



Dr. G. W. LEITNER.

MUHAMMADANISM¹

The idea of Muhammad was to convert millions of the human race to a high form of culture and civilization

There would be no Nihilists or Socialists in Europe if Western society was constituted on the basis of Islam

Muhammad raised the status of woman from being a property to that of a proprietor

by **GOTTLIEB WILLIAM LEITNER**

Islam has been greatly misunderstood, even by scholars like William Muir

My special knowledge of Muhammadanism began in a mosque school at Constantinople in 1854, where I learnt considerable portions of the Qur'an by heart. I have associated with Muhammadans of different sects in Turkey, India and elsewhere, and have studied Arabic, the language in which their sacred literature is written. I may at once point out that without a knowledge of Arabic it is impossible to exercise any influence on the Muhammadan mind; but I would add that there is something better than mere knowledge, and that is sympathy: sympathy is the key to the meaning of knowledge — that which breathes life into what otherwise would be dead bones.

There are instances of eminent scholars who, for want of sympathy, have greatly misjudged Muhammadanism. Sir William Muir, for example, has been led into very serious mistakes in dealing with this religion.

Let us hope that the present occasion may help, in however humble a degree, to cement that "fellow-feeling" which ought to exist between all religions.

"In proportion as we love truth more and victory less," says Herbert Spencer, "we shall become anxious to know what it is which leads our opponents to think as they do."

More profound is the Tibetan Buddhist Lama's vow never to think, much less to say, that his own religion is better than that of others. The edicts of Asoka, carved on rocks and more monumental than brass, also recommend his subjects to praise the faith of others.

As regards the great religion with which we are dealing today. I have adopted the term "Muhammadanism" in order to limit this address to the creed as now professed by Muhammadans. If I had used the better heading "Islam", which means the creed of "resignation to the Divine Will", a more extensive treatment would have been necessary than can be afforded in the course of an hour.

Islam is a perfect religion — not merely imitative or eclectic of Judaism and Christianity

Muhammadanism is not the religion of the Prophet Muhammad because he only professed to preach the religion of his predecessors, the Jews and the Christians: both of these faiths being stages in the faith of "Islam", of which the form preached by Muhammad is the perfection and the seal.

"To walk with God," to have God with us in our daily life with the object of obtaining the "peace that passeth all understanding", "to submit to the Divine Will" — this we too profess to seek: but in Muhammadanism this profession is translated into practice, and is the cornerstone of the edifice of that faith.

In one sense Muhammadanism is like, and in another sense unlike, Judaism and Christianity. To walk with God, to have God ever present in all our acts, is no doubt what the prophets of both these religions taught; and in that sense they were all Muhammadans, or rather "Muslims", namely, professors of the faith of "Islam".

But so far as I know either of Judaism or of Christianity, the system preached by Muhammad was not merely imitative or eclectic; it was also "inspired" — if there be such a process as inspiration from the source of all goodness. Indeed, I venture to state in all humility that if self-sacrifice, honesty of purpose, unswerving belief in one's mission, a marvellous insight into existing wrong or error,

¹ This is a report of an extempore address delivered at South Place Chapel, Finsbury, on Sunday afternoon, 6th January 1889. This was originally reported in *The Times* of July 1889 and later reprinted in the form of a booklet with additional appendices by Swan Sonnenschein & Co., London. We have retained the original title of this talk, i.e., "Muhammadanism," because Dr. G. W. Leitner had a reason for choosing this misnomer which he explains in the course of his address. Please refer to the sixth paragraph.—Editor, *The Islamic Review*.

and the perception and use of the best means for its removal, are among the outward and visible signs of inspiration, the mission of Muhammad was "inspired".

Islam is pure Judaism plus proselytism, pure Christianity minus the teaching of St. Paul

The Judaism known to Muhammad was chiefly the traditional "Masora" as distinguished from the "Markaba"; indeed, pure Judaism as distinct from Buddhistic or Alexandrian importations into it.

The Christianity also which Muhammad desired to restore to its purity was the preaching of Christ, as distinguished on the one part from the mystic creed of St. Paul, and the outrageous errors of certain Christian sects known to the Arabs.

Muhammad thought the Jews would accept him as their Messiah, but the "exclusiveness" of the Jews prevented this. He, however, insisted on the Arabs and on "believers" generally participating in the blessings of their common ancestor, Abraham; and his creed, therefore, became Judaism plus proselytism, and Christianity minus the teaching of St. Paul.

