned at a much slower rate or tempo than is usual. But there was nothing seriously wrong — he was in fairly good health. The only other person present was Sidi Muhammad, who stood in the middle of the room, his back towards us in an attitude of profound respect, his eyes downcast. He saw nothing, but in a low voice he translated the questions and the replies.

When the examination was over the Shaykh again took up his priest-like posture on the cushions. Sidi Muhammad clapped his hands and an attendant entered, carrying some more tea.

I then explained to the Shaykh that he was in the throes of a fairly heavy bout of influenza, but that there was no cause for alarm, that his principal organs were functioning normally, that I did not think there was any need for medicine, and that in a few days the trouble would have disappeared of its own accord. However, as complications could set in in a case like this — a fairly remote possibility, however — it would be advisable for me to maintain supervision over his progress. I should therefore need to see him again, as a precautionary measure. I added that I was rather concerned at his almost emaciated condition, and that in the future he ought to follow a somewhat more plentiful diet. During my interrogation I had in fact learned that his daily nourishment consisted of a litre of milk, a few dried dates, one or two bananas and tea.

The Shaykh seemed very satisfied with the result of my examination. He thanked me courteously, apologised for any inconvenience he might have caused, and said that I could return to see him whenever I considered it necessary. As for the question of nourishment, he viewed things in a different light. For him, the act of taking food was a tiresome necessity, to which he submitted in the most limited manner possible.

I pointed out to him that an intake of insufficient food would make him weaker and weaker and, what was more, would diminish his resistance to any future illnesses. I quite understood that he attached little importance to this purely material manifestation, but if, on the other hand, he wanted to prolong or simply conserve his life, he would be absolutely obliged to co-operate with Nature, however tiresome that might seem to be.

This argument seemed to strike home, for he remained silent for some little time. Then he made a vague, evasive kind of movement with his hand: "God will attend to it," he said softly, and a smile hovered on his lips.

He had resumed his former meditative posture, and seemed to gaze far-off into the distance.

I retired discreetly, taking with me an impression which, after an interval of more than twenty years, has still remained indelibly engraved on my memory, as though these incidents dated from only yesterday.

* * *

So simple and natural

I have described in all its details this first visit of mine to the Shaykh. I considered that the best way of delineating his personality was, firstly, to describe the impression he made on me during our first meeting. This impression is all the more genuine and sincere since, before meeting this personage, I knew nothing at all about him.

When I was asked, professionally, to see the Shaykh, I imagined he would simply be some kind of religious leader — there are many such among the Muslims. But once in his presence, I felt immediately that I had to do with someone — or something — of a very different nature. I tried to obtain some informative details about this remarkable personality, but was unable to learn anything of special note. Generally speaking, the Europeans of North Africa live in such ignorance of the personal life and beliefs of Muslims that they imagine a Shaykh or marabout to be a kind of witch-doctor or sorcerer, who is of importance only to the extent of the political influence he can exert over Muslims. But this Shaykh exerted no such influence. Therefore, he was quite unknown to them.

On reflection, I began to wonder if I had not become a victim of my imagination. Perhaps this Christ-like figure, with the soft, gentle voice and courteous manners, had created on me such a favourable impression that I had conceived the image of a spirituality which may not have existed. Perhaps his pious attitude was nothing more than a deliberate and calculated "pose". Under this outer appearance, which seemed to cover something important and meaningful, perhaps there was nothing at all. Nevertheless to me he had seemed so simple and natural that my first impression remained — later on it was to be fully confirmed.

The next day I returned to see him, and my visits continued for some little time until he had completely recovered. Each time I found him the same, unchanged and unchangeable, sitting in the same position, in the same place, looking away into the distance, with the ghost of a smile on his lips, as though he had not moved an inch since the night before, like a statue for which time does not exist.

At each of my visits he seemed to become more friendly and confiding. Although our talks — apart from medical matters — were fairly limited and devoted mostly to matters of a general nature, my impression that he was not an imposter grew more and more pronounced. Our relationship quickly became more friendly, and when I informed him that my professional visits were no longer necessary, he replied that our acquaintanceship had given him great pleasure and that he would be glad if I would come to see him from time to time whenever I had a spare moment.

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Záwiyah built by volunteers

Thus began a friendship between the Shaykh al-'Alawí and myself which was to last until his death, which occurred during the year 1934. During those fourteen years I had the opportunity of seeing him about once a week. Sometimes it was for the pleasure of conversing with him during my free time, sometimes because he had sent for me to attend one of the members of his family, and quite often because his own health — still in a precarious and unsettled condition — needed my attention.

As the time passed my wife and I became frequent visitors to the house, where we were received on terms of the most complete intimacy. With the passage of years we came to be regarded almost as members of the family, though this deepening of our friendship was a gradual one, almost imperceptible. When our friendship first started the present-day záwiyah² did not exist. A group of the *fuqará*³ had purchased the land on which the building was to be constructed, and had conveyed it to the Shaykh as a gift. The foundations had in fact been started, but owing to the events of 1914 C.E. the work had had to be suspended. It was resumed in 1920 C.E.

The way in which this záwiyah was built was both significant and typical. There was neither architect nor contractor, and all the workmen gave their services voluntarily. The Shaykh himself was the architect, though he had never drawn up plans or used a set-square. He simply stated what he wished to be done, and his idea was readily understood and carried out by the personnel. Not all of the workers came from the district. Far from it. In fact, large numbers came from Kabylie, many from Morocco, the Riff region in particular, and some from Tunisia, but there was no customary hiring of labour or recruitment of any kind. The news had gone round that construction work on the záwiyah could be resumed, and nothing more was needed. From among the disciples of North Africa there was a general exodus "in dispersed order". Bricklayers, carpenters, stone-cutters, "navvies", or ordinary labourers — they tied up a few meagre provisions in their handkerchiefs and set out for the far-off goal where dwelt the Master, to put the work of their hands at his disposal. They received no wages but were given their food. They lived in tents. But each evening, for a period of one hour before the time of prayer, the Shaykh assembled them together and gave them instruction in their religion. And that was their reward.

