

THE ORIGINS OF THE QUR'AN

AN ENQUIRY INTO THE SOURCES OF ISLAM

BY THE

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"Verily it is a glorious Qur'an written on a preserved table."

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CONTENTS

ORIGINS OF THE QUR'AN

PREFACE

THIS little book has no claim to originality. It is principally based upon the larger works of Geiger, Tisdall, Zwemer, Muir, Sell and Imadu'd-Din, and aims at presenting in a brief, and therefore inexpensive, form for Indian readers some of the results of the exhaustive studies of those scholars. If it helps any enquiring Muslims to understand more clearly the origin of the faith taught by Muhammad, it will have accomplished, the purpose, for which it was written. The transliteration adopted is that recommended the Royal Asiatic Society, namely,

INTRODUCTION

THE word "Qur'an" is derived from the Arabic verb to read. It means "the reading," or rather "that which is to be read." It is taken from Suratu'l-'Alaq (xcv. 1)1 which is said to have been the first Sura revealed to Muhammad. This word, first used to designate a portion only of the Qur'an, was subsequently, and is now, used to describe the whole collection of the "revelations" made to Muhammad. The Traditions relate many wonderful stories regarding the descent of inspiration upon Muhammad, of which 'Ayesha, the favourite wife of the Prophet, has preserved the following: "The first revelations which the Prophet received were in true dreams, and he never dreamt but it came like the dawn of day. After this the Prophet became fond of retirement, and used to seclude himself in a cave in Mount Hira and worship there day and night till one day the angel came to him and said, 'Read,' but the Prophet said, 'I am not a reader.' 'Then,' said Muhammad, 'he took hold of me and squeezed me as much as I could bear, and he then let me go and again he said, 'Read,'

1

and I said, 'I am not a reader.' Then he took hold of me a second time and squeezed me as much as I could bear, and then let me go and said, 'Read,' and I said, 'I am not a reader.' Then he took hold of me a third time and squeezed me as much as I could bear and said

1

'Recite! in the name of thy Lord who created; - Created man from the clots of blood; - Recite thou! for thy Lord is most Beneficent, who hath taught the use of the pen; - Hath taught man that which he knoweth not.' Then the Prophet repeated the words himself, and with his heart trembling returned to Khadija and said, 'Wrap me up! Wrap me up!' and they wrapped him up in a garment until his fear was dispelled."2

Such Traditions as the one related above, together with the oft-repeated statements of the Qur'an itself, form the basis of the Muhammadan belief that the Qur'an is the uncreated word of God which was communicated to Muhammad in a miraculous manner, chiefly by the mediation of the angel Gabriel. The Qur'an, it is said, was extant in the highest heaven from all eternity, written on the

Lauhu'l-Mahfuz, or the "preserved table," near the throne of God, and then sent down to the lowest heaven in the month of Ramadan, whence it was revealed to Muhammad

1 Suratu'l-'Alaq (xcvi. 1--5.)

2 Mishkatu'l-Masabih,, xxiv. 5.

piecemeal during a period of some twenty-three years. The Qur'an abounds in passages asserting its divine origin, and many are the anathemas hurled at those who refuse to acknowledge its claims. Bukhari and others have preserved numerous Traditions, for which we have no space here, relating the manner and occasion of these "revelations;" whilst later writers, such as Jalalu'd-Din as-Syuti, have classified and arranged the different modes of this divine inspiration such as, by the mediation of an angel, by suggestion in the heart of the Prophet, by dreams, by direct communication from God to the Prophet and so forth. We are not concerned here, however, with these details,¹ and for the purposes of this enquiry it must suffice to state the bare fact that the Qur'an is held in the highest esteem by 200,000,000 of people, taking the average estimate, who look upon it as the very word of God, existent in heaven from all eternity, and finally given to the world through the agency of his chosen messenger Muhammad.

The purpose of this small book is to examine this stupendous claim, and to enquire whether the contents of the Qur'an may not be accounted for apart from this theory of divine inspiration. To the Muhammadan reader, whose mind revolts from the suggestion to subject the holy Qur'an to such a critical study, we commend the following words of Sir Syed Ahmad in his commentary on the Holy Bible.² This Muhammadan

¹ For a full account of the Collectors of Traditions and of the value of the various Traditions, see "Faith of Islam" (3rd ed Madras, 1907) pp. 93-101.