The idea of Muhammad not to limit the benefits of Abraham's religion to his own people, but to extend them to the world, has thus become the means of converting to a high form of culture and of civilization millions of the human race, who would either otherwise have remained sunk in barbarism, or would not have been raised to that brotherhood which "Islam" not only preaches but practices.

The founder of Muhammadanism has been talked of by Christians in the most unworthy manner. Still, at first, he was regarded as a Quasi-Christian Sectarian. Dante refers to Muhammad as a heretic in his *Inferno*: and indeed, in another sense, he was only a dissenter from one of the many forms which have adopted the appellation of "Christian". Some authors alleged that his religion was taken from the Talmud; but it seems to me that the question of what Muhammadanism really is cannot be summed up better than in stating it to be pure Judaism plus proselytism, and original Christianity minus the teaching of St. Paul. This as regards its theory: in practice it is far more than modern Christianity in its artificial European aspect — the "Sermon on the Mount" translated into daily life.

There is no priesthood in Islam

Every Muhammadan is a church in himself: everyone is allowed to give an opinion on a religious matter, on the basis of the belief common to his correligious. They are not slaves to priests: they pray to God without an intermediary, and their place of worship is wherever they happen to be at the appointed hours of prayer.

Their preachers can also follow other vocations; some of them are shoemakers, etc. But of course, the bulk of their ministers of religion are so by profession in regulated communities.

There is no such thing as a Pope among them.

Any ordinary Muhammadan may say, "By resigning myself to the Divine Will I am myself the representative of the faith of which the Prophet Muhammad was the exponent." Indeed, the bulk of Muhammadans throughout the world are guided by the *confidelium*. Those are the

Sunnis or *al-Jama'at*, in contradistinction to the second most important sect, the Shi'ahs, which considers Muhammad and his lineal successors to be practically infallible. The Shi'ahs venerate the hereditary principle, and their religious profession is regulated by the interpretation of the Qur'an and of their traditions by their leading priests or learned men the *Mujtahids*.

Muhammad himself did not make any claim to infallibility. On one occasion he had a revelation censuring himself severely for having turned away from a beggar in order to speak to an illustrious man of the commonwealth, and he published this revelation, the very last thing which he would have done had he been an imposter, as ignorant Christians call the great Arab Prophet. Allow me now to read to you the letter of an eminent religious Muhammadan functionary, the present *Sheikh al-Islam* of Constantinople, to a convert, Mr. Schumann, which I humbly venture to endorse, except the following passage: "On the day when you were converted to Islam your sins were taken into account." There is a revered saying that the "objection of one who is learned is better than the consent of a thousand who are ignorant"; and, without in the least professing to be learned, I can, from a Muhammadan standpoint, claim the privilege of a believer in objecting to a ruling which has probably been rendered incorrectly in translation, and which contradicts the injunction addressed to all to "avoid sin and apply yourselves to righteousness", whether Jew, Christian or Muhammadan.

The religious practices of Islam

With regard to the outward signs of a Muhammadan, such as prayer, alms, fasting and pilgrimage, the religious books contain the necessary instructions. As for prayer, they practically enforce that "cleanliness is next to godliness", for ablutions precede prayer. The regulations regarding both acts are minute, and as to their ritual it is not of every Christian that a priest could say what the *Sheikh al-Islam* says of every Muhammadan: "These things, however, may be learnt from the first Musulman that you meet."

Their alms, which are rightly called only a pecuniary prayer, consist in giving up a portion, not less than a 40th part, or 2½ per cent, of their goods, to the poor. These alms go into the public treasury, and are applied, among other things, to the redemption of slaves, another subject regarding which Christians ignorantly accuse Muhammadans of a state of things which Muhammad did his best successfully to mitigate by a practical legislation towards its eventual abolition.

But, reverting to alms, in order that these be acceptable to God, the givers must show that they are in lawful possession of the gift (which, it is needless to add, can be increased beyond the legal minimum). It would not do "to rob a till in order to build a chapel", but those who voluntarily give more than the fortieth part will be rewarded by God. The pilgrimage to Mecca is of great importance; as Muhammadans meet there from all parts of the world, it is a bond of union, and creates a real visible Muhammadan church such as the Christian world, with its innumerable sub-divisions, does not yet possess for the assembly of an entire Christianity. It is, moreover, a great stimulus for the diffusion of culture by means of a common sacred language, Arabic, in the same way as was the case in Europe when Latin was the only language spoken by all learned persons in addition to their native tongue. Thus by knowing Arabic one has a key not only to the Muhammadan religion but

also to the heart of the whole Muhammadan world. In Asia, and even Africa, in spite of the so-called semi-barbarism, any abstract Arabic word can become the common property of all the Arabic-speaking or Arabic-revering nations, and Muhammadans thus possess an agency of civilization and culture which is denied to other faiths.