They worked in this way for about two months, sometimes three, and then left, happy to have played a part in the great work, their souls refreshed with Divine nourishment. They were replaced by other volunteers who also worked for a time and then, in their turn, returned to their homes. These again were replaced by others, eager to continue the work. They came and left continually, and the building-site was never without its full quota of willing helpers. This continued for a period of two years, until the construction work was finally terminated.

I experienced a deep personal happiness at this manifestation of simple and sincere devotion. Here was proof that there were still people in the world who were disinterested enough to put themselves, without thought of material reward, at the service of an ideal. In our own twentieth century I was witnessing at first hand the same upsurge of religious feeling which resulted in the construction of the great

² The usual meeting-place of a Muslim brotherhood.

³ *Fuqará* is the plural of the word *faqir*, meaning a beggar.

cathedrals of the Middle Ages. No doubt this work was carried out under similar conditions — voluntary labour, both physical and mental, furnished by willing and devoted men. Such sincere devotion was a cause of wonder to me, and it gladdened my heart.

It gave me cause to imagine that in our countries today, where materialistic egoism seems to reign supreme, there might still be many such unselfish souls, ready to offer their services, even to make sacrifices if need be, if one could awaken their interest and enthusiasm for the pursuit of a tangible ideal instead of a feverish hankering after foolish and extravagant illusions.

This idea seemed to reconcile me, so to speak, with the human race, which I had held in rather poor esteem. But if history shows us that the great spiritual upsurges have their own particular beauty, they have also their deviations and dangers, and if there are some which are praiseworthy and beneficent, others can become veritable scourges. Everything depends on the animator. When the animator is a real Sage, in the real sense of the term, nothing but good can come of it. But he could also be the Anti-Christ.

* * *

A spiritual celebration

When the building of the *záwiyah* was finished, the *fugará* expressed the wish to organise a big fête to celebrate its inauguration. The Shaykh could not do otherwise than accede to their wish.

I had known him long enough to be able to express my thoughts to him quite freely. I said I was rather surprised at his agreeing to a manifestation so little in harmony with his temperament and so contrary to his love of solitude and self-effacement. At this stage of our friendship he had already ceased to have recourse to our interpreter, Sidi Muhammad, though the latter was almost always present during our discussions. Most of our conversation was in French, and Sidi Muhammad would intervene only when the Shaykh decided he was unable to express his thought clearly enough in the French language.

At my remark he shrugged his shoulders, almost imperceptibly, looked upwards for a moment, and replied: "You are very right. I don't care for these things. But we must take people as we find them. It is not everyone who can find complete satisfaction merely by exercising the intelligence, and in contemplation. Men sometimes feel the need for meeting together, they like to feel that there are many, many of them who think the same things and are in mutual sympathy. They ask for nothing else. Besides, the kind of fête they have in mind is not the same as those you must have seen at certain Muslim shrines, with the firing of guns, 'fantasias', various sports and games, and excessive supplies of food and drink. No, for my disciples, a fête is a spiritual celebration. It is simply a reunion for the exchange of ideas and experiences, and for prayer in community."

Described in this way the idea of a fête was not so outrageous after all, and, to judge from the number of adepts who attended it, it was a great success. These followers of the Shaykh came in from many different regions, and were of all categories. From what the Shaykh had told me, I had the impression that this reunion must be a kind of congress where scholars and intellectuals, eager to "prove their point", would discuss thorny points of doctrine and would exercise

their skill in meticulous "pin-point" arguments, and in the art of "splitting hairs".

As far as I could gather, from certain passages in the speeches made, the gist of which was translated for me by Sidi Muhammad, there was during the fête a certain amount of this wordy argumentation, especially among the younger disciples. But this was not the main interest of the gathering. The older men, who spoke very little and were absorbed in deep meditation, were much more interesting to observe. And then of special interest there were those humble and obscure followers of the Shaykh, hill-dwellers of the Riff region, who had travelled for a whole month, going from village to village, sustained and animated by that inner flame which burned in their simple and honest souls.

They had set out full of enthusiasm, like the pioneers in some "gold rush", but the riches they had come to seek were not of a material kind. The wealth they sought was purely spiritual, and they knew they would not go away empty. I saw them, motionless, silent, drinking in the atmosphere, as though bathed in a kind of ecstasy through the mere fact of being there, penetrated with the holiness of the place, their supreme aspiration realised. It was they themselves who created the special atmosphere appropriate to their devotions.

Some strange practices

Elsewhere, some of the disciples were engaged in what seemed to be rather strange practices. After long hours of immobility and silence, they would assemble in groups, each group forming a circle. Then the members comprising each circle would begin to sway rhythmically from side to side, in time with each other. Each time they swayed they would pronounce, distinctly, the name of God. The swaying would begin at a fairly slow rhythm, under the direction of a kind of master of ceremonies, who stood in the middle of the circle and whose voice dominated the rest.

Gradually the movements became more rapid. The slow preliminary swaying gave way to leaps in the air — the members bending their knees and then sharply straightening them. Soon, during this round of rhythmic movements, the participants began to gasp, and their voices became hoarse. But the rhythm became faster and faster, the rapid leaps in the air became more and more precipitate and abrupt, almost convulsive. The spoken name of Allah (God) was now no more than a gasp, but the movements still continued, faster and faster, until the breath itself seemed to be lacking. Some members fell down from sheer exhaustion.

The object of this practice, which resembled those of the Dancing Dervishes, was evidently to induce in the participant a definite state of consciousness. But I wondered what spiritual connection there could be between these inelegant practices and the refined sensitivity of the Shaykh.

And how had the renown of the Shaykh come to spread so far afield? For there had never been any kind of organised propaganda. His followers never sought to make any converts. In the urban and village centres where they live, they established, as they still do today, small and exclusive *záwiyahs*. These are administered by one of their members, called the *muqaddim*, who is invested with the authority and the confidence of the Shaykh. These small brotherhoods make it a rule not to engage in any kind of external activity, as though they wish jealously to preserve their secrets. And yet their influence spreads, and there is no dearth of candidates for initiation. And these come from all categories.

