

CHAPTER VI.

A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF THE PROPHET.

The Childhood and Early Life of Muhammad.

Muhammad belonged to the most noble family of the Quraish, the hereditary guardians of the Ka'aba (the sacred Shrine of Mecca) in the south-eastern corner of which is set the "Hajar al aswad"—the most sacred monument of Islam.

Abdulla, his Father, was the favourite son of Abdul Muttalib of the family of Hashim, and was married to Amina, a Lady of the Quraish: but their married life was of short duration for Abdulla contracted some disease whilst with the yearly caravan journey from Gaza and died during the return journey, leaving his young widow in somewhat poor circumstances.

Muhammad was born in the Autumn of 570 A.D. only a few months after his Father's death. It was the custom of the Quraish to place their young children out to nurse among the tribes around Mecca in order that they might benefit by the fresh mountain air and acquire, from the earliest years, a good knowledge of the Arabic language which was spoken in its purest form in those districts. In accordance with this custom he was entrusted to a reliable lady named Halima, a Bedouin nurse, in whose care he remained till he was two years of age. He was then returned to Mecca but,

owing to the breaking out of an epidemic and the solicitude of his Mother who naturally felt anxious about his health and wished him kept clear of all chances of infection or contagion, he was sent back to the hills with Halima where he remained till he was six years old, when he finally returned to Mecca.

In the following year his Mother died and he was left an orphan under the care of his paternal grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, with whom he spent two very happy years at the end of which time there was another sad change for his Grandfather died and, at eight years of age, he came under the protecting care of his Uncle, Abu Talib. From the very cradle he showed signs of gifts and coming spiritual powers and there were not wanting indications of those moral qualities which were to equip him for his Mission. There have not come down to us many authenticated details of the facts which prompted men of his time to accord to him virtue and affection but it is known that both his Grandfather and Uncle regarded him with the deepest affection and placed unlimited confidence in him.

Whilst Muhammad was under the care of Abu Talib, who by reason of his commercial business had to make frequent visit to distant lands, he had opportunities of meeting many people of importance who were to be of service to him in later years. On one occasion it is related that he said to his Uncle who was just starting on a business expedition to Syria:—"O my Uncle, do take me with you." The request was granted because the Uncle was devotedly attached to the little orphan and could not bear to be parted from him. So they set off together and this early visit, in his twelfth year

brought him into contact with Christianity and Christian ideas, Khadeeja also sent him on a commercial expedition to Syria and Damascus.

Respecting his life, whilst under the care of Abu Talib, the facts show that he must have possessed an excellent disposition as well as great charm of manner for he undoubtedly attracted the good will and regard of all he had dealings with—even when he was but a child of tender years. These beautiful qualities grew with him and the contemplation of the opening out of his blameless life, unsullied by the temptations and wickedness with which he was later on surrounded, fills one with reverence and admiration. Allah had blessed him and, under the cover of the Almighty Wings, he gave the great confirming instructions and Warnings to the Nations of the whole World. He was enabled by God's almighty power to confirm the teachings of former Prophets and emphasize the Unity of God with a power never previously granted to Divinely inspired human agency.

His Early Aversion to Idolatry. Whilst accompanying Abu Talib, the caravan stopped at Busra, an important town in Syria, where there was a famous Christian Convent under the charge of the Pontiff Bohera whose guests Abu Talib and Muhammad became.

On a certain occasion Abu Talib was speaking of the idols Laat and Hubul, suggesting their superiority to the Christian Deity, Muhammad heard all in silence but his face showed signs of suppressed anger. Finally he burst into tears and said that he did not know how to express his hatred of the two idols which were the

objects of worship by his countrymen. For one brought up by and belonging to the family of the hereditary guardians of the Great Shrine, to express hatred of the family gods was little short of astounding and could hardly have taken place had he not been conscious of his coming mission.

It has been asserted by certain Christian writers that Muhammad worshipped idols in his boyhood and youth and early manhood, but such a statement is absolutely incorrect and cannot be supported by any evidence. The incident recorded above occurred when he was in Syria when he was a little boy of ten or eleven and seems sufficient to refute any suggestion of idol worship: beside which there are many other instances related by his Uncle Abu Talib when he evinced the strongest abhorrence of idol-worship. Furthermore Abu Talib told his brother Abbas that he had never found Muhammad tell a lie nor had he ever observed in him any tendency to flippancy or idleness.