² Muhammadan Commentary on the Holy Bible, Part ii, p.335.

scholar says, "I can by no means rest content with the superstitious notion that Scripture, and all Scriptures in general, even the Holy Qur'an, must not be subjected to critical examination. Would any one imagine for a moment that the most exalted of blessings bestowed upon man, namely, the faculty of reason, is given to us to remain idle? Can we conscientiously and faithfully profess to be Christians or Muhammadans without being able to give a reason for our belief, or without exercising our intellect to the utmost of our ability in the thoughtful and reverent consideration and examination of the precious volume which is given us as a guide of our faith? ... On the contrary I would earnestly desire that those sacred writings be examined with fairness, and discussed with respectful but not impertinent freedom."

May the Muslim reader of this book, remembering the solemn and eternal nature of the issues involved, seek, in the spirit of Sir Syed Ahmad's statement, to investigate with candid freedom the book upon which his faith is based. For ourselves we believe, and will try to prove that the Qur'an is nothing more than a heterogeneous collection of doctrines and stories already current in Arabia in the time of Muhammad, which were adopted and altered by him, and afterwards given out from time to time as a direct revelation from God. To these stories were added a number of practical precepts, both positive and negative, which were called forth by the exigences of the time. In accordance with this plan we purpose to discuss in order (1) those portions of the Qur'an which Muhammad adopted from the heathen religions of his day; (2) those portions which

have a Jewish origin, both Biblical and Talmudic; (3) those portions which Muhammad learned from his Christian contemporaries; and finally (4) those portions of the Qur'an which were called forth by the special circumstances of the moment, and which were suited to support and sanction the varied actions of the Prophet.

CHAPTER I

HEATHEN BELIEFS AND PRACTICES INCORPORATED INTO THE QUR'AN

ISLAM may be said to be the most eclectic Faith existent in the world. Certainly its author, Muhammad, made wide use of the varied materials which lay within his reach.

It is generally supposed that Muhammad first brought to his fellow-countrymen the great truth of the unity of God. He himself seems to claim that it was revealed to him by direct revelation. Thus in Su'ratu'l-An'am (vi. 106) we read:

Follow thou, (O, Muhammad) that which hath been revealed to thee by thy Lord. There is no God but He. But apart from the fact that there were communities of both Jews and Christians in Arabia at the time of Muhammad from whom he could learn the doctrine of the unity of God, the slightest acquaintance with Arabian history reveals the fact that the Supreme God was known and worshipped by the Arabs long before the time of Muhammad. In pre-Islamic literature

Ila'h was used for any god, but "Al-Ilah," contracted to "Allah," was the name of the Supreme. The pagan poets Nabiga and Labid both repeatedly use the word "Allah" in the sense of the Supreme Deity, and the word is also used in that sense in the famous Mu'allaqat; whilst Ibn Hisham tells us that the Quraish, when performing the ceremony of Ihla'l, used the following words, "We are present in Thy service O God; Thou hast no partner except the partner of Thy dread; Thou ownest him and whatsoever he owneth." It should, moreover, be remembered that for centuries before Muhammad the Ka'ba was known as "Bait-Allah," the house of God; whilst the very name of Muhammad's father 'Abdu'llah shows the wide use of the word "Allah."¹ Sir Syed Ahmad in his work on the pre-Islamic Arabs freely acknowledges the existence of theistic sects amongst the Arabs before the time of Muhammad. He says: "There were two classes of theistic Arabs in the times of ignorance. The members of the second worshipped the true God, and acknowledged the judgment and the resurrection of the body at the last day, the immortality of the soul and its punishment and reward according to the actions done in the body. But they believed in neither prophets nor revelation." Again, he says: "There were four theistic sects in existence in Arabia before Islam which acknowledged a revelation, and which were prevalent at various times, namely, the Sabians, the Hanifs, the Jews and the Christians."² The reader is now in a position to see that the conception of a Supreme Being known as Allah, was well known to the contemporaries of Muhammad, and without doubt to Muhammad himself also, who adopted it as the foundation of his system, and gave it out as a truth revealed from heaven. Little wonder that the Arabs should

¹ See also Zwemer's "Moslem Doctrine of God."