"They come to seek the Inner Peace"

One day I expressed to the Shaykh my astonishment at this situation. He replied: "Those who come here are the ones who are pre-occupied with the thought of God." And he added these words, which could well have come from one of the Gospels: "They come to seek the Inner Peace."

For the remainder of the day I did not dare press my questions any further, for fear of appearing inquisitive. But I reflected a little on the invocations I had sometimes heard, and which had intrigued me. In fact, on several occasions during my visits, while I was conversing quietly with the Shaykh, there came to our ears from some far corner of the *záwiyah* the name of Allah (God), chanted on a long, vibrant, drawn-out note:

"Aa Ila ah!"

It was like some desperate appeal, some distracted supplication, coming from the heart of a solitary disciple deep in meditation in his lonely cell.

The appeal was usually repeated several times in succession, and then all was silent.

"Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord!
O Lord, hear my voice!"

"I will cry unto Thee from the ends of the earth
When my heart faints within me!
Lead me unto that rock
Which is too high for me!"

These verses from the Psalms came to my mind. It was in fact the same supplication, the supreme appeal to God from a soul in distress.

I was not mistaken in my impression, for, some time later, when seated with the Shaykh, we both heard the same far-off cry, and I asked him its significance. He replied: "It is a disciple, who is asking God to help him in his meditation."

"And might one ask what is the object of his meditation?"

"To reach self-realization in God."

"And do all the disciples succeed in this?"

"Rarely. It is only possible for a few."

"And do the unsuccessful remain in a state of hopelessness?"

"No, they are successful enough to reach, at least, the Inner Peace."

The Inner Peace. It was to this that he referred the most often. And no doubt his great influence was due to this. For where is the man who does not yearn, in one way or another, for the Inner Peace?

And here we are reminded of Jesus Christ's question to Peter: "What troubles you?"

When he was in fairly good health, and during the fine weather, the Shaykh always received me under a kind of verandah at the bottom of a small garden surrounded with high walls, which reminded me of certain illuminated engravings found in Persian manuscripts. It was in these peaceful surroundings, far from the noises of the world, amid the whispering of the leaves and the song of the birds, that we exchanged views, our conversation being sometimes punctu-

ated by long periods of silence. As is the case with people who understand each other, and have been on fairly intimate terms, for us the silence was no embarrassment. It was even sometimes necessary, after some remark which called for a certain amount of reflection. The Shaykh never spoke for the sake of saying something, and we felt the need for speech only when we had something to say.

He and I were surprised

At the beginning of our friendship the Shaykh had been surprised at discovering that I knew a little about the Muslim religion, at least, its essential points and principles; that I knew the main details of the life of the Prophet and the history of the first Caliphs; that I knew about the Ka'bah, the well of Zemzem, and the flight of Ishmael with his mother, Hagar, into the desert. It is true that this was only quite elementary knowledge, but the ignorance of the average European on these matters is generally so profound that the Shaykh was unable to conceal his surprise.

For my part, I also was surprised at his broad-mindedness and tolerance. I had always heard it said that every Muslim was a fanatic, and could only regard with the utmost contempt the "unbelievers" — those not of the Muslim religion. But he declared that God had inspired three prophets. The first had been the Sayyidiná Músá (Moses), the second the Sayyidiná 'Isá (Jesus), and the third the Sayyidiná Muhammad. From this he drew the logical conclusion that the Muslim religion was the best, since it was based on the last message sent by God, but that the Jewish religion and the Christian religion were nonetheless revealed religions.

His concept of the Muslim religion was equally broad and tolerant. He was concerned only with what was essential. He used to say: "To be a good Muslim, one has only to observe five precepts: belief in God (Allah), and to acknowledge that Muhammad was His last Prophet, prayer five times a day, payment of the poor-rate, to practise fasting, and to make the pilgrimage to Mecca." What I particularly appreciated in the Shaykh was the complete absence of any attempt at proselytism. He simply answered me when I questioned him, but did not seem to trouble at all about the effect produced on me by his replies. Not only did he not make the slightest attempt at converting me, but for a long time he appeared to be quite indifferent as to my ideas on the matter of religion. This was quite typical of him. He used to say: "Those who have need of me, come to me. As for the others, why try to attract them here? They care little for the things that count, and go their own way."

So that our conversations and discussions were somewhat like those of two friendly neighbours who chat from time to time over the hedge separating their gardens. But one day our discussion narrowed, so to speak, to the question of my own personal ideas, and he was led to sound me on this matter. Perhaps he had already thought of this, without knowing exactly how to broach such a delicate question, and he was waiting for a suitable opportunity. This opportunity arrived.

The occasion was the arrival in the neighbourhood of a band of black Muslims — those who have brought to Islam a number of Sudanese customs. They are itinerant musicians, who, at certain times of the year, parade through the streets, leading a bull decorated with flowers and ribbons, accompanied by the din of tom-toms, tambourines, dancing and shouting, singing, and castanets of metal. One of these periodical celebrations was now in progress, and, under the

verandah, at the bottom of the peaceful garden, we could hear faintly the far-off sounds of the procession.

I have no religion

Without knowing why, I spoke up rather impulsively, drawing a comparison between these manifestations and certain Catholic processions. I added that the latter seemed to me to be pure idolatry, and that, similarly, the Eucharist was nothing else but a kind of magical practice, if it was regarded as anything else than a symbol.

"And yet it is your religion," said the Shaykh.

"If you say so," I replied. "But as a matter of fact I was baptised when I was still in my mother's arms, and apart from that, there is nothing that binds me to that religion."

"Then what is your religion?"

"I haven't one."

There was a silence. Then the Shaykh continued: "That's curious."

"Why curious?"

"Because usually people who, like you, profess no religion, are hostile to all forms of religion. And you don't appear to be."

"That's true. But the people to whom you are referring have fostered a religious and intolerant mentality. They have remained uneasy, so to speak. In losing their beliefs they have not found that Inner Peace of which you speak. On the contrary."