All traditions agree that he was thoughtful and serious and that the games and amusements of boyhood had not much attraction for him. His cleanliness and neatness were very early shown for, whilst his little cousins, Abu Talib's children, came out in the morning in dirty or untidy clothes, Muhammad was always both clean and tidy. The peaceful side of his nature kept him from joining in disputes and quarrels—he seemed to be always serene and tranquil, as though taking no real interest in such trifling things. This excellent disposition led to his being taken into the society of his elders and he did not mix with the other children at meals.

He was not a greedy boy and was rarely known to ask for food or drink and there is rather a pretty story told of his modesty when he was helping in the repair of the Ka'aba. The Quraish community was carrying the stones for the repair of the Sacred Shrine, all were helping, and it was not considered indecent for a child to walk naked, but the little Muhammad always wore a loin cloth just like a man. His Uncle Abbas fearing that the heavy stones might bruise him, said:—"If you will take off that cloth I will put it on your shoulder to prevent the stones from hurting your skin" and with these words he snatched the cloth from his little nephew who was so shocked that he almost fainted and was never seen naked again.

It is important to note that in his earlier life his candour, truth, and sincerity earned for him the title of "El Amin"—*the Trusty*, and this happy appellation stuck to him throughout the whole of his life. Indeed his truthfulness and wisdom were so remarkable that he was consulted on matters of dispute amongst the Arabs—known to be one of the most passionate and hot tempered races on earth: his wise decisions often turned aside wrath and prevented trouble and bloodshed.

In this respect there is one very noteworthy incident which deserves to be specially recorded. When the Ka'aba had been destroyed by fire and was being rebuilt, there was a dispute as to who should have the privilege of replacing the Black Stone in its position. The immemorial antiquity of the Stone and its peculiar sanctity, long before Islam was established rendered the work of replacing it in position a particularly im-

portant one. Clans and families disputed as to who should undertake the honoured task; controversy ran high and it was at last agreed that the first arrival on the following morning should be appointed arbiter and settle the question definitely. Muhammad was first on the scene on that eventful morning and was at once appealed to for his decision. He was not long in making up his mind and what he did was worthy of the future maker of wise laws. He spread his cloak on the ground and, placing the Stone upon it, asked the heads of the clans and families each to take a part in lifting it into position. Everyone was pleased and the simple expedient averted bloodshed and strife and a state of affairs which might easily have degenerated into a fierce and protracted tribal war.

In his twentieth year he was present with his Uncles at many of the sacrilegious battles which broke out at that time and in the following years he tended sheep and goats on the hills surrounding Mecca and it is probable that this quiet life tended to mould the growing meditative side of his nature and to prepare him for his mission.

His Marriage. By the time he had reached the age of 25 Muhammad's sterling qualities and love of truth had made him respected far and wide. Khadeeja, a wealthy lady of the Quraish and a distant kinswoman, deputed him to act as her agent. The appointment was made on the recommendation of Abu Talib who was aware of his capabilities in commercial affairs as well as his probity. For this Lady he undertook charge of a trade caravan bound for Syria on two different occasions; he was completely successful and managed the business

affairs with great skill and ability—indeed the successes gained fully confirmed the statements which had been made concerning him. His character and disposition no doubt attracted Khadeeja's admiration and his commercial success had won her gratitude; so that it was not at all surprising that they had a strong mutual regard for one another which ultimately culminated in marriage though she was very much his senior. This marriage, which was a very happy one, placed him above any uncertainty as regards financial matters. Many rich men had sought her hand but she had refused them all, preferring the man of all others who had won her respect and love by his beautiful character and wonderful qualities.

This marriage placed Muhammad in the forefront of the commercial and social life of Mecca; up to that time his life had been one of meditation and communion with Nature in a broad and general sense, but after his marriage with Khadeeja he was able to devote a greater portion of his time to that meditation for which he was naturally adapted, it is true he continued his commercial work but he found leisure for the contemplation of the stupendous duties which would devolve upon him before the journey of life terminated. He contrasted in his mind the polytheistic creed of Mecca and compared it with the more refined faith of the Jews and Christians and he very clearly perceived the need of reforms of the most drastic nature.

