

AL-QUR'ÁN

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'THE RECENSIONS OF THE QUR'ÁN'



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PREFACE

IN the *Indian Interpreter* of July, 1909, an interesting article on the Qur'án, written from the orthodox Muslim standpoint, was contributed by Munshi Maḥmúd Khán, of the Fergusson College, Poona.

The Rev. Canon Sell, D.D., of Madras, was invited to write another article for the next number of the Magazine (October, 1909) dealing with the same subject from a wider and more critical point of view.

That article is now reproduced separately by request in the hope that it will secure a much wider circulation. This accounts for the form in which this important contribution appears.

JOSEPH PASSMORE.

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AL-QUR'ÁN

1. *The Koran*, translated from the Arabic by J. M. Rodwell, M.A., London, 1909.
2. *The Historical Development of the Qur'an* by Canon Sell, D.D. Third Edition, Madras, 1909.
3. *Yanábi'u'l-Islám*, Lahore, 1899.
4. *Commentary* by Baidáwi, 2 Vols., Edited by H. A. Fleischer, D.D., Leipsic, 1848.

THE republication of Rodwell's English translation of the Qur'án in a cheap form will be of great service to all students of this important book. The special feature of it is that it does not follow the order of the Arabic Súras or chapters; but re-arranges the whole in chronological order, so far as that can now be ascertained. There may be differences of opinion amongst Oriental scholars and Muslim commentators as to the exact position of some Súras, or of some verses, but Rodwell's arrangement is approximately in accordance with that of Jalálu'd-dín as-Syúfi and of Nöldeke, and may be accepted as a successful attempt to give the English reader a good idea of the gradual growth of the book and of the development in the Prophet's mind of the great system of Islám.

The orthodox view is that the Qur'án is eternal, a view based on the verses:—

It is a glorious Qur'án written on the preserved Table.—Súratu'l-Buruj (lxxxv) 22.

This is the honourable Qur'án, written on the preserved Table.—Súratu'l-Wáqi'a (lvi) 76.

Verily we have caused it (the Qur'án) to descend on the night of power.—Súratu't-Tin (xcv) 1.

Verily from the Lord of the worlds hath this book come down; the faithful Spirit (Rúhu'l-Ámín) hath come down with it.—Súratu'sh-Shu'arú' (xxvi) 193.

These are all Meccan Súras, but in an early Madína Súra Gabriel is said to have been the medium of communication. Thus:—

Say, whoso is the enemy of Gabriel for he it is who by God's leave hath caused the Qur'án to descend on thy heart.—Súratu'l-Baqara (ii) 91.

The Qur'án thus revealed is now looked upon as the standing miracle of Islám. Other divine books it is admitted were revelations delivered under the form of ideas; but the Qur'án is far superior to them all, for the actual text was revealed to the ear of the Prophet. Thus we read:—

Move not thy tongue in haste to follow and master the revelation,

For we will see to the collecting and recital of it;

But when we have recited it, then follow thou the recital;

And verily it shall be ours to make it clear to thee.—Súratu'l-Qiyámat (lxxv) 16—19.

Baidáwí explains the recital as being by the tongue of Gabriel and adds, 'recite it and repeat it till it remains in thy memory.' The external mode in which it came is referred to in the verse:—

We have sent down to thee an Arabic Qur'án.—Súratu Tâ Há (xx) 112.

Ibn Khaldún explains this descent of the book thus: 'The Qur'án was sent from heaven in the Arabic tongue and in a style conformable to that in which the Arabs were wont to express their thoughts. It was revealed phrase by phrase, verse by verse, as it was needed, whether for manifesting the doctrine of the Unity of God, or for expounding the obligations to which men ought to submit in this world.'¹ The revelation, then, is entirely an objective one and so Muslim theologians speak of a subjective and an objective inspiration. The former is *ilhám*, the latter *wahí*. Imám Ghazálí thus defines them: (1) 'The recipient receives information from an unknown source and in a way unknown. This is called

¹ *Les Protégomènes* d'ibn Khaldún (de Slane's translation) vol. ii, p. 458.

the breathing into the heart (*nafakha fi qalb*). This is the inspiration of Súfis. It is *ilhám*. (2) The recipient knows the medium by which he receives information, i.e., the angel appears to him. This is *waḥí* and is the inspiration of prophets.¹ The revelation of the Qur'án is by the *waḥí* method, or verbal inspiration in its extremest form. This and the idea of its eternal nature make it extremely difficult for Muslim theologians of the orthodox school to explain its gradual growth, its borrowing from other sources, its occasional contradictions and above all, as we shall see, the changing attitude of the Prophet towards men and measures. In these days the principles of the higher criticism are applied to all sacred books. Muslim divines cannot hope that the Qur'án will be exempt from such treatment, and they must find an intelligible method of meeting it. They must cease to look upon criticism of their sacred book as an act of disrespect. Whatever view may be taken of it all Oriental scholars admit that it is a great book and worthy of the honour of being submitted to the most searching criticism. Objection to such criticism betrays a sense of weakness.

The controversy is not a new one. Many centuries ago learned Muslims questioned the correctness of the orthodox view of the eternal nature

¹ *Mudáqqu'l-'Arifin*, vol. iii, p. 214.

of the Qur'án. To investigate this view fully it would be necessary to enter upon an explanation of the divine attributes, especially of the one known as '*kalám*', which means not mere speech but revelation and every other mode of communicating intelligence. Al-Ghazálí in the '*Iḥyá' 'ulúmu'd-dín*' says: 'He doth speak, command, forbid, promise and threaten by an eternal ancient word (*kalám*) subsisting in His essence . . . the Qur'án, indeed is read with tongues, written in books and is kept in hearts, yet, as subsisting in the essence of God, it doth not become liable to separation and division whilst it is transferred into the hearts and on to paper.'¹ An-Nasafí, who lived in the early part of the sixth century of the Hijra says: 'He whose majesty is majestic speaks with a word (*kalám*). This word is a quality from all eternity. The Qur'án is the uncreated word of God.'² Many other passages from Muslim divines of recognized authority might be quoted on the subject. They all look upon the Qur'án as the eternal word inherent in God's essence.³

The Mu'tazilas, a Muslim sect who in the early days of Islám sought to arrest the growing development of a hard-and-fast system of

¹ See Macdonald's *Muslim Theology*, pp. 300-7, for a translation of the section of the *Iḥyá'*, which deals with this subject.