"And you? Have you found it?"

"Yes. Because I have carefully weighed up all the issues. I have seen things at their real value and in their rightful perspective."

The Shaykh reflected for some time, and then continued: "That also is curious."

"What is?"

"That you should have arrived at this conception by means other than that of doctrine."

"Which doctrine?"

The Shaykh made a vague gesture and became absorbed in meditation. I saw that he did not wish to continue the discussion, and I retired.

* * *

A spiritual bond

From that day onwards I had the impression that the Shaykh had become more interested in me. Up till then our relationship, which had been quite friendly and apparently intimate, had never gone beyond the limits of an ordinary friendship. He had regarded me as a pleasant and congenial acquaintance, but, nevertheless, a more or less "remote" foreigner. Years had passed during which I had been only an object of passing interest, and doubtless of little importance in his eyes, a wayfarer whom one meets during the journey of life, a temporary companion whom one accepts as a fellow-traveller for a part of the voyage because he is polite and does not bore, since later on he is quite forgotten.

The situation was changed by a few chance words spoken during one of our conversations. In these few fleeting words, fleeting but charged with meaning, our two intellects had made contact. They had by no means inter-penetrated, but, as though through the medium of subtle antennae, they had impinged on each other, had made, so to speak, a cursory examination, seeming to recognise a mutual link, a common relationship. Henceforward we were united by a spiritual bond.

And now each time we found ourselves alone, the conversation would turn to the abstract. It often consisted of short, enigmatic, prudent phrases, like so many hesitant, precautionary steps we might take when exploring a house whose occupant we do not wish to disturb. It was like a veil which one lifts ever so slightly to try to see the face which it covers, and which one drops again in the hope of discovering more about it at the next opportunity.

I greatly regret that I did not at the time transfer these delightful and delicately-nuanced conversations to paper, for I realise today that they would have formed a collection of valuable biographical material, not only for myself, but for others. But at the time I did not attach to them the importance which, with the passage of time, they have acquired in my memory.

So that I can give only a very general review of these discussions, and mention but a few of the salient points which I still remember. Sometimes the dialogue was limited to a few remarks interspersed with long intervals of silence, sometimes there was a definite *exposé* of my point of view, which he had asked me to give, on some particular detail. For it was now the Shaykh who was asking the questions. We never had arguments. By this I mean that we never engaged in wordy controversies, during which one speaker tries to prove to the other that he is right. We simply exchanged ideas.

Idle curiosity

It was in this way that I was led to explain to him my position regarding religion. Since every man is more or less pre-occupied (some men are troubled) by the riddle of his existence and his ultimate destiny, so each man seeks for an explanation which satisfies him and which sets his mind at rest. The various religions give an explanation which satisfies the vast majority of people. What right have I to trouble those who have in this way found their spiritual peace, by trying to demonstrate that what they believe appears to me to be false? Besides, whatever the means employed, or the path chosen, to attain spiritual peace, we are always obliged to take as a point of departure — a belief. The scientific path itself, which is the one I have followed, is based on a certain number of postulates, that is to say, a number of affirmations regarded as evident truths, but which, however, cannot be demonstrated. In all religions belief plays a certain part, which is either very great or very small. There is truth only in what we believe to be true. Each person follows the path which suits him best. If on that path he finds what he is looking for, then for him that path is the best one. One way is as good as another.

Here the Shaykh interrupted: "No, one way is not as good as another."

I said nothing, waiting for an explanation. It came.

"One way is as good as another," he began, "but only from the point of view of 'appeasement'. But here again there

are varying degrees. Some are satisfied with very little indeed, others are satisfied with religion, others want more than this. They need not only 'appeasement', but the Great Peace, the peace in which they find the fullest spiritual satisfaction."

"And the religion?"

"For such people, the religions are only stepping-stones."

"Do you mean that there is something which is higher than religion?"

"Above religion there is doctrine."

I had already heard this word — doctrine. But when I had asked him what the term meant to him, he had not replied. Somewhat timidly I asked him again: "Which doctrine?"

"The means for attaining God — realisation."

"And what are these means?"

He smiled sympathetically. "Why tell you them, since you are not willing to follow them? If you were to come to me as a disciple, I should be able to give you a reply. But why satisfy idle curiosity?"

* * *

Desire for Immortality

On another occasion we happened by chance to discuss the subject of prayer, which I considered as a contradiction on the part of those who believe in a Supreme Wisdom.

"Why should we pray?" I asked.

"I see what you mean," replied the Shaykh. "In a way, you are right. Prayer is superfluous when one is in direct communication with God. For then — one knows. But it is useful for those who are trying to communicate, but have not yet succeeded. But even in that case it is not indispensable. There are other ways of attaining God-realization."

"Which are they?"

"The study of doctrine. Meditation or intellectual contemplation are among the best and most effective methods. But they are not within the scope of everyone."

* * *

What astonished him the most was that I was able to carry on my daily routine quite happily and calmly, with the conviction that my final destiny was total annihilation, for he could see that I was deeply sincere in this belief. At intervals, when the subject happened to creep into the Shaykh's conversation, I pointed out that my belief stemmed from humility and not from pride. Man's unrest comes from the fact that he wishes, at all costs, to survive bodily death. He obtains peace when he has completely relinquished this desire for immortality. The world existed before I came on the scene, it will go on existing after I have gone. What difference does it make? As a great French savant, Henri Poincaré, once said: "Thought is but a flash of light in the middle of a long night." This viewpoint gave me precisely the degree of serenity I needed, because it enabled me to see the futility of everything and to eliminate my desires. The world was a spectacle, but nothing but a spectacle, to which I had been invited, knowing neither why nor how, and I was unable to understand the meaning of it all, if there was a meaning. Neverthe-

less, this spectacle was not without a certain interest, and that is why I found myself attracted to Nature rather than to things of the abstract. When the time came for me to leave the spectacle, I would go, regretfully it is true, because I had found it interesting. But no doubt in time it would have begun to bore me. Besides, what could I have done about it? And how utterly unimportant I was in the scheme of things! An ant which is crushed underfoot — can it have the slightest influence on that vast machine which we call "the world"?