All chroniclers are agreed that he made a most ideal husband to the wife he so dearly loved and that his home life was above reproach; his marriage with Khadeeja in his 25th year was indeed a union of hearts as

well as of hands and for twenty-seven years nothing disturbed the harmony of their married life; his affection was unswerving and loyal; during her lifetime he contracted no other alliance and death alone brought about that cherished memory which lasted until his own passing into Paradise.

A great deal of misconception exists as to the Prophet's Wives after the decease of Khadeeja. He married a very beautiful lady, Ayesha, and it is said that she was jealous of his late wife and once asked him if he did not love her more than Khadeeja. His reply was characteristic for he said:—"Never was a better wife than Khadeeja; she believed in me when men despised me; she relieved my wants and helped me when I was poor and looked down upon by the rest of the world." He was deeply attached to Ayesha and the other wives he married were the widows of his friends who had fallen in fighting his defensive engagements. The position of "widow" has always been a sad one in the East and it is not difficult to imagine that the tender heart of Muhammad went out to these defenceless ones whose protectors had given their lives in his glorious cause, and he did the best for them by letting them have the shelter of his home. As actual wives he had no need of them but as protector of the friendless he did the right thing and secured the blessings of many whose life would otherwise have been cheerless and unhappy. In home matters he was ever impartial and he carried into every day life, whether domestic or public, a rigid justice which gained for him the love of every class of his fellow countrymen.

During his early married life he often retired with

Khadeeja to Mt. Hira for meditation and prayer; on these occasions they took but little food with them and Muhammad slept very seldom and the prayerful meditations were followed by periods of ecstasy during which the secrets of nature became revealed to him and his inner faculties were awakened so that he was rendered capable of seeing coming events revealed beforehand; whatever he saw in his visions became reality on the following day.

He was approaching his 40th year, the 15th year of his married life, and was spending the month Ramadan with Khadeeja in the usual retreat on Mt. Hira when on the night of Al-Kadr there appeared to him "One mighty with power and endowed with understanding—the Apparition showed itself on the far off horizon and drew near to him and revealed unto him that which he now reveals." It was Gabriel, who held in his hand a silken cloth covered with writing and bade him read. When Muhammad pleaded his inability to decipher the writing he was told to read in the name of the Lord. After an intermission the Archangel returned and said:—"O Muhammad thou art the Apostle of God and I am Gabriel." He told Khadeeja of the marvellous apparition and, having gathered around him a few faithful friends and followers, the doctrines and instructions which had been thus miraculously imparted to him were secretly discussed, but only promulgated amongst a very few reliable disciples.

About three years later the messenger Gabriel came again, but this time with the injunction that Muhammad should preach the Faith openly. He evidently feared the result of a too hasty revelation of the Divine Message to his people, though he was of course ready to

risk anything for the Faith and to take his orders from on high, and in the dilemma he sought the advice of his wife on whose judgment he knew he could rely. Khadeeja, with 15 years of experience of Muhammad's strength of character, realized by womanly intuition the fact that the revelation was from the Highest Truth. She was aware of his sterling qualities and unhesitatingly declared that God, who recognized all that he had done for the poor and helpless, would never allow him to fail in the work that He had set before him as a messenger. Her judgment was correct as history shows.

Following Khadeeja many other members of his family accepted his teachings. Zaid, his adopted son, then Ali and Abu Bakr, who belonged to a collateral branch of the Quraish whose influence brought him five new adherents—some of them were kinsfolk of Khadeeja and the little band soon numbered 40 converts. The injunction of Gabriel to preach, rapidly brought opposition and persecution, for the new departure aroused the violent animosity of the Quraish tribesmen of Mecca and the nascent faith of Islam was subjected to a bitter hostility which can hardly be wondered at. The teaching of Muhammad meant nothing short of a holy war against idolatry—it was a direct attack on the pagan worship of idols and, as such, was looked upon as equivalent to an attack on Mecca itself; Mecca being regarded as the religious centre of Arabia a considerable loss of revenue was feared if paganism were destroyed.