² *Ibid.* p. 309.

³ الكلام النفسى القديم العالم بذاته

theology, took up an uncompromising position against this crude notion of the eternal nature of the Qur'án. Their objections may be thus summarized:¹ (1) The Qur'án is written in Arabic, it descended, is read, is heard and is written. It was the subject of a miracle. It is divided into parts and some verses are now abrogated by others. (2) Events are described in the past tense, but if the Qur'án had been eternal the future tense would have been used. (3) The Qur'án contains commands and prohibitions; if it were eternal, who were commanded and who were admonished? (4) If it has existed from all eternity, it must exist to eternity, and so even in the last-day and in the next world men will be under the obligation of performing the same religious duties as they do now, and of keeping all the outward precepts of the law. (5) If the Qur'án is eternal, then there are two eternals. (6) Men can produce its like in eloquence and arrangement.

The Mu'tazilas by their asserting the subjective nature of the inspiration of the Qur'án brought it within reach of criticism. They believed the book to be a revelation of God's will, given through his Prophet under divine guidance. They recognized both the divine and the human

¹ For a more detailed account of their views, see *Sharh-i-'Aqa'id-Jámi* (ed. A.H. 1271), p. 83. The Asha'rfán view is given on p. 84.

side of the Qur'án and could look upon things which needed change or removal as part of the human element, and so transitory. This view was not consistent with the idea of an eternal Qur'án sent down from heaven. This critical attitude towards the Qur'án raised up a great conflict, and perhaps it may be placed to the credit of the consistency of the belief held by the orthodox that, although the Khalífa al-Ma'mún in the year A.H. 212 issued a fatvá declaring all who believed in the eternity of the Qur'án to be heretics, they did not give way and many were put to death in consequence. The days of reaction came and in their turn the Mu'tazilas also consistently and bravely yielded up their lives in the defence of their opinions. So the Mu'tazilas passed away and a great opportunity for the construction of a rational view of inspiration was lost for centuries.

It is of some interest to note that in more recent times there has been a revival of Mu'tazila views. Syed Amír 'Alí has openly declared that he belongs to this school of thought,¹ and the accomplished and learned writer, the late Cherágh 'Alí Sháhib, by his declared views on inspiration, clearly ranged himself on the same side. He says: 'A prophet is neither immaculate nor infallible. A prophet feels that his mind is

¹ *Personal Law of the Mahomedans*, p. xi.

illuminated by God, and the thoughts which are expressed by him and spoken or written under this influence are to be regarded as the words of God. This illumination of the mind, or effect of the divine influence, differs in the prophet according to the capacity of the recipient, or according to the circumstances—religious and moral—in which he is placed.¹

I am not aware that the early Mu'tazilas in their controversy about the eternal nature of the Qur'án ever dealt with the question of its origins. They maintained with great vigour that it was created, and had they possessed the critical skill and the knowledge requisite for an investigation of its origins, they would have found a powerful argument in support of their view. A distinguished modern Mu'tazila admits that the Qur'án owes something to previous religious systems. Thus: 'the Houris are creatures of Zoroastrian origin; so is paradise; whilst hell in the severity of its punishment is Talmudic.' He speaks also of the 'eclectic faith of Mohammed.'²

It is now generally accepted by all Oriental scholars who have made a critical investigation of the sources of the Qur'án that the Prophet derived much of his material from the many legends of his time and country, namely, 'Jewish

¹ *Critical Exposition of Jihád*, p. lxix.

² *Spirit of Islám*, pp. 394, 387.

traditions based upon the Talmud . . . and the floating Christian traditions of Arabia and of S. Syria.'¹ His early Meccan opponents called his statements :—

Fables of the Ancients that he hath put in writing and they were dictated to him morning and evening.—Súratu'l-Furqán (xxv) 6.

They also said :—

A certain person teacheth him.²—Súratu'n-Nahl (xvi) 103.

These were, however, the views of the Prophet's adversaries and, therefore, much stress need not be laid upon them. It is more to the purpose to compare passages from the Qur'án with their originals. Amongst those which have been derived from Zoroastrian sources may be placed the night journey of the Prophet to heaven, the Muslim Paradise with its Húrís, the light of Muḥammad (núr-i-Muḥammad) and aṣ-Ṣirát or the bridge.

The night journey is thus described :—

Praise be to Him who carried His servant by night from the sacred temple to the temple that is more remote, whose precincts we have blessed, that we might show him some of our signs.—Súratu Baní Isrá'íl (xvii) 1.

¹ Rodwell's *Koran*, p. 8.

² Baiḳáwí says this refers to Salmán the Persian.

The vivid descriptions which poets and traditionists have given of what the Prophet saw and heard may be dismissed with the remark that no Muslim need believe them. The orthodox view is that it was an actual journey, but Sir Syed Ahmad and other intelligent Muslims consider it to have been a vision only. With all this we are not now concerned. The question is where did the idea of such a journey come from? It is evidently based on the ascension of Artá Viráf, recorded in the book of 'Artá Viráf', the probable date of which is about 400 years before Muḥammad. The similarity between this event and the traditional accounts of Muḥammad's ascension are close.¹

In the Meccan Sūras the descriptions given of Paradise and of the Hūrís is very realistic. Most of the enlightened Muslims of the new School look upon the description as purely allegorical.² The origin of the Prophet's teaching concerning this is Zoroastrian. We have the high authority of Syed Amír 'Alí for this statement, so no further proof is needed.³ The legend of the 'light of Muḥammad' is well known, and its connexion with the high position claimed by the Shí'ahs for

¹ Quotations on the various points taken from the original text of the *Artá Viráf* will be found in the *Yanábí'u'l-Islám*, pp. 192-4.

² *Historical Development of the Qur'án* (3rd ed.), pp. 27-8.

³ *Spirit of Islám*, p. 394. For further details, see Tisdall's *Sources of the Qur'án*, pp. 235-7.