"This is doubtless true as far as the body is concerned," replied the Shaykh. "But what about the soul?"

"Yes, there is the soul, what we may term our higher consciousness. But this did not exist when we were born. Its formation came slowly, through the medium of our sensations. It came to us progressively, little by little, as we acquired knowledge. It developed side by side, so to speak, with our body, it grew with it, became stronger at the same time as the body as a result of the ideas we acquired, and I find myself quite unable to believe that it can survive this body which, after all, gave it birth."

There was a long silence. Then, emerging from his meditation, the Shaykh said: "Would you like to know what you lack?"

"What is that?"

"To be like one of us and to perceive Truth, you lack the desire to raise your spirit above your ordinary self. And for that there is no remedy."

* * *

An indefinable principle

One day the Shaykh asked me point-blank: "Do you believe in God?" I replied: "Yes, if by the term 'God' you mean an indefinable principle on which everything depends and which, without doubt, gives sense to the universe." He appeared satisfied with my reply. I added: "But I consider this principle to be beyond our grasp and our understanding. What astonishes me, however, is to see that so many people who say they are, or believe themselves to be, religious, and who are convinced of their immortality in God, can go on attaching so much importance to their earthly existence. They are neither logical nor sincere with themselves. Unconsciously they enunciate the 'dilemma of Pascal', that supreme cowardice of a doubting spirit. It seems to me that if I were certain of another life, the spectacle of life on earth would become devoid of all interest and would leave me completely indifferent. I should live only in expectation of the real life awaiting me on the other side and, like your '*fuqará*', I should devote myself wholly to meditation."

He looked at me attentively for some time, as if reading my thoughts. Then, as if peering into my very soul, he said slowly: "It's a pity you refuse to let your higher self rise above your everyday consciousness. But whatever you say and whatever you believe, you are nearer God than you think."

* * *

The moment is not far off

"You are nearer God than you think." At the time when he said these words the Shaykh al-'Alawí had not very much longer to live. The pilgrimage to Mecca, which he was bent on accomplishing before he died, and to which he had added

a journey to Syria and Palestine, had exhausted him. He was very weak, but his mind was still quite active.

In the meantime, Sidi Muhammad, his nephew, who had held the position of *muqaddim*, had died. He had been replaced by another nephew of whom he was particularly fond, Sidi Adda Ibn Trúnès. It was Sidi Adda who accompanied him to Mecca and it is he who administers the Zâwiyah at the present time.

Sidi Adda did not hide from me his anxiety. From him I learned that the Shaykh was becoming more and more absorbed in his deep meditation, from which he seemed very loth to emerge. In spite of my remonstrances, he would take practically no food. To all my entreaties he would smile faintly and reply, in his gentle voice: "What's the use? The moment is not far off." To that I could find nothing to say.

I could see the anguish in the eyes of the disciples, and I knew they were very concerned with my opinion of the Shaykh's condition. Normally I had seen very little of them. They knew who I was, and the friendship shown me by the Shaykh was enough to win their sympathy and goodwill. Nevertheless, they usually kept rather aloof. The feeling that danger threatened the Master drew them nearer to me. I reassured them with a smile. I knew the Shaykh would live until he had used up his very last spark of energy. But he would have no need to fight, simply because he had accustomed his body to do with such small amounts of nourishment, that his organism would continue to function, though in a quiescent and less active way, at a slower rate. I knew that he would continue like this, with a minimum amount of strength, a minimum which would have long ago been insufficient for anyone else. He would burn the last drop of oil from the lamp of life, the lamp he had, some time ago, turned down to a mere flicker. And he knew this, too.

Of the disciples, the Shaykh had introduced me only to those of Western origin, who came to the Zâwiyah from time to time. But my relations with them were always rather limited. Since I was not an initiate, we did not speak exactly the same language, and I did not wish to appear inquisitive by asking them how they had come to enter on this special devotional path.

Some of them were personalities of some note. One of them was a famous artist whom I would never have expected to meet in this way. This artist, when electing to follow the Muslim tradition, had also adopted Muslim dress, and this suited him so well that he could well have been taken for a shaykh himself. He spent eight days at the Zâwiyah. He was accompanied by a member of the Tribunal of Tunis and a lady, both of whom were initiates of the Order, and charming people. There was also an American, almost penniless, who had somehow managed to reach the Zâwiyah. He fell ill after a few days, and had to be sent to hospital, from where he was later repatriated.

Due to ignorance

Muslims, who I knew were not disciples, came to my house to ask for news about the Shaykh's health. To a certain extent I enjoyed their confidence, because I had never adopted the proud and condescending attitude towards them which Europeans usually show, though I was careful not to display the undue familiarity which some people think necessary in order to curry favour. To both these attitudes Muslims reply with contempt. With Muslims one must behave with dignity, one must keep one's place. And one must not speak

to them in a haughty or snobbish way, but show that one is friendly without being familiar. They readily notice these nuances and are very sensitive to them. Many unsuccessful civil servants have learned these facts from bitter experience.

It is mainly the want of tact on the part of Europeans, want of tact combined with their complete ignorance of Islam, that is responsible for such gross misunderstanding between the two communities. The European is imbued with the feeling of superiority. He is quite convinced of this superiority, and he firmly believes that it extends to all domains. In consequence, he may hurt the feelings of the Muslim often without noticing it. Even when he wishes to be kind, he may offend the Muslim by his air of condescension or by some tactless remark. It is not so much antipathy as misunderstanding, through ignorance. For a *rapprochement* to be possible, the European must try to realise that the Muslim peoples have traditions and customs which they do not wish to abandon, traditions which are every whit as worthy of respect as ours, and certainly very much older. To flout them openly, to poke fun at them or to laugh at them in the presence of your Muslim host is to behave like an ill-mannered boor. Your host will say nothing, but he will hardly be amused.