The opposition soon turned to open hostility, for the persecution became systematic, sustained and violent: every indignity, incivility, and insult was brought into

play until the danger of assassination became both apparent and imminent and Muhammad took refuge in flight to Medina where he had friends and converts and was accorded a hearty welcome. In this city a mosque was erected, Muhammad taking his share with the rest in the work of construction. There is something very sacred and inspiring in the thought of this first place of worship, partly built by the Great Founder of Islam Himself, and no doubt chiefly to mark the importance of the Hijrat and birth of Islam. This event has been termed the Land-Mark of Islam for from it the Mission of Muhammad commenced.

One very notable event took place when Muhammad was closely pursued by his enemies. He was accompanied on this occasion by one friend only—Abu Bakr. The two fugitives, hotly followed by a considerable band of his implacable foes, had taken refuge in a cave with a very narrow entrance. They heard their enemies searching about near the mouth and every instant expected to be discovered, hauled out and put to death. Abu Bakr said:—"O Muhammad, we are only two and how can we hope to fight against so large a band." "Brother, it is not so: we are *three* for Allah is here with us." As it turned out a little spider had with marvellous rapidity spun its web across the mouth of the cave and when the pursuers came up, one of them said:—"They cannot be in here for, lo, a spiders' web is right across the entrance and no man can be inside the cave." Muhammad had not even asked God's help ——*he was sure of it.*

It has been said that those who take the sword shall perish by the sword but there are instances when it is

necessary to resort to the use of lethal weapons. It has for generations past been the custom for certain sects to attribute to Muslims (and generally to Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Heretics) an insane desire for bloodshed. I am sorry to have to admit that the members of these sects call themselves "Christians" and that their regard for truth is completely smothered by their desire to injure the reputation of quite good people who happen to see things from a slightly different point of view. The Crusaders who attacked the Muslims in the old days, took the sword in the first instance and naturally the Muslims had to protect themselves. It was the Christians who were conspicuous in the dark ages, and indeed right up to the 17th century, for the cruelest torturings, burnings and murders conceivable to the mind of man.

With regard to the question of taking the sword I think I cannot do better than shortly quote from that excellent little book *The House Divided* by Khwaja Kamal-ud-din who points out that we cannot conscientiously stand aside as indifferent spectators when the liberties of an oppressed people are being trampled upon, or when religious freedom is at stake. Even so gentle a teacher as Jesus Christ, had to avow that he had come to send fire and sword into the world.

"There do arise situations when the use of arms becomes an unavoidable necessity. Could Jesus view the agonies of a down-trodden people without striking a blow in their defence? And such a blow might he not, in all probability, have struck had his ministry not been cut short? Likewise, Muhammad not only permitted the use of arms under such circumstances, but made it a

high virtue, saying that Paradise lies under the shadow of the sword.

“Islam has long been stigmatized as a religion of the sword; but that is a story of bygone days. Church dignitaries themselves spared no pains during the Great War to justify warfare from the teachings of Jesus; though, by the way, a contributor to the *Islamic Review* (Vol. v. No. 9) has shown that in their sermons on war the Bishops of London and Chelmsford were walking in the steps of Muhammad rather than of the Christ . . .

“The Qur-án sanctions the use of the sword under certain circumstances. First and foremost, in the cause of religion—religion as such it must be borne in mind, and not Islam exclusively. For this, two distinct occasions have been mentioned. First, when a house of worship is in danger—be it Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, or any other—a Muslim is enjoined to shed his very blood to save it from demolition. Says the Qur-án:— ‘Permission (to fight) is given to those upon whom war is made because they are oppressed, and most surely Allah is well able to assist them!’

“Those who have been expelled from their homes without a just cause except that they say: our Lord is Allah. And had there not been Allah’s repelling some people by others, certainly there would have been pulled down cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques in which Allah’s name is much remembered; and surely Allah will help him who helps *His Cause*; Most surely Allah is strong, Mighty (Chap. XXII, v. 39—40).

“It is significant that the Mosque is mentioned last of all. This single verse has since been responsible for

the safety of all buildings dedicated to any form of worship. Notwithstanding a thousand years of Muslim rule, India is still the home of thousands of the temples of idolatry. Can history produce a parallel to such magnanimity? Where are the great and georgeous Mosques, one may ask, that were once the glory of Spain, Sicily, Southern France, Malta, and elsewhere? To pick out a solitary instance here and there of the conversion of a non-Muslim House of worship into a Mosque, is to make a mountain out of a mole-hill. Such cases—which are too rare to deserve any serious mention at all—are exceptions due to the indiscreetness on the part of individuals, and do, actually only tend to establish the rule.