'Alí is close. It is not, however, mentioned in the Qur'án, unless the words:—

Fain would they put out God's light with their mouth.—Súratu't-Tauba (ix) 32

refer to it. In the '*Khuláṣatu't-Tafásír*' this verse is explained to be a proof that the light of Muḥammad and the religion of Ahmad are permanent and cannot be abolished; but a reference to the nūr-i-Muḥammad is doubtful. The existence of the light, however, is a matter of earnest belief amongst the orthodox¹ and the origin of the idea is clearly Zoroastrian. In the Pahlavi '*Mínúkhírad*' and the '*Khashíta*' a similar account is given of the light of Jamshid² which passed on from generation to generation, just as the light in the Muslim legend does.

Aṣ-Ṣirát, or the bridge over hell, is referred to in the following verses:—

If we pleased, we would surely put out their eyes; yet even then would they speed on with rivalry in their path (Ṣirát).—Súratu Yá Sín (xxxvi) 60.

Gather together those who have acted unjustly and their consorts and the gods whom they have adored beside God, and guide them to the road (Ṣirát) for hell.—Súratu's-Saffát (xxxvii) 23.

¹ See such works as the *Qisṣu'l-Anbiyá* and the *Raudatu'l-Aḥbáb*.

² The original text is given in the *Yanábí'u'l-Islám*, p. 211.

Širát is not called a bridge in the Qur'án but al-Ghazálí says: 'it is a bridge stretched over the back of hell, sharper than a sword, finer than a hair. The feet of the unbelievers slip upon it by the decree of God and fall with them into the fire; but the feet of believers stand firm upon it by the grace of God, and so they pass into the abiding abode.'¹

The word Širát is derived from the old Persian word Chinvaṭ and the whole idea is connected with Zoroastrianism. It is referred to the 'Dín-kart' where the speaker says that he worships the Lord in order that he may not arrive at the severe punishment of hell, but may cross over Chinvaṭ and may attain to the blessed abode.²

Though Muḥammad speaks of the Gospel (Injil) as a book of divine authority, which descended on Jesus, and says that the Qur'án was sent down 'confirmatory of previous Scriptures and their safeguard' [Súratu'l-Má'ida (v) 52]; yet he seems to have had very little acquaintance with the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. The Bible was not translated into Arabic until long after his time.³ What he has stated about the Christian and Jewish religion is gathered mainly from the mythical stories in the Apocryphal

¹ *Ihyá' 'ulimu'd-din*, quoted in Macdonald's *Muslim Theology*, p. 306.

² *Yandbi'u'l-Islám*, p. 214.

³ Rodwell's *Koran*, p. 11.

Gospels and from Jewish traditions based on the Talmud.¹ Thus, the legend of the Inmates of the Cave is given in Súratu'l-Kahf (xviii) 8-25. Jacob of Sarúg (who died A.D. 521) gives some account of the myth which was known as the story of the 'Seven Sleepers' and is of no historical value at all. No more blame is to be attributed to Muḥammad for accepting this story than to the credulous Christians who gave credence to it; but it is difficult to believe that it was written from all eternity on the preserved Table, or that Gabriel brought it down from heaven.

The history of the Virgin Mary is taken almost entirely from the Apocryphal gospels, though even here Muḥammad was not accurate, for he confuses her with Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron. Thus:—

O Mary, now hast thou done a strange thing. O sister of Aaron.—Súratu Maryam (xix) 28-9.

And Mary the daughter of 'Imrán.—Súratu-t-Taḥrím (lxvi) 32.

'Imrán is the Arabic form of Amran who is described as the father of 'Moses and Aaron and Miriam their sister.' (Numbers xxvi. 59). The account of the birth of Mary is given in Súratu 'Alí 'Imrán (iii) 31-2. Baidáwi's comments on this are taken from the 'Protevangelium Jacobi

¹ The Babylonian Gemara was finished about the year A.D. 530; the Jerusalem Gemara in A.D. 430; and the Mishna about A.D. 220 and so all would be well known to the Jews of Arabia.

Minoris'.¹ In verse thirty-nine of this same Súra we read:—

This is one of the announcements of things unseen by thee. To thee do we reveal it for thou wast not with them when they cast lots with reeds which of them should rear Mary.

Baidáwí says the purpose of this verse 'is to enforce the fact of its being a revelation'; but that seems unnecessary for the myth was well known.

In the 'Protevangeliium' already referred to we read: 'He (the priest) gave to each one his rod and a dove came forth from the rod and flew up upon Joseph's head. And the priest said unto him "thou hast obtained by lot to receive the virgin of the Lord; receive her unto thyself to guard."'²

In Súratu Maryam (xix) 16-35 we find an account of the birth of Jesus Christ. The legend about the palm tree is found in the Apocryphal works, the 'History of the nativity of Mary', and the 'Infancy of the Saviour'.³

The legends about Christ speaking to men in the cradle [Súratu Áli 'Inrán (iii) 41-43] and [Súratu Maryam (xix) 29-31] come from a Coptic source through the 'Injillu't-Tufúliyah'. Mary the Copt was a favourite concubine of the Prophet and probably knew the legend well.

¹ *Chrestomathia Baidawiana*, pp. 26, 159.

² See the original Greek in *Yanábí'u'l-Islám*, p. 128.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

The legend about Jesus making birds from clay [Súratu'l-Má'ida (v) 109-110] comes from the Apocryphal gospel of Thomas the Israelite.¹ The account of the supposed miracle of the Table, which gives the name to the third Súra (al-Má'ida), is given in verses 112-115. It may be derived from some Ethiopian myth, in favour of which view it may be urged that the word used in the Qur'anic account for Apostles is Hawáriyún, which is not an Arabic, but an Ethiopian term. Some of the early Muslims fled for refuge to that country and may have heard some such fable there. If this is not so, then it seems to be a confused mixture of the accounts of the Lord's Supper (Luke xx. 30) and of Peter's visions (Acts x. 9-16).²

In Súratu'n-Nisá' (iv) 156 it is said of the crucifixion of Christ that:—

They slew him not and they crucified him not, but they had only his likeness.

Though the Qur'an as we have seen (*ante* p. 18) was the safeguard of previous Scriptures it here adopts the view of a gnostic heretic, Basilides, and of Manes or Mání.³ The Prophet was entirely ignorant of the true Christian doctrine of

¹ See *Yanábí'u'l-Islám*, p. 140.

² Tisdall, *Sources of the Qur'an*, p. 177.

³ Rodwell's *Koran*, p. 427, note 2; See *Yanábí'u'l-Islám*, pp. 149, 150 for the exact words of Basilides.

the Trinity in Unity and his account of it in Súratu'l-Má'ida (v) 116 is one which cannot be found in any Christian creed.