Fasting is, of course, a mere discipline, but it is also of great hygienic value, and, as stated by the *Sheikh al-Islam*, "The fulfilment of the duties of purity and cleanliness, which are rational and also fulfil the hygienic requirements of the physician".

Indeed, as regards Muhammadan rules generally regarding abstention from wine, pork, improperly slaughtered flesh, the disposal of what would be injurious if not quickly made away with, etc., it may safely be asserted that they were not laid down to worry those who fulfil them, but to benefit them in body and mind.

With regard to social gradation, the rich man is considered to be the natural protector of the poor, and the poor man takes his place at the table of the rich. Nowhere in Muhammadan society is there any invidious distinction between rich and poor; and even a Muhammadan slave is not only a member of the household but also has far greater chances of rising to a position in the government or in society than an English pauper.

Food is given to anyone who needs it, and charity is administered direct, and not by the circuitous means of a Poor Law system. Indeed, from a Muhammadan, as also from the Buddhistic, point of view, the giving of charity puts the giver into a state of obligation to the receiver, since it enables the former to cultivate his sense of benevolence.

In the same way, among the Hindu Brahmins, when even a "sweeper" comes to ask for alms at a Brahmin's door, the latter worships him for having afforded him the opportunity for the exercise of charity. Such a view, in my humble opinion, includes all the "graces" of the truest and widest Christian charity, and from that standpoint I can only say that the best "Christians" I ever knew were a Brahmin who had never heard the name of Christ, an old Muhammadan who revered Him as a prophet, and a poor Jew who nursed through a long illness the Christian who had deprived him of his little all.

Servants, although they partake of meals after, fare exactly the same as their masters.

In a mosque there is perfect equality among worshippers; there are no pews; the "Imam" of the place or any other worshipper may lead the prayers, and nothing can be a more devotional sight than a crowd of Muslim worshippers going through their various genuflexions with perfect regularity and silence.

Englishmen object to formalism, but they often worship routine and the letter, rather than the spirit, of rules. Indeed, it may be said that English precision is at the foot of a great deal of evil; and if charity in its widest sense is the greatest of virtues, the formalities that accompany its collection and distribution in this country destroy its very grace.

We do not seem to recognize that laws are laid down for general guidance and that the letter of such laws is not to be the lord but the servant of our interpretation of them. Above all, our abstract charity, our abstract religion, our hard-and-fast rules, are in contrast to the personal, individual, concrete, dramatic, allegorical and imaginative which characterize the Eastern faiths and forms that have

been adapted by us. There would be no Nihilists and no Socialists in Europe were Western society constituted on the basis of Muhammadanism; for in it a man is not taught to be dissatisfied, as is the great effort, aim and result of our civilization.

Marriage and divorce in Islam, and misconceptions about polygamy

I would draw your attention to what *Sheikh al-Islam* says regarding marriage. The marriage contract requires the attestation of two witnesses, and constitutes a religious act; but it is not sacramental, as with Christians and Hindus.

The husband is to enjoy his wife's company, but he cannot force her to accompany him to another country; he is, however, in the latter case, bound to continue to maintain her.

When a connubial quarrel takes place, arbitrators may be chosen, and divorce is allowed if the parties cannot remain together otherwise than in a state of enmity. You will admit that Muhammadan legislation on the subject of marriage does not deserve the opprobrium that has been cast on it by Christian writers.

The statement that among Muhammadans there exists the power of unlimited marriage along with unlimited power of divorce is not true. Divorce is not such an easy matter, as you may have perceived from the letter of the *Sheikh al-Islam*, for it cannot be obtained without the judgment of arbitrators.

Besides, at marriage a certain dowry is named, which has to be paid to the wife in the event of a divorce; and many women fix the amount at a sum far larger than the husband would ever be able to pay, in order to secure themselves against the danger of a divorce.

The Christian, or rather Hindu, view of marriage, that it is spiritual, is no doubt higher than the Muhammadan, but the practice of Christian countries generally shows less observance of the sacredness of the marriage-tie than that of the Muhammadans.