“Again, the use of the sword is also permissible when freedom of conscience is at stake. Of all religions, Islam stands conspicuous in establishing a perfection of religious freedom. ‘There is no compulsion in matters religious,’ proclaims the Qur-án (Chap. II. v. 256), which has since been the Magna Charta of religion for peoples of all creeds under the rule of Islam. Not only is all interference with another’s religious views forbidden, but, should such interference be enforced at the point of the sword, it is the duty of a Muslim to repel it with the sword. In the matter of religion, none may stand between God and man. It is the birth-right of man to hold whatever conviction he deems right. Persecution of others must be resisted at all costs by a Muslim, irrespective of whether the aggrieved be a Jew, or a Christian, or of any other faith. For this purpose the Muslim is not only allowed, but enjoined, to fight until perfect religious liberty has been established. (See

Muhammad Ali's translation of the Holy Qur-án, Chap. II. v. 192, 193.)

"As regards temporal affairs, authority to wield the sword has been limited to one, and only one, case—self-defence. This provision has been further restricted by the condition that as soon as the enemy shall have suspended hostilities, and shown an inclination towards peace, then Muslims must do the same. This is a principle which Britain acted upon during the Great War; and the Church supported her. Whatever the interpretation put upon the Sermon on the Mount, the fact remains that in comporting herself as she did in the Great War, Britain followed the teaching and example of the Prophet of Arabia.

"Muhammad had to fight seven battles in all, of which the first three—the principal ones, the rest being more of the nature of skirmishes when a general state of war prevails—best illustrate the principle in question. For thirteen long years the Prophet and his comrades were the victims of inhuman persecutions at the hands of the Meccans—an historical fact admitted by friend and foe. He suffered all this without retaliation. When however things reached a pitch when his life itself was in imminent danger, some safeguard became necessary. The very night when the conspirators were to make away with him, he managed to escape with his life to Medina, in the company of his devoted friend Abu Bakr. But his enemies did not let him alone, even in this far-off refuge—150 miles from Mecca. Jealous of his success in this new place of sojourn, they made repeated efforts to nip the tender plant of Islam in the bud. In all these three battles, the locality of the battle-field is,

I think, a decisive factor showing that the Muslims were constrained to resort to the sword in sheer self-defence. The first of these was fought at Badr, 120 miles distant from Mecca, the enemy head quarters, and 30 miles from Medina. And what was the strength of the contending parties? 313 Muslims against 1000 Meccans.

“Uhud was the scene of the second battle. It was still nearer the Muslim’s home of adoption—only 12 miles from Medina. The relative strength this time was about 1000 Muslims to 3000 Meccans.

“The third attack was on the town itself. Siege was laid to Medina with an army 10,000 strong. Do not these facts and figures—the locality of the action and the relative strength of the two—furnish conclusive testimony to the fact that self-defence was the only motive which prompted the Muslims to strike a blow? This is exactly the occasion when Jesus would have us sell our clothes to purchase swords. But it was left to Muhammad to illustrate also the practical application of the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, and this he did in a manner unique in the history of the world. With 10,000 men he marched against Mecca—the same Mecca which was the scene, for long years, of Muslim persecution. The town surrendered, and was occupied without the spilling of a drop of blood. The vanquished, who had spared no ingenuity in inflicting tortures on Muslims—the ringleaders of the deadly opposition, tormentors, oppressors and assassins—lay wholly at the mercy of the victors. No punishment would have been too hard for them, according to modern military laws. But was it that the ‘Spirit of Truth’ had to perfect the

teachings of the Preacher of the Sermon on the Mount—to lead people into ‘all truth?’ Was it for him to illustrate, in practice, the precept of Jesus, ‘Love thine enemy?’

“Summoning their leading men, he announced his decision—a decision beyond their wildest expectations of leniency—‘This day there shall be no reproach on you.’ Such a magnanimous amnesty secured to the Muslims what could never have been gained in any other way—victory over their enemies’ hearts, by love. The gulf of decades of bloodthirsty malice was bridged by a single stroke. Love was applied to anoint and heal the raw wound of hate. The great and famous dynasty of Muslim rulers—the Umayyads—to whom the world is indebted for vast treasures of art, of science and of philosophy, sprang from the descendants of the ringleader of enemies thus won over.