Al-Ghazáli says that the good Muslim 'should believe in the balance with the two scales and the tongue. In it deeds are weighed by the power of God most high.'¹ This is a reference to the balances in which the actions of men will be weighed at the judgment day and punishment or reward will be according to the result. The Qur'án is clear on this point. Thus:—

They whose balances shall be heavy shall be the blest; but they whose balances shall be light, these are they who shall lose their souls, abiding in hell for ever.—Súratu'l-Mu'minún (xxiii) 104.²

The idea of this weighing of men's deeds was an ancient Egyptian one. It is found in an Apocryphal work, probably originally written in Egypt. There was an Arabic version of this. In an account of the Judgment the method of weighing the souls of men in a balance is described. The resemblance is so close that the origin of the idea may be clearly seen. For other similar cases the 'Yanábi'u'l-Islám' may be consulted.

¹ *Ihyá' 'ulimu'd-din*, quoted in Macdonald's *Muslim Theology*, p. 306.

² See also Súratu'l-A'ráf (vii) 7, 8; Súratu'l-Qári'a (ci) 5-8; and for an account of the whole matter, *Faith of Islám* (3rd ed.), pp. 258-9.

Muḥammad owed much to his Jewish informants and it is apparent that from their traditions, and not from the Old Testament account, he derived much of the historical part of the Qur'án which deals with Jewish history. In the Qur'anic account of the creation of man [Súratu'l-Baqara (ii) 28-35] it is stated that Adam at God's request gave names to all things. This statement had been previously made in the *Midrash Rabbah*.¹

The refusal of Iblis the devil to fall down and worship Adam is given in many Súras.² It is interesting to note that with the exception of one Súra (vii), which is probably a late Meccan one, all the others are Súras of the middle Meccan period (A.D. 617-19) when the Prophet was in friendly intercourse with the Christians, for this legend, according to Rabbi Geiger, bears marks of a Christian source, although it is referred to in the 'Midrash' of Rabbi Moses who, however, lived after this date. It is a curious fact that the name for the devil is the one used by Christians and not the general Hebrew one.³

¹ The original Hebrew is given in *Judaism and Islám*, p. 76. This is an English translation of Rabbi Geiger's valuable work, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen*.

² Súratu'l-Hijr (xv) 28-44; Súratu Bani Isrá'il (xvii) 63-5; Súratu'l-Kahf (xviii) 48; Súratu Tá Há (xx) 115; Súratu Şád (xxxviii) 71-86; Súratu'l-A'ráf (vii) 10-18.

³ إبليس (διάβολος) not الشيطان (ꞑꞑꞑ)

It is quite evident that though Muḥammad had ample opportunities of becoming acquainted with Judaism, he did not draw his information from the Hebrew Scriptures, but from Jewish traditions and sayings which are useless as history. The result is that there is much confusion in the account given in the Qur'án of the Old Testament men. Geiger fairly concludes from the curious order in which he places the names of patriarchs and prophets and from the parts he assigned to them in history that Muḥammad had never even looked into the Hebrew Scriptures. The charge made by his opponents at Mecca is thus recorded:—

We also know that they say 'surely a certain person' ¹ teacheth him. But the tongue of him at whom they hint is foreign, while this (Qur'án) is in the plain Arabic.—Súratu'n-Nahl (xvi) 105.

The infidels say: 'The Qur'án is a mere fraud of his own devising, and others' ² have helped him with it.—Súratu'l-Furqán (xxv) 5.

In any case it is quite clear that, without the intervention of Gabriel, there was no difficulty in getting the confused information now given. It would far exceed the limits of this article to go into details on this point; but I refer to a few.

¹ The commentators suggest various names for this person. Geiger thinks he was 'Abdu'lláh ibn Salám, a Rabbi, with whom Muḥammad was in constant intercourse.

² Baiḏáwí says that by the 'others' the Jews are meant, vol. ii, p. 33.

In the account of Cain and Abel it is said that God sent a raven to Cain, which scratched upon the ground to show him how he might hide his brother's wrong.¹ This is from a Jewish tradition and is not even stated correctly, for it was to Adam and not to Cain that the raven appeared.²

The remarkable story of Hárut and Marút [Súratu'l-Baqara, (ii.) 96] is also clearly derived from a Rabbinical source, the original Hebrew of which with the authorities for it are given by Geiger. Numerous other examples might be shown of the same adaptation of popular legends. If they are true, then it would seem that Gabriel long before the birth of Muḥammad must have revealed them to other teachers of men and so their repetition was not needed. Anyhow, it is most difficult to explain these facts on the orthodox view that the inspiration of the Qur'án is by the wahí method, or that the book is eternal.

Geiger says: 'The Jews in Arabia, even when able to speak Arabic, kept to the Rabbinical Hebrew names for their religious conceptions; so words which from their derivation are shown to be not Arabic but Hebrew, or still better Rabbinic, must be held to prove the Jewish origin of the

¹ Súratu'l-Má'ida (v) 34.

² See Rodwell's *Koran*, p. 489, note 4, and *Judaism and Islam*, p. 80.

conceptions expressed.¹ The words which have passed from Rabbinical Hebrew into the Qur'án are Tábut, Ark; Taurát, the Law; Jannátu Adn, Paradise; Jahannam, Hell; Aḥbar, teachers; Darasa, to teach or to study deep; Rabbáni, those who are perfect in theory and practice;² Sabt, a day of rest; Ṭaghút, used in the plural in the Targums for idols and in the Qur'án to denote idolatry;³ Furqán, deliverance. The victory of Badr is spoken of as the Youmu'l-Furqán. [Súratu'l-Anfál. (viii) 42.] Furqán is also used for illumination, revelation.⁴ Thus:—

We gave of old to Moses and Aaron the illumination.—Súratu'l-Anblyá' (xxi) 49.

The title Furqán is also applied to the Qur'án. Another word is Sakínat, the Shechinah. Samuel is reported as saying to the Israelites:—

The sign of His kingdom shall be that the ark all come unto you: therein shall be tranquility (sakínat) from your Lord.—Súratu'l-Baqara. (ii) 249.

The idea is then applied to Muslims and is expressed as 'the spirit of repose' which came

¹ *Judaism and Islam*, p. 31.