¹ Syed Ahmad, "Maroam al-Arab qabl al-Islam," pp.222, 223.

retort that he was simply rehearsing "Tales of the Ancients,"¹ or that when Muhammad bade them believe in his revelations they should say, "He hath forged it himself."²

The period immediately preceding the time of Muhammad witnessed the rise of a theistic sect known as the Hanifs, a band of earnest reformers who rejected in toto the idolatry of their fellows, and stood for the worship of the one true God alone. The principal of these seekers after truth were Waraqa ibn Naufal, 'Ubaid Ullah, Ibn Jash, 'Uthman ibn al-Huwairith and Zaid ibn 'Amr. A Tradition records that "Zaid adopted this term Hanif at the instance of a Christian and of a Jew who both exhorted him to become a Hanif. Zaid having at the time renounced idolatry, and being unable to receive either Judaism or Christianity said, 'What is a Hanif?' They both told him it was the religion of Abraham who worshipped nothing but God. Upon this Zaid exclaimed, 'O God, I bear witness that I follow the religion of Abraham.'" Ibn Hisham, one of the earliest and most reliable of all the biographers of Muhammad has left in his book "Siratu'r-Rasul"³ an interesting account of the Hanifs in the course of which he tells us that: -

Waraqa ibn Naufal entered the Christian faith, and took up the study of the Scriptures of the Christians until, at last, he became well versed in the learning of the people of the book. The Traditionist Muslim further tells us that this Waraqa was the cousin of Khadija the wife of Muhammad, and that he translated the Injil into Arabic. From these interesting facts one or two conclusions may

¹ Suratu'l-Furqan (xxv. 6.)

2 Suratu't-Tur (lii. 33.)

3 Part 1, pp.76, 77 quoted in Tisdall's "Religion of the Crescent p.144.

easily be drawn. The first is that Muhammad must often have had intercourse with Waraqa, and the second is that the great truth of the unity of God could easily have been learnt in intercourse with these Hanifs.¹ One thing may be taken for certain, namely, that Muhammad was largely indebted to them for his theistic ideas; so much so that when he began to preach, he adopted the very term as the keynote of his discourses, and again and again asserted that he was simply sent to preach the religion of Abraham, whom he represented as a Hanif. From a wealth of references we quote two passages,² one from Su'ratu'l-An'am (vi. 162), where the Prophet says:-

Say, As for me, my Lord hath guided me into a straight path, a true religion, the religion of Abraham the Hanif. Again in Suratu Al-i-Imran (iii. 89), we read:-

Follow the religion of Abraham the Hanif.

Not only was the idea of one Supreme God known to the contemporaries of Muhammad, but it is an indisputable fact that most of the ceremonies connected with the Muhammadan pilgrimage also, which Muhammad pretended had been taught him by revelation, were already in existence long before his time, and were regularly performed by the idolatrous Arabs. The famous Muslim historian Abu'l-Fida

¹ For a critical study of the relation of Muhammad to the Hanifs, see Sell's "Essays in Islam," pp. 241-50 also Kuenen's "Hibbert Lectures," for 1882, p. 21.

² See also Su'ratu'l-Hajj (xxii. 77).

Suratu'n Nahl (xvi. 124).

Suratu'l-Baqarah (ii. 129).

Suratu'n-Nisa' (iv. 124).

candidly admits these facts. In his great history¹ we read that, "They (the pre-Islamic Arabs) used to perform the pilgrimage to the Ka'ba, where they put on the 'umra and ihra'm, and they also performed the tawaf (circumambulation of the Ka'ba), and the running at Mounts Safa and Marwa, and the casting of stones, and at the end of every three years spent a month in solitary contemplation ... and they performed circumcision, and cut off the right hand of thieves." This testimony of Abu'l-Fida leaves no room for doubt that all these practices, together with various ceremonial ablutions mentioned by him, were observed long before the time of Muhammad, and were simply borrowed by the latter and incorporated into his system as though revealed from heaven. Even his own immediate followers found it difficult to harmonize the retention of these idolatrous practices with a purely theistic system; and there is a Tradition recorded by Muslim which relates that,

'Umar bin al-Khattab kissed the black stone and said, 'My God, I well know that thou art simply a piece of stone, and if I had not seen the Apostle of God kiss thee, then I had not kissed thee.'²

But Muhammad did not restrict his plagiarism to the Arabs. His journeys into Syria and elsewhere brought him into contact with many Persians and others, from whom he adopted many ideas relating to heaven and hell, judgment and reward, which afterwards appeared, adapted and altered,

1 "Hist. Ante-Islamica" (ed. Fleischer), p.180.