“So long as man is what he is, and his nature is not a true Muslim or a true Christian nature—which are at bottom one and the same—war will remain an indispensable factor of human life.”

It is interesting to note that when Muhammad first took refuge in Medina as a fugitive the Jews formed a strong colony in Medina and at first welcomed him, expecting that he would realize their long cherished dream. Finding that his scheme was too comprehensive they became hostile to him and allied themselves with his enemies the Quraish. A protracted struggle then commenced and numerous conflicts took place.

At the battle of Badr the Muslims were victorious against heavy odds and this was followed by the battle of Uhud where the Prophet was severely wounded and

the Muslims suffered a reverse. With the fall of Mecca Arabia came under the dominion of Muhammad and the news of the capture of the Holy City spread far and wide and the heads of the chief clansmen and tribesmen of the country flocked to tender their submission or enter into an alliance with him. He virtually became the acknowledged head or un-crowned King of all the territories of Arabia from the Mediterranean to the extreme limits of the fertile Yemen district.

Following the recognition of Islam and the destruction of the pagan idols at Mecca came the time for receiving and sending deputations to the neighbouring states with a view to extending the teachings of Islam to the non-Arab races. He dispatched a letter to Maqauqis, the Christian King of Egypt, which is extant, inviting him to embrace Islam. The message was a courteously received by the King who said that he did not find him enjoin aught which he should abstain from, and did not consider him a magician or one with erroneous views, nor did he consider him a soothsayer or liar, but he considered that he showed signs of prophethood.

Letters were also sent to the Kings of Abyssinia, Persia, Syria, and to the chieftans of certain of the Arabian provinces. One which was written to Munzar, King of Yemen, is still preserved at Damascus. The letter to Heraclius was read by him at Jerusalem, whilst that which was sent to Chosroes was treated with contempt and torn in pieces.

When the Muslim Commonwealth was established at Medina, it was sought to enlist the sympathy of the Jews who formed an influential and numerous section of

the people. He granted them a charter embodying principles of equality, security and community of interests as well as guarantees of civil rights and perfect religious freedom. They were secured against insults and vexations and both patrons and clients were to have equal rights. All Muslims were required to hold in abhorrence all those guilty of crime. These laws constituted Muhammad Chief Magistrate and guardian of the people, their lives and liberties. Soon after the formation of the beneficent laws in their protection the treachery of the Jews compelled him to take action against them and to lay siege to their stronghold which surrendered after making a brief resistance.

The Medina Commonwealth was based on a just and equitable code of laws, the practice of usury was prohibited as also was the cornering of food-stuffs which had often proved a great hardship in times of scarcity and gave rise to much distress amongst the poor. Intemperance was discouraged as a source of moral weakness and degradation—it is hinted that our modern politicians and social reformers might pick up a great deal of useful information from the Medina Code.

With the completion of this important Code of Laws the Mission and life work of Muhammad may be said to have terminated: he had lived to see the establishment of a flourishing community in reformed Arabia; the monotheistic Faith of Islam accepted by his country and being spread beyond its border and must have experienced intense happiness at beholding the fruition of all the long years of waiting for success.

The last year of his life was spent at Medina, and the earlier part of that year was devoted to organizing

and perfecting the Commonwealth and its units and strengthening its borders.

His last days were spent with Ayesha close to the Mosque where, as long as his strength permitted, he joined in the public prayers. His strength gradually failed and in June 632 A.D. there departed the Soul of the most remarkable personality, having regard to both spiritual and material gifts ever known on earth. Endowed with a marvellous power over men his genius and inspirations seem to live over again in the great and compelling force of Islam which to-day consoles and rules the spirits of more than one third of the inhabitants of the globe. He seemed to be above the petty irritations of life: the same in power and weakness, in affluence and poverty, in triumph or in failure, ever reposing his trust and confidence in God. Abstemious, frugal and industrious, as the records of the time show, the founder of an Empire and of a world-wide religion, he was as self-effacing and humble in his fully-realized achievements as when he was a persecuted and rejected outcast from his own people.