² It is used as a mark of honour in Súratu 'Alí 'Imrán (iii) 73; Súratu'l-Má'ida (v) 48, 68.

³ Súratu'l-Baqara (ii) 257, 259.

⁴ This is a wrong use of the word. See Nöldeke, *Sketches from Eastern History*, p. 38.

on Abú Bakr in the cave,¹ and on those who pledged their fealty under the tree at Hudaibiya.² The word is found only in the Madína Súras. The use of Matháni,³ 'repetition', in connexion with the Qur'án, has caused some perplexity:—

The best of recitals hath God sent down to thee, a book in unison with itself, and containing teaching by iteration, (matháni).—Súratu'z-Zumar (xxxix) 24.

Rabbi Geiger shows that this perplexity arises from the origin of the word not being understood.

The word Malakút in the Rabbinical writings is used of God's rule. It occurs in several places in the Qur'án.⁴

Nöldeke referring to the use of foreign words in the Qur'án shows how Muḥammad often applied them incorrectly. 'Thus *forkán* really means "redemption", but Muḥammad (misled by the Arabic meaning of the root *frk* "sever", "decide") uses it for revelation'. *Milla* is properly "word", but in the Qur'án "religion". *Illiyún* (lxxxiii. 18, 19) is apparently the Hebrew name for God, *Elyon*, "the Most High"; Muḥammad uses it of a

¹ Súratu't-Tauba (ix) 40.

² Súratu'l-Fath (xlviii) p. 4, 18, 20.

³ For the views of Muslim commentators on this word, see *Historical Development of the Qur'án*, pp. 60-2.

⁴ Súratu'l-An'am (vi) 75; Súratu'l-A'râf (vii) 184; Súratu'l-Má'minún (xxiii) 90; Súratu Yá Sin (xxxvi) 83.

heavenly book'.¹ It is not easy to conceive that Gabriel would have been inaccurate in such matters, but according to the waḥí mode of inspiration it is he who, rather than Muḥammad, is responsible for the misuse of foreign words.

However that may be, the use in the Qur'án of all such words, taken from the Rabbinical Hebrew and which would be current amongst the Arabian Jews, shows how important conceptions passed from Judaism into Islám and suggests a natural method by which the Prophet could obtain the ideas embodied in his system. The waḥí inspiration seems to be unnecessary here. It would be interesting to know how the Mu'tazilas would have dealt with this great question of the borrowing which Islám has made from pagan, Jewish, and Christian sources. It would doubtless have strengthened their opposition to the dogma of the eternal nature of the Qur'án. It reveals a human side of the Qur'án which is quite inconsistent with the orthodox idea of the verbal inspiration (waḥí) of the book. Some bold thinkers have given up that idea, but few have the courage of the late Maulavi Cherágh 'Alí who said: 'No regard however is to be paid to the opinions and theories of the Mokalids.'² Freedom from the bondage of taqlíd is a first step to a more intelligent study of the Qur'án.

¹ *Sketches from Eastern History*, pp. 37-8.

² *Reforms under Moslem rule*, p. vii.

When we come to consider the order in which the alleged revelations were given, we find no help in the arrangement of the Arabic Qur'án or in translations which in this respect follow it. The longest Súras come first and the shortest ones last without the least reference to their historical setting.

Rodwell's English translation, which is based on the chronological order of the Súras, thus throws much light on the book and reveals the growth of ideas and plans in the mind of Muḥammad and the marvellous way in which revelations suited the occasions.¹

The Prophet was reproached for not having a complete revelation and answered the reproach thus:—

The infidels say, 'Unless the Qur'án be sent down to him all at once'—but in this way we establish thy heart in it; in parcels have we parcelled it out to thee.—Súratu'l-Furqán (xxv) 34.

We have parcelled out the Qur'án into sections that thou mightest recite it unto men by slow degrees, and we have sent it down piecemeal.—Súratu Baní Isrá'il (xvii) 107.

The correctness of Baiḍáwí's statement that 'piecemeal' means 'according to the events', or

¹ See Nöldeke's *Geschichte des Qorans* and Sell's *Historical Development of the Qur'án* for the full details.

the circumstances,¹ is more clearly seen from a perusal of the Qur'án in its chronological order, which Rodwell gives, than could be the case from reading Sale's translation which follows the Arabic arrangement. The occasions when Baiḍáwī's term 'according to the circumstances' may be employed in considering the revelations are very numerous. The revelations² denouncing Wálid bin Muḡhaira, Abú Lahab, Akhnas ibn Sharif, and Abú Jahl, are very striking and very personal. As opposition increased and became severe revelations were brought strongly denouncing it. The words :—

Woe be on that day to those who charged with imposture,

are repeated no less than ten times in the Súratu'l-Mursalát (lxxvii), an early Meccan chapter. The Meccans were slow to believe and quick in objecting. This led to revelations in which the torments of hell are fully predicted for them. Thus :—

Hell truly shall be a place of snares. The home of transgressors.

¹ The Arabic text is فَرَكْنَاهُ تَنْزِيلًا and Baiḍáwī says it means 'according to the circumstances'.—vol. i, p. 553.

² Súratu'l-Mudaththir (lxxiv) 11-19; Súratu'l-Lahab (cxi); Súratu'l-Hamaza (civ) 1-7; Súratu'l-'Alaq (xciv) 6-7.

They gave the lie to our signs, charging them with falsehood.

But we noted and wrote down all :

Taste this then and we will give increase of nought but torment.—Súratu'n-Nabá' (lxxviii) 21-2, 27-30.

The denunciations close with :—

Begone to that hell ye called a lie,
Begone to the shadows that lie in triple masses ;
But not against the flames shall they help or shade you.—Súratu'l-Mursalát (lxxvii) 29-31.

A little later on in his Meccan career, the Prophet produces revelations entering into minute descriptions of the terrors of hell. His opponents linked together in chains will dwell amid scorching blasts and in scalding water ; dressed in garments of pitch and enwrapped in fire ; no coolness shall they taste therein nor any drink, save boiling water and running sores. There may have been much to provoke him, but the punishment invoked is severe. As regards his general attitude towards idolatry, with the exception of the weakness he showed about al-Lát and al-'Uzzá,¹ a fall from which a speedy recovery was made, the Prophet made a noble stand against it at Mecca.