Among the Hindus marriage, being spiritual, cannot be dissolved, and among the Roman Catholics it can only be dissolved with the greatest difficulty; but whether the sacramental or the contract view of marriage be taken, the union is, as a matter of fact, in the vast majority of cases of a permanent nature in all countries and among all religions, though I grieve to have to admit that, having lived among Muhammadans from 1848 until recently, in spite of their "unlimited opportunity for divorce" I have known of more cases of divorce among Christians than among Muslims. I also have no hesitation in affirming that in kindness to their family, to the learned or aged, to strangers, and to brute creation, the bulk of Muhammadans are a pattern to so-called Christians.

A few words may be said regarding the much-abused subject of Muhammadan polygamy. Apart from the fact that polygamy tends to provide for the surplus female population in the few places where there is such surplus, and that polygamy is a check on prostitution and its attendant evils, as also a protection against illegitimacy of birth, it cannot be denied that the vast majority of Muhammadans have only one wife. This is largely due to the teaching of Muhammadanism.

Muhammad came into a state of society where to have a daughter was considered to be a misfortune, and where

female children were sometimes buried alive. There was no limit to the number of women that a man could marry, and they were a part of the property divided among the heirs of a deceased person.

On the unlimited polygamy which produced this state of things Muhammad put a check; he directed that a man could only enter into the marriage contract with two, three or four wives, if he could behave with equal justice and equal love to them all.

Unless he could do that he was only permitted to marry one wife. Now, as practically no one can be, as a rule, equally fair and loving to two or more wives, the spirit of Muhammad's legislation is clearly in favour of monogamy.

He also raised woman from the condition of being a property to that of a proprietor, and he constituted her as the first "legal" sharer whose interests the Muhammadan law has to consult.

Muhammad's character

The allegation has been made against Muhammad that by his own example he justified profligacy.

Let this statement be examined. Fortunately, we are not dealing with a legendary individual, but with an historical person, whose almost every act and saying is recorded in the *Hadiths*, or collections of Traditions, which next to the Qur'an form a rule of Muhammadan conduct. These "Acts of the Apostles" are subjected to the most stringent rules of criticism as to their authenticity, and unless the story of an act or saying of the Prophet can be traced to one of his own companions, it is thrown out of the order of traditions, which form the subject of critical investigation as to their actual occurrence adopted by Muhammadan commentators.

We have certainly far less authority of a secular character for the sayings and doings of our Lord Jesus Christ. Well, then, on what authorities, good, bad or doubtful, do the allegations of Muhammad's profligacy rest? I have no hesitation in affirming that, following every such story to its source, it will be found to be entirely unsubstantiated, and that, on the contrary, to the very great credit of Muhammad, in spite of many temptations, he preserved the utmost chastity in a state of society which did not practice that virtue.

Living among heathen Arabs, he remained perfectly chaste till, at the age of twenty-five, he married a woman of forty; and he married her because she was his benefactor and believed in his sacred mission. As he stated years after her death to a young and beautiful wife, who was "only jealous of the old and dead Khadija", in answer to her question "Am I not so good as she?" "No, you are not so good; for she believed in me when no one else did, she was my first disciple, and she honoured and protected me when I was poor and forsaken."

During the whole period of his marriage with her, twenty years,* he remained absolutely faithful to her.

It is true, at the age of fifty-five, we find him taking wife after wife; but it is fair to assume that in the case of a man who had shown such self-control till that age, there may be reasons other than those assigned by Christian writers for his many marriages. What are these reasons?

I believe that the real cause of his many marriages at an old age was charity, and in order to protect the widows of his persecuted followers.

The Prophet's social reforms

Persecution was great against his followers, "the believers in one God". At one time no one was allowed to give them food, and some of them were obliged to escape to Abyssinia in order to seek refuge with the Christian king of that land. The king did not give them up to their persecutors. Some of them died in Abyssinia; and their widows, who would otherwise have perished, Muhammad took into his household. The idea that the Prophet had any improper intention in so doing is without foundation; especially if we consider that he had given abundant proof during his youth of continence. The story of the marriage of the Prophet to Zainab, the divorced wife of his freedman and adopted son, Zaid, has also given rise to misconception. It may be premised that the heathen Arabs considered it wrong to marry the divorced wife of an adopted son, although they had no objection to marry the wives (excluding their own mother) of a deceased father, just as some people nowadays might not mind breaking the Decalogue who would on no account "whistle on a Sunday".

Muhammad excluded all this "nonsense" by saying that an adopted child was not a real child; and this being so, it could be supposed to be within the prohibited degrees. To affirm this truth and not to justify a new marriage the Prophet received a revelation, which has been misconstrued as a sanction of a wrongful act.

It really seems to me that if men cultivated something like true charity they would have a different view of other religions than they now hold, and that they would endeavour to learn about them from their original sources, instead of from the prejudiced second-hand reports of the opponents of these religions.