Little "bird-brains"

Naturally there are, fortunately, exceptions to this, but they are only exceptions, whereas, generally speaking, Muslims endeavour to behave with dignity and with real consideration for the feelings of others. At official celebrations and gatherings I have always noticed that Muslim dignitaries who had been invited as guests behaved with the utmost decorum, propriety and good taste. In contrast, when Europeans had been invited to receptions organised by these dignitaries, the scene was quite different. I heard the wives of Government officials make loud, ridiculous remarks, get fidgety and excited, rummage about in the most ill-mannered way, or laugh mockingly at some custom which happened to surprise their little "bird-brains". In short, their conduct was not of the kind they would have permitted in their own homes. I was so embarrassed at this kind of behaviour, that I made a point of refusing all invitations to Muslim gatherings if other Europeans were going to be present. One of these typical Europeans, who moved in the most select circles, one day put to me a most outrageous question. We were discussing the Shaykh, who, it appears, was in his youth apprenticed to a shoemaker (a fact, incidentally, which is all to his honour). "How is it possible that you can be interested in this ex-cobbler?". "You are forgetting," I replied, "that Jesus was an apprentice carpenter. You, a so-called Christian, you speak like a Pharisee." The European went away — he had no reply to make.

* * *

Well again

In spite of his increasing weakness the Shaykh continued to hold meetings with his disciples, but he was obliged to cut them short. His heart was becoming feebler, and irregular, and it was with difficulty that I could get him to take the heart-tonics necessary for restoring a faulty rhythm. Fortunately the very small doses he took were sufficient to act upon an organism which had never before been vitiated, so to speak, by the action of medicine.

One day, during the year 1932 C.E., we were greatly alarmed — the Shaykh had suffered a semi-syncope. I was

sent for and I hurried to his side. When I arrived he had hardly any pulse and seemed to be unconscious. An intravenous injection soon put things right. The Shaykh opened his eyes and looked at me reproachfully: "Why did you do that?" he asked me. "You should have let me go. It's not important. What's the use?"

I replied: "If I am at your side, it is because God has so decided. And if He has so decided, it is so that I can do what I ought to do." "Yes," he replied, "*Inshá Alláh*" (If God wills). I stayed with him for some time in order to watch his pulse, lest he should have another attack. I did not leave him until he appeared to me to be sufficiently well again.

* * *

The last goodbye

After this attack there were others, although the Shaykh lived for about another two years, with alternating periods of fair and poor health. During the happier periods he followed his usual mode of life as though nothing had happened. Yet he seemed to long for his end, though he waited for this with much patience. Only the expression in his eyes showed the utter intensity of his inner life, his body having the appearance of a worn-out support which could crumble away at any moment.

One morning he sent for me. He did not appear to be more gravely ill than on the preceding day, but he said: "It's for today. Promise me that you will not intervene and that you will let things take their course." I remarked that he did not appear to me to be any worse on the day before. But he insisted: "I know *it* is for today. And you must let me return to the bosom of God." I left him, rather impressed but a little sceptical. I had seen him so many times, his life hanging by a thread, but the thread still held good. It would be the same today as it had been so many times before.

But when I returned in the afternoon the scene had changed. He was hardly breathing at all, and I could not count his pulse. Feeling my fingers on his wrist he opened his eyes and recognised me. His lips murmured: "At last I go to my rest in the bosom of God." He just managed to press my hand — then closed his eyes. It was the last "Good-bye". My place was no longer there. He belonged now to his disciples, who were waiting. So I retired, intimating to Sidi Adda that I had seen the Shaykh for the last time.

During the evening I learned that two hours after I had left he had passed away, peacefully, almost imperceptibly, respectfully surrounded by all the disciples then staying at the Zāwiyah.

The last drop of oil had been consumed.

* * *

Postscript

In the account I have tried to give an idea of what Shaykh al-'Alawí was. I know how incomplete the account is, but I have insisted throughout on narrating only those facts of which I was absolutely sure. Some of the phrases I have quoted are exactly word for word those actually spoken by the Shaykh. In other cases I cannot maintain that the wording is exactly the same, but I can guarantee that their general import is the true one.

I could easily have embellished what was, after all, the simplest of themes, but I preferred the plain sobriety of the

true details as known to me. The portrait of the Shaykh, as delineated in this way, appears to me to be clearer, and purer. In addition it has the special attribute of having been drawn quite impartially, without superfluous eulogy, and without the halo with which a disciple would doubtless have been tempted to surround him. It is sufficient unto itself, and perhaps gains from having been sketched by a "profane".

I have avoided any personal conception of the Shaykh's teaching. My opinions were in no way involved, since my object was simply to delineate the Shaykh as I found him, and not to discuss his ideas. I know that his doctrine was of an esoteric nature, but, not having become a member of the Order, I could have had only very vague ideas on the subject.

The initiate members will perhaps smile when they read some of my impressions, but they will give me credit for having been sincere and, intentionally, a little "ignorant". They will also notice that nowhere have I made use of the word faith. This was because I wanted to be scrupulously honest and accurate on this particular point, for, if I had understood the Shaykh correctly, doctrine did not constitute an act of faith, *but an authentication of the evidence*.

I remember telling him one day that what prevented me from trying "... to raise my consciousness above my ordinary self ..." (to use his expression), was doubtless lack of faith. He replied: "Faith is necessary in the various religions, but it ceases to be necessary for those who travel farther and succeed in attaining God-realisation. When that happens, they no longer believe, they see. There is no longer any need to believe when they can 'see' the Truth."

I hope the disciples will forgive me for having delineated in such an imperfect way such a unique and remarkable personality as the Shaykh al-'Alawí. It is for them that I have piously recorded these few recollections. I think they will be of interest ... their sole merit lies in their sincerity.

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What Our Readers Say . . .

ISLAMIC APOLOGETICS ARE OUT OF DATE

Perumahan Rakjat 14,
Jogjakarta,
Indonesia
June 1969

Dear Sir,

Assalamu 'Alaykum!