The doubts expressed as to the alleged source of his revelations called forth continued and

¹ See, *Historical Development of the Qur'an*, pp. 37-41.

reiterated assertions of his divine call and of the truth of the revelations he gave forth, combined with a strong protest against all who opposed his claims. He produced a series of revelations to show that previous prophets had been treated just as he now was and so the opposition of the Meccans was held to be a proof of his divine mission.¹ The events of each day varied and the opposition took different forms and so the fragmentary nature of the revelations (*ante* p. 29) proved most useful in meeting opponents at all points and led to the impassioned assertion of the divinity of the Qur'án which is found in the Meccan Súrās.² The very force and earnestness of these utterances seem to betray doubt in the mind of Muḥammad. The calm dignity of a prophet of God is scarcely visible. Early in his Meccan career the Prophet challenged the production of a book like the Qur'án :—

Will they say, 'He hath forged it himself?'

Nay rather it is that they believe not.

Let them produce a discourse like it, if they speak the truth.—Súratu't-Túr (lii) 34-5.

It is said that men and jinn could not produce its like. The argument was supposed to be so

¹ Súratu'l-Hijr (xv) 10-13; Súratu Şád (xxxviii) 11; Súratu'l-Qamar (liv) 43; Súratu'sh-Shu'ará' (xxvi) 2-5; Súratu'l-Anbiyá' (xxi) 43; Súratu'l-Má'min (xl) 85.

² Súratu't-Takwír (lxxxix) 15-22; Súratu'n-Najm (liii) 5; Súratu'l-Wáqi'a (lvi) 74-8; Súratu'z-Zukhruf (xliii) 1-3; Súratu'z-Zumar (xxxix) 24; Súratu'l-Haqqá (lxix) 38-44; Súratu Şád (xxxviii) 25.

convincing that it was repeated again at Madína. Thus:—

If ye be in doubt as to that which we have sent down to our servant then produce a Súra like it.—Súratu'l-Baqara (ii) 21.

Naḍir ibn Háritha accepted the challenge. He put into rhyme some tales of the Persian kings and read out these Súrās, or chapters, at meetings, similar to those in which Muḥammad published the Qur'án. It was a rash thing to do, for in a late Meccan Súra came the revelation :—

A man¹ there is who bringeth an idle tale, that in his lack of knowledge he may mislead others from the way of God and turn it to scorn. For such is prepared a shameful punishment.—Súratu Luqmán (xxxi) 5.

Naḍir was taken prisoner at the battle of Badr. Ransom was refused and he was put to death,² so the shameful punishment met him. Naturally few persons would care to enter into a competition the result of which was so dangerous. The fact is that the claim made as to the impossibility of producing a book like the Qur'án is overstated. If the claim refers to the subject matter, the Quraish could not do it, for they did not believe.

¹ Baiḍāwī calls him Naḍir ibn Háritha, vol. ii, p. 112. See also *Tafsir-i-Husaini*, vol. i, p. 183.

² Margoliouth, *Mohammed*, pp. 135, 266.

its dogmatic teaching. Any attempt to do so would have been only a copy, and copies fall short of the original. Muḥammad had stamped upon his book his own individuality which no one could reproduce and so the challenge was a safe one to make. If the claim is as to the form and style, then as the Qur'án is looked upon as the perfect model for rhetoric, as the standard by which all other literary compositions must be judged, it follows that other writings can only be adjudged excellent as they imitate its style.¹ The Mu'tazilas held that, if God allowed it, men could produce a Súra equal to the Qur'án in eloquence and arrangement.²

Muslim theologians who teach that the Qur'án is incorruptible quote this verse:—

A book whose verses are established in wisdom
and then set forth with clearness.—Súratu Húd
(xi) 1;

but the fact that the Khalífa 'Uthmán and his company of revisers had to consider a variety of readings, to weigh their authority and sometimes to discard them in favour of Meccan ones caused no small scandal in the early days of Islám.³

¹ See *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. vi, pp. 55—6; Nöldeke's *Geschichte des Qorans*, p. 43.

² Shahrastání, *al-Milal wa'n-Nihal*, p. 39. For an excellent discussion of this subject, see Nöldeke, *Sketches of Eastern History*, pp. 32-7.

³ See for a full account of these proceedings, *The Recensions of the Qur'án* (O. L. S.)

An interesting illustration of the 'piecemeal' revelation, or as Baidáwi calls it the revelation 'according to the circumstances', is the Súratu Áli 'Imrán and the battle of Uḥud. The Muslims had gained a great victory over the Meccans at Badr, which was declared to be won by God's assistance and favour.¹ Then the Muslims were in turn defeated at Uḥud and the conclusion naturally drawn was that God had forsaken them. The Jews indeed used this argument and said: 'No true claimant of the prophetic dignity hath ever been beaten on the field, or suffered loss in his own person and that of his followers as he hath.'² The argument was no doubt weak, but so much had been made of the previous victory that the defeat was not easy to defend. The danger was that doubt would arise in the minds of the Muslims. A skilful production of revelations explained the cause. The Súratu Áli 'Imrán³ is full of the subject and shows how important a crisis it was and how opportunely, 'according to the circumstances', the revelations came to support the people now disheartened at the adverse turn their circumstances had taken.

One of the most interesting applications of the 'according to the circumstances' theory is to the

¹ Súratu'l-Anfál (viii) 9-10, 17.

² Wáqidi, quoted in Muir's *Life of Mahomet*, vol. iii, p. 189.

³ Súratu Áli 'Imrán (iii) 134-5, 138-9, 140, 145-6, 149, 154, 160, 163-5.

question of toleration. It is quite easy to select from the Qur'án verses setting forth a tolerant attitude towards Jews and Christians; it is just as easy to show that Islám is intolerant. The true method of arriving at a correct conclusion is to consider the dates when, and the conditions under which, all these statements were made. The English reader who consults Rodwell's translation will be able to trace the changing attitude of the Prophet in this matter. Two of the most frequently quoted texts on the side of toleration are:—

Let there be no compulsion in religion.—Súratu'l-Baqara (ii) 257.

Verily they who believe (Muslims) and they who follow the Jewish religion and the Christians and the Šábians—whosoever of these believeth in God and the last day and doeth that which is right,¹ shall have their reward with their Lord: fear shall not come upon them, neither shall they be grieved.—Súratu'l-Baqara (ii) 59.