Celibacy is rare among Muslims, and there are very few, if any, marriageable women who are not married.

Adultery is punished equally both in men and women. The culprit is publicly flogged with a hundred stripes.

With regard to concubine slaves, the Muhammadan law will not allow their offspring to be branded with infamy; and the child of the slave inherits with the children of its master. Among us an illegitimate child has little protection, and even our highest ideal of marriage falls far short of, for example, the Hindu marriage in a good caste, in which the wife prays for the salvation of her husband, as without her prayer his salvation could not be accomplished.

The Muhammadans have no taverns, gaming houses or brothels, nor have they any idea of legalizing prostitution; and as regards their general conversation it is infinitely more decent, as a rule, than that of most Europeans. I have seen young Muhammadan fellows at school and college, and their conduct and talk is far better than is the case among Western young men.

Indeed, the talk of the latter is often such as would incur punishment in a Muhammadan land.

The married woman is in a better legal position than the married Englishwoman, and she can give evidence in attestation of a birth, marriage or death, which is still denied to a woman in Republican France.

The true meaning of Jihad

As regards the assumed inimitability of the Muhammadan religion, there is a liberty of interpretation

* Twenty-seven years.—Ed., *J.R.*

of the Qur'an which enables "Islam" to be adapted to every sect and country, i.e., the law laid down for its interpretation that a conditional sentence has to take precedence of an absolute one, is one that secures every reasonable liberty of conscience: i.e., "fight the infidels" is an absolute sentence; "fight the infidels if they attack you first" is a conditional sentence, and has therefore first to be taken into account in determining the much misunderstood question of the "holy war", or rather *Jihad* against infidels. Indeed, no such war is legitimate except in self-defence against those who persecute Muhammadans *because* they believe in one God and who turn them out from their homes; in other words, as in the case of the Muslim refugees to Abyssinia. As for religious toleration, there is much more of it in practice among Muhammadans than *has* been the case, at any rate, in Christian countries; and had this not been the fact, the Armenian, Greek and Jewish communities would not have preserved their autonomy, religion and language under, say, Turkish rule — a rule, I may add from personal knowledge, which offers many lessons of forbearance and humanity to Christian legislation.

Muhammad included Jews and Christians among Muslims; for those who believe in God and the last day "shall have no fear upon them, neither shall they grieve".

In the chapter on "Pilgrimage" in the Qur'an, the object of a religious war is declared to be the protection of "mosques, synagogues and churches", for in them alike "the name of God is frequently commemorated".

A good Christian should revere truths enunciated by the Prophet

Is not this as tolerant a position as we have only reached after centuries (if, indeed, judging from the present foolish crusade against Muhammadanism, which we are confounding with slavery, we *have* reached such a position)?

I know many Muhammadans who have subscribed to churches; how many Christians subscribe to Mosques? Yet in them "the name of God" is indeed commemorated.²

As for Muhammadan persecutions of Christians, *ab uno disce omnes*. When Omar, in order to avenge a former massacre of Jerusalem by the Crusaders, swore to put the defenders of the city to death, he refrained from doing so after taking it: for, as he said, "I will rather incur the sin of breaking my oath than put to death a single creature of God".

I cannot conclude this address better than by insisting on the fact that the Jewish, Christian and Muhammadan religions are sister-faiths, having a common origin; and by expressing a hope that the day will come when Christians will honour Christ more by also honouring Muhammad.

There is a common ground between Muhammadanism and Christianity, and he is a better Christian who reveres the truths enunciated by the Prophet Muhammad.

² It was perhaps a realization of this fact which induced Dr. G. W. Leitner to build the Shah Jehan Mosque at Woking.—Ed., *I.R.*

THE DIVINE DIVAN

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I am thy God, I am thy Guide.
Turn not from My Grace aside.
I am thy God, I am thy Lord.
Beside Me none should be adored,
The One Supreme in heaven and earth.
What are all thy wishes worth,
If they be not brought to birth
By the One Belovéd Lord,
By Whom heaven and earth is stored
With mercies manifold and rich reward
For those who live but to their Lord,
The One Supreme, the Heart's-Adored?

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Set thy lips to giving praise,
Set thy heart in giving praise,
All thy days!
What is life worth, if it be not
Purest joy, where sorrow is not?
How can this be?
Easily.
Set thy lips to giving praise,
Set thy heart to giving praise,
All thy days!
To the One Belovéd Lord, Eternal.
Let Him guide thee in thy ways!

William Bashyr Pickard.