Permit me to introduce myself to begin with. I am a student of I.A.I.N. (the *Institut Agama Islam Negeri*, i.e. the State Institute of Islam), Jogjakarta, Indonesia. I am now in the final year of the Faculty of Usûl al-Dîn of the Institute. Dr. Mu'ti 'Alî, Deacon of our Faculty and lecturer in comparative religion, sociology and history of religion, etc., is an alumnus of McGill University, Montreal, Canada, and a specialist in comparative religion. You have printed in your magazine his articles on Islam. My object in writing this letter is to convey to you his criticism of the method of expounding Islam by the *Islamic Review*.

Here is a portion of his lectures on the modern trends in Islam. He *inter alia* said "the method of *The Islamic Review* in preaching Islam is apologetic, i.e., it is at pains to show the teaching of Islam as ideal in all aspects of life, although it takes in its stride every now and then to comment on the false teaching of other religions, especially Christianity. This step was very good in the first stages of Europe's acquaintance with Islam some half a century ago, when many European scholars and Christian missionaries considered Islam as a crude religion emanating from a cruel land : Arabia.

"But nowadays European opinion about Islam is so different from that of fifty years ago. Hundreds of scholars are engaged in studying Islam deeply and scientifically. The light of Islam has now penetrated their hearts; they are beginning to understand Islam and even consider it an ideal teaching. For instance, some thinkers, like Professor Dr. A. J. Toynbee, see in Islam a way to save Europe from its many corruptions which could not be healed by Christianity during its existence of 2,000 years. Apologetics are out of date now. The best way to preach Islam is not only to expound its teachings but also to practise its ideal doctrines and establish the Islamic conceptions in all activities of life, as a counterpart of those of Christianity.

"European Christians have built schools, hospitals, universities and thousands of institutions of learning. The Muslims should also establish these on the European models but with the Islamic idea and conception. Not only that. Islam has now to make suggestions and produce ideas on all problems of life. Apologetics are capable of showing the high teaching of Islam, but it cannot instruct people as what to do or how to give that teaching a practical shape. When the people know these high doctrines of Islam and understand their superiority, they will, as is natural enough, come to the stage when they will be full of questions: What is to be done? and What is the evidence in support of that high

teaching? We all know that all Muslim countries are still under-developed and millions of Muslims are uneducated and still continue to live on a low level of life. If the Muslims have the best teaching, as the apologists tell us, why, then, do such cruel conditions continue to exist? Where is the Islamic conception on all these aspects of life? Where are the formulas on exact sciences, technology, education, psychology, etc?"

In a word, his criticism is that apologetics are out of date now, and the best way to preach Islam is by exposition and practice. At the end of his lectures he also told us that : "*The Islamic Review* is the best Muslim magazine and there is none better than it. I cannot overemphasise its great services to Islam. Despite the criticism that I have made, I think it deserves our praise, and may it last for a long, long time! Amen."

Yours sincerely,

MUSLIM KEFLY.

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Salient Features of Islam

THE following is a very brief account of Islam and some of its teachings. For further details, please write to the IMAM of the Shah Jehan Mosque, Woking, Surrey, England.

ISLAM: THE RELIGION OF PEACE.—The word "Islam" literally means: (1) peace; (2) submission. The word in its religious sense signifies complete submission to the Will of God.

OBJECT OF THE RELIGION.—Islam provides its followers with a perfect code, whereby they may work out what is noble and good in man, and thus maintain peace between man and man.

THE PROPHET OF ISLAM.—Muhammad, popularly known as the Prophet of Islam, was, however, the last of the Prophets. Muslims, i.e., the followers of Islam, accept all such prophets of the world, including Abraham, Moses and Jesus, as revealed by the Will of God for the guidance of humanity.

THE QUR'AN.—The Gospel of the Muslims is the Qur'an. Muslims believe in the Divine origin of every other sacred book. Inasmuch as all such previous revelations have become corrupted through human interpolation, the Qur'an, the last Book of God, came as a recapitulation of the former Gospels.

ARTICLES OF FAITH IN ISLAM.—These are seven in number: Belief in (1) God; (2) Angels; (3) Books from God; (4) Messengers from God; (5) the Hereafter; (6) the Premeasurement of good and evil; (7) Resurrection after death.

The life after death, according to Islamic teaching, is not a new life, but only a continuance of this life, bringing its hidden realities into light. It is a life of unlimited progress; those who qualify themselves in this life for the progress will enter into Paradise, which is another name for the said progressive life after death, and those who get their faculties stunted by their misdeeds in this life will be the denizens of the Hell—a life incapable of appreciating heavenly bliss, and of torment—in order to get themselves purged of all impurities and thus, ultimately, to become fit for the life in the Heaven.

The sixth article of Faith has been confused by some with what is popularly known as Fatalism. A Muslim neither believes in Fatalism nor Predestination; he believes in Premeasurement. Everything created by God is for good in the given use and under the given circumstances. Its abuse is evil and suffering.

PILLARS OF ISLAM.—These are five in number: (1) Declaration of faith in the Oneness of God, and in the Divine Messenger-ship of Muhammad; (2) Prayer; (3) Fasting; (4) Alms-giving; (5) Pilgrimage to the Holy Shrine at Mecca.

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD.—The Muslims worship One God—the Almighty, the All-Knowing, the All-Just, the Cherisher of All the worlds, the Friend, the Helper. There is none like Him. He has no partner. He is neither begotten nor has He begotten any son or daughter. He is indivisible in Person. He is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth, the Merciful, the Compassionate, the Glorious, the Magnificent, the Beautiful, the Eternal, the Infinite, the First and the Last.

FAITH AND ACTION.—Faith without action is a dead letter. Faith by itself is insufficient, unless translated into action. A Muslim believes in his own personal accountability for his actions in this life and the Hereafter. Each must bear his own burden and none can expiate for another's sin.

ETHICS OF ISLAM.—"Imbue yourself with Divine Attributes," says the noble Prophet. God is the prototype of man, and His Attributes form the basis of Muslim ethics. Righteousness in Islam consists in leading a life in complete harmony with the Divine Attributes. To act otherwise is sin.