These are early Madína verses revealed at a time when it was most desirable to conciliate the Jews. Passing by the fact that the commentators, as I have just shown Baidáwí does, explain away the apparent toleration, the Qur'án itself

¹ Baidáwí, vol. i, p. 64, says this means:—

دخّل في الإسلام دخلاً صادقا—'enter Islam with sincere entrance'. In other words, toleration is only for converts from other religions.

practically cancels these verses. Thus the last verse quoted is said to be abrogated by a later verse:—

Whoso desireth any other religion than Islám it shall not be accepted of him and in the next world he shall be of those who perish.—Súratu 'Áli 'Imrán (iii) 79.

This settles the matter. The verse about 'no compulsion' is explained away as not referring to any general law or principle, but to a specific case of two individuals¹ and Baidáwí speaks of its abrogation by the words:—

O Prophet contend against the infidels and the hypocrites and be rigorous with them.—Súratu't-Tauba (ix) 74.

But later on when the breach with the Jews was complete, the mind of the Prophet was quite clear on this question. Thus we read in the last Súra of all:—

O ye who believe take not the Jews and Christians as your friends.—Súratu'l-Má'ida (v) 56.

This verse seems to contradict the apparently more liberal views of the preceding verses 52-3, which have caused much trouble to the orthodox commentators, who however now explain away not the harsher verses, but the milder ones and

¹ For the original authorities for this statement see *The Historical Development of the Qur'án* (3rd ed.), pp. 229-30.

throw the weight of their influence and learning on the side of intolerance.¹

In the last Súra but one, of Jews and Christians it is said:—

God do battle with them. How are they misguided.²—Súratu't-Tauba (ix) 30.

It is sad to think that the aged Prophet, who in earlier days could say:—

Dispute not, unless in kindest sort, with the people of the Book.—Súratu'l-'Ankabút (xxix) 45.

should now, at the close of a strenuous life, leave as a legacy such a call to strife. Happily the mandate is not obeyed except amongst fanatical races; but there it is recorded for all time. It is an excellent illustration of the great importance of reading the Qur'án in its chronological order, remembering Baidáwi's dictum that it is given 'according to the circumstances'. There are many other instances which show the importance of this method of reading the Qur'án in its chronological order, but I must pass them by.

Rodwell says, what all will agree with, that

¹ See *The Historical Development of the Qur'an*, pp. 223-4.

² Baidáwi says: 'it is a prayer for their destruction, or astonishment at the odiousness of their saying'. His alternative explanation is gentler than most commentators allow. Dr. Nadhir Ahmad says it means 'may God make havoc of them'. Other commentators so interpret it. See *The Historical Development of the Qur'an*, pp. 223-4.

'the Qur'án deserves the highest praise for its conceptions of the Divine nature in reference to the attributes of power, knowledge and universal providence and unity, that its belief and trust in the one God of heaven and of earth is deep and fervent;'¹ but it is also said by an eminent scholar that 'Muhammad's idea of God is out and out Deistic. God and the world are in exclusive external and eternal opposition.'²

Al-Ghazáli defining the Qur'anic idea of God says: 'He is living, powerful, commanding, conquering. He is Lord of the worlds, the visible and the invisible, that of force and might. He possesses rule and conquest and creation and command.'³ The Qur'án instructs men on the seven attributes of God: life, knowledge, will, power, hearing, seeing, speech. Holiness and love are not amongst the attributes. It is said that they are included in the attribute 'will', but that only confirms the opinion that the Qur'anic conception of God is mainly that of a being of arbitrary power.⁴ The doctrine of 'tanzih'⁵ (transcendence) has been so exaggerated that the idea of the

¹ Rodwell, *Koran*, p. 15.

² Hauri, *Islam in Seinem Einfluss*, p. 44.

³ *Ihyá 'ulūmu'd-dīn*, quoted in Macdonald's *Muslim Theology*, p. 302.

⁴ Súratu'l-An'ám (vi) 39, 150; Súratu'l-Insán (lxxvi) 29, 30.

⁵ *Tanzih* has been defined as the doctrine which asserts the entire absoluteness of God and His complete separation from and unlikeness to all finite things.

immanence of God is defective. Muslim theologians also find great difficulty in reconciling the anthropomorphic statements in the Qur'án with 'tanzih.'¹ Thus, whilst we may gladly recognize the beauty of many of the Qur'anic statements about God, we may also express our conviction that its teaching on the nature of God is hardly, as has been recently stated by a Muslim writer,² an 'adequate and clear' view of God. The protest made in the Qur'án against idolatry and many other evils, which the writer just referred to sets forth,³ must also be recognized as a great advance on the then existing state of morals in Arabia; but unfortunately permanence has been given to other evils which, notwithstanding some privileges

¹ See *Faith of Islám* (3rd ed.), pp. 193-8.

² *The Indian Interpreter*, Vol. II, No. 2, p. 79.

See also, some interesting discussions on the Qur'anic idea of God in *The Orient and Occident*, published in Cairo, on November 1, 22, 29, 1909. The great philosopher Hegel says: 'If we regard God merely as the Absolute Being, and nothing more, we know him only as the general, irresistible Force, or, in other words, as the Lord. Now it is true that the "Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom", but it is also true that it is *only* the beginning. It is in the Jewish, and further in the Mohammedan religion that God is conceived of as the Lord, and, in fact, only as the Lord. Now although this conception of God is an important and necessary step in the development of religious consciousness, it yet by no means exhausts the depth of the Christian idea of God.' (Hegel's *Werke*, vol. vi, pp. 226, 348). 'Thus', Dr. Köelle remarks, 'in the judgment of this great thinker, Muhammad not only did not advance the knowledge of God, but sunk back, in his conception of the deity, below the Christian level, to the long-superseded standpoint of Judaism and Deism.'

³ *The Indian Interpreter*, Vol. II, No. 2, p. 85.

given to women about property, have really degraded them and wrought untold evils in the home and in the State.

It is said that 'the Qur'án contains the religious, social, civil, commercial, military, judicial, criminal and penal code of Islám. It regulates everything. It contains the truths of all religions and is free from inconsistencies.'¹ This is a rhetorical statement which contravenes the views of a very learned Muslim. Thus: 'the Qur'án does not interfere in political questions, nor does it lay down specific rules of conduct in the civil law.'² Indeed, it would be a misfortune for Islám were it so, for then in all departments of life rules framed for the Arabs of the seventh century would be fixed and final for all people and all centuries, and so progress would be made most difficult.