1 Chapter on Pilgrimage, see 4, Part 3.

in the pure Arabic of the Quraish as a part of the revelations communicated to him by the angel Gabriel. Ibn Hisham, the biographer of Muhammad, mentions one, Salman by name, who afterwards became famous as a Companion of the Prophet. In Arabia, Muhammad had many opportunities of learning the tales and legends of the Persians, for Persian influence had long been felt in that land. Indeed for some time previous to the time of Muhammad a succession of Persian governors had ruled over Hira, Iraq and Yamen. The Muslim historian Abu'l-Fida mentions eight Persian princes who had thus ruled over Yamen. The influence which was exercised upon the Arabs by their more cultured conquerors could not have been small; on the contrary, there is ample evidence in Arabian history to show that the legends and poetry of the Persians were well known amongst the Arabs. A striking example of this is found in the work of Ibn Hisham. This writer tells us that in the early days of Islam not only were Persian stories current in Madina, but the Quraish were in the habit of comparing their tales with those of the Qur'an. He then tells us that one day Nazir ibn Harith stood up before the Quraish and recited to them certain stories of the Persian kings; and then continued,

By God, the stories of Muhammad are no better than my own; they are simply tales of the ancients which he hath written out as I have written mine. The author of the Randatu'l-Ahbab is even more candid, for he tells us that, "It was the Prophet's practice to converse in their own tongue with people of every nation who visited him; and hence the introduction of some Persian words into the Arabic language."

This damaging admission furnishes a key to the understanding of much of the Qur'an which would otherwise be difficult of apprehension, for it clearly indicates the source of the many Persian words and conceptions to be found therein. Any comparison of the Zoroastrian cosmogony with the stories of heaven and hell, death and judgment, which now adorn the pages of the Qur'an, will make it undeniably clear that Muhammad learned them from the many Persians with whom he had intercourse, and then gave them out to the ignorant Arabs in his own eloquent language as a revelation from heaven. The conceptions thus borrowed from Zoroastrianism may generally be traced by the presence of Persian words in the narratives which contain them, for it is certainly a legitimate inference to draw that, if the word used to describe a hitherto unknown religious conception be Persian in its origin, then the conception itself is also derived from that source. Now, it is a striking fact that in the book which Muhammad is never tired of describing as the "perspicuous Arabic Qur'an" we find quite a large number of foreign words embodying conceptions which are found in the very systems from whence those words come. The inference is clear that the conceptions themselves were borrowed also.

We now proceed to give two or three examples by way of proof.

Every Muslim is familiar with the story of Muhammad's celebrated night journey known as the Mi'raj. Yet the Qur'an, strange to say, has only the briefest reference to this wondrous event, which we here quote from Suratu Bani Isra'il (xvii. i).

Praise be to Him who transported His servant by night from the sacred temple to the farther temple, the circuit of which we have blessed, that We might show him of Our signs.

There is another reference in the 62nd verse of the same Sura to this same event, where we read:-

We have not appointed the vision which We showed thee, except as a test for men. This latter statement notwithstanding, Muhammadan commentators and Traditionists delight to paint in detail a literal bodily journey by night upon the back of a fabulous steed, not merely to the further temple (the temple of Jerusalem), but to heaven itself, where the Prophet ascended from story to story, until he reached the very presence of God and learned many of the secrets of heaven.

This story Muhammad must have learned from the Persians, for in the "Arta' Viraf Namak" which was written some four hundred years before his time, we find a similar story - agreeing in many of its details - in which the here a young magian priest of saintly life, ascended to heaven under the guidance of an angel, and after passing into the very presence of God and beholding the felicities of heaven returned to the earth to tell Zoroastrians what he had seen.¹

The Qur'a'nic stories of the Houris of Paradise are likewise borrowed from the Persians. Every reader of the Qur'an is familiar with the pictures of the sensual paradise found here, and of the Houris with large black eyes who recline upon luxurious couches waiting the embraces of the faithful. Out of a large number of passages we quote one from Suratu'r-Rahman (lv. 46-76).

¹ Chapter vii. §§ 1-4, quoted in Tisdall's "Sources of the Qur'an," p. 227 et seq

But for him who dreadeth the tribunal of his Lord, there are two gardens, planted with shady trees. In each of them are two fountains flowing. In each of them are of every fruit two kinds. They shall repose on couches, the linings whereof are of thick silk interwoven with gold; and the fruit of the two