CAPABILITIES OF MAN IN ISLAM.—The Muslim believes in the inherent sinlessness of man's nature, which, made of the goodliest fibre, is capable of unlimited progress, setting him above the angels, and leading him to the border of Divinity.

THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN ISLAM.—Man and woman come from the same essence, possess the same soul, and they have been equipped with equal capability for intellectual, spiritual and moral attainments. Islam places man and woman under the like obligations the one to the other.

EQUALITY OF MANKIND AND THE BROTHERHOOD OF ISLAM.—Islam is the religion of the Unity of God and the equality of mankind. Lineage, riches and family honours are accidental things: virtue and the service of humanity are matters of real merit. Distinctions of colour, race and creed are unknown in the ranks of Islam. All mankind is of one family, and Islam has succeeded in welding the black and the white into one fraternal whole.

PERSONAL JUDGMENT.—Islam encourages the exercise of personal judgment and respects difference of opinion which, according to the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, is a blessing of God.

KNOWLEDGE.—The pursuit of knowledge is a duty in Islam, and it is the acquisition of knowledge that makes men superior even to angels.

SANCTITY OF LABOUR.—Every labour which enables man to live honestly is respected. Idleness is deemed a sin.

CHARITY.—All the faculties of man have been given to him as a trust from God for the benefit of his fellow-creatures. It is man's duty to live for others, and his charities must be applied without any distinction of persons. Charity in Islam brings man nearer to God. Charity and the giving of alms have been made obligatory, and every person who possesses property above a certain limit has to pay a tax, levied on the rich for the benefit of the poor.

tively handled as they may be, the characters of the *Hadith* have distinct personalities and are closely connected with the real world of the author. Some of them may seem static, and some may appear or disappear at random, yet many are life-like characters who appear throughout the greater part of the romance. Among the latter group we may include the village headman, the dancing girl and the playboy. Even the Páshá, perhaps the crudest of all the characters in the *Hadith*, is capable of development. At first arrogant, slow to understand and intransigent in his refusal to accept the new values of Egyptian society, he becomes ultimately more tolerant of the changes in that society.

Despite its episodic structure, the *Hadith* tells a complete story which begins with the resurrection of the Páshá and develops simultaneously with his personality. Because of its narrative quality and the relatively flexible nature of some of its characters, one contemporary critic has regarded al-Muwaylihi's *Hadith* not only as a work which points up the palpable distinctions between the *maqamah* and the novel, but in fact as an early form of the Egyptian novel.³⁴

While this conclusion may be appropriate, it is equally important to notice that in his effort to portray Egyptian life and institutions and the social characteristics of the people, al-Muwaylihi strove for an illusion of authenticity. This fact is evident from his attempt to cater for the conservative reading public, who disdained fiction, by stating in his introduction that the *Hadith* represents reality, not fiction. But despite his effort to minimize the fictional element of his romance, he never escaped the reproach of the conservative readers. According to 'Alí al-Rá'í, the famous Egyptian writer Tawfiq al-Hakím once related that some friends, concerned about the reputation of al-Muwaylihi's family, complained to his father that "by writing a book along the lines of the literature of the common people, your son has pursued a path the very thought of which was uncommendable."³⁵ Nevertheless, this book stands as a milestone in the development of native prose fiction in Egypt. The very fact that al-Muwaylihi based his

fiction upon contemporary life in Egypt, and his remarkably accurate portrayal of this life as he knew it, are in themselves a sufficient contribution to the development of modern Egyptian prose fiction. While the *Hadith* cannot by any stretch of imagination be considered a novel, it does contain the basic ingredients of the novel. It is a step ahead of 'Alí Mubárák's *Álam al-Dín*, which lacks not only vision, but also the ingenious subtlety with which al-Muwaylihi satirizes Egyptian society. Whereas 'Alí Mubárák chose Europe alone as his setting, in order to instruct his countrymen in the virtues of the far superior European civilization, al-Muwaylihi concentrates on Egyptian life and society, treating Western civilization only as it bears upon his main subject.

The literary and cultural impact of *Hadith 'Isá Ibn Hishám* upon Egyptian life must have been considerable, because the Ministry of Education felt the need of making it part of the reading curriculum of the secondary schools. In introducing the *Hadith* into the curriculum in 1927, the Ministry stated :

"As the *Hadith 'Isá Ibn Hishám* becomes reading matter for the pupils of the secondary schools, it will do them the greatest good, for it will attract them by the rhetorical style, sound expression and exquisite wording with which it has treated the manifold questions of current interest among people. These qualities have been lacking in all the books written in earlier times. Moreover, it will broaden their faculties and accustom them to penetrating observation, powerful expression, and the handling of the different arguments on both sides of a given question."³⁶

(To be continued)

34 Al-Rá'í, p. 22; 'Ayyád, p. 72.

35 Al-Rá'í, p. 10.

36 Al-Dasúqí, p. 138.

A lover of Greek antiquities in Libya on leaving Benghazi

Once more I turn around my face
To you, Benghazi
And rest a long, long gaze
At you, Benghazi.
The tears begin to roll
And deeply in my heart a longing burns
For you, Benghazi.
Farewell, Benghazi,
And though we never once should meet again,
Before my mem'ry's eyes your picture will remain
Light, fair and beautiful.
Forget the sadness of this world — for me,
Benghazi, precious one, you'll live eternally.
A perfect arch the heavenly vault,
A velvet dome of pure cobalt,

Sweet peace and quiet reign supreme,
But screech-owls voice their eery scream ;
Gaunt palm-trees raise their crowns on high
Towards the maze of star-decked sky,
A golden moon sails lightly on its way,
While sparkling gems around the bay —
O night of tropical delight,
What magic spell lies in thy sight !
O take me gently by the hand
And guide me through your fairyland,
Where warm and balmy zephyrs blow,
Where myriad whiffs of perfume flow
That leave the senses so elate,
In such a sweet contented state.

KURT VORDERMAIER

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