The view expressed in the last *Indian Interpreter* (p. 78) by the Muslim writer just referred to, about the absence of inconsistencies seems irreconcilable with the orthodox view of the inspiration and eternal nature of the Qur'án, for how then is the changing attitude of the Prophet towards different classes of men to be explained. Such a claim for consistency is practically set aside by the doctrine of abrogation which provides

¹ *The Indian Interpreter*, Vol. II, No. 2, p. 78.

² Cherágh 'All, *Reforms under Moslem rule*, p. xvii.

that one verse may cancel another. Thus in a Madína Súra we read:—

Whatever verses we cancel or cause thee to forget we give thee better in their stead.—Súratu'l-Baqara (ii) 100.

The inconsistencies were there, and this very obvious remedy had to be adopted to do away with the difficulties thus caused.

In the article in the last *Indian Interpreter* to which reference has already been made an extract¹ from the Qur'án is given setting forth the claims of true religion. It is excellent, but the statement as to the freedom given concerning the direction towards which prayer may be offered is inconsistent with the verse:—

Turn thy face to the Mosque, and wherever ye be, turn your faces toward that part.—Súratu'l-Baqara (ii) 139.

Here again it is a case of abrogation, made in order to avoid inconsistency, and no such freedom of direction, as is implied in the extract quoted, is now allowable.

In the same article attention is called to the most praiseworthy injunctions of the Qur'án as regards the case of orphans and the needy. All this is most excellent, but nothing is said about the permission of wife-beating,² the bitter denun-

¹ Súratu'l-Baqara (ii) 172. ² Súratu'n-Nisá' (iv) 38.

ciations of personal opponents (*ante p.* 30) and the sanction given to the persecution of the Jews. It may be and indeed often is urged that in the Old Testament Scriptures savage acts are narrated; but these are not examples to the Christian Church. Such actions are not the Sunnat, a divine rule of faith and practice. If Muhammad had delivered his teaching 600 B.C. instead of A.D. 600 much more might be made of such an argument; but after Judaism came Christianity, and the example and teaching of Christ are now the world's great possession. To pass this glorious revelation by and to justify events long after it by the actions of Jewish kings seems to show the weakness of a cause; but even Jehu's extermination of the house of Ahab (2 Kings x. 30) quite as cruel as the slaughter of the Jews by Muhammad, was denounced by the Prophet Hosea (i. 4). I am not aware that any Muslim commentator has ever expressed disapproval of the slaughter of the Bani Quraiza. 'Israel's wars of extermination are regarded as Jehovah's retribution on the wicked and test obedience to His commands, but only as those commands could be conceived by a semi-barbarous race. The terrible curses of the imprecatory psalms may serve to exhibit the external antipathy between righteousness and iniquity; but as the expression of a spirit of vengeance on the part of individuals they are flaws upon the morality of their authors

and have nothing to do with "the mind of Christ".¹ It seems clear that those who consider the Sunnat of the Prophet to be of farḍ or of wájib obligation and who believe that the Qur'án is eternal and that it was written on the preserved Table and from thence brought down to justify many deeds, cannot accept the Christian attitude towards such actions. That which is eternal from the beginning remains eternal and, as the Mu'tazilas said, is eternal in its obligation. It is true men are often better than their creeds. It is well that it is so, for it is only in this fact and in a reconstruction of the orthodox idea of inspiration that there lies any hope of sound progress in Islám.

It is to be regretted that Muslim writers who appeal to European authors for support generally pass by the great Oriental scholars of the West and quote, as the writer in the last *Indian Interpreter* does, from the books of men² who, however brilliant they may be as essayists or historians, cannot be recognized as authorities of any weight in Oriental matters. Take the case of Mr. Bosworth Smith. Quotations are freely made from his *Lectures on Mohammed and Mohammedanism*

¹ *Contentio Veritatis*, p. 177.

² See *Indian Interpreter*, Vol. II, No. 2, pp. 77, 81; but no references are given. The context of these passages might throw another light on them; but even if not these opinions are of no value at all and the cause of Islám is weakened by undue reliance on the opinions of such men.

(published in 1874), in which he highly praises the Prophet and his work; but as years went on, Mr. Bosworth Smith's knowledge increased and in an article published in the December number of the *Nineteenth Century*, 1887, he states that he now thinks certain 'modifications and explanations' of his earlier views 'essential'. He concludes with these words: 'If we are able to believe in God at all, we must also believe that the ultimate triumph of Christianity is not problematical but certain, and in His good time, across the lapse of ages, will prove to be not local but universal, not partial but complete, not evanescent but eternal.' Mr. Bosworth Smith was not an Oriental scholar and so was not a competent critic of Islám; but Muslims often accept him as such and, in support of their position, constantly refer to his book. Let them now refer to his maturer views and quote him fully if they quote him at all. Carlyle also is often quoted, but his opinion of Islám is worth nothing. No Orientalist would pay the least attention to his approval or disapproval of it, or of the Qur'án. However, if Muslims still believe that they find support in him, and apparently they do for they quote him,¹ then let them read his view of the Qur'án: 'One feels it difficult to see how any mortal ever could consider this Koran as a Book written in Heaven,

¹ *The Indian Interpreter*, Vol. II, No. 2, p. 81.

too good for earth: as a well-written book, or indeed as a book at all; and not a bewildered rhapsody; written so far as writing goes as badly as almost any book ever was'.¹ Our Muslim friends must not be surprised if we look upon their use of isolated extracts from the writings of such men as unwise and as a sign of weakness. Carlyle, at all events, may now be left alone. A book which commands, as the Qur'án does, the reverence of so many millions of the human race is not to be spoken of in the off-hand, supercilious manner of Carlyle; on the other hand, it is no disrespect to enquire into its origin, to criticize its methods and to sometimes question its statements, for, 'at the present day every literary product of a past age is subjected to a minute and searching examination before it can be assigned to its proper place in history, and before the contribution it makes to history and to the development of life and thought can be properly appreciated.'²

¹ Carlyle, *Heroes, Hero-worship* (ed. 1840), p. 77.

² *Contentio Veritatis*, p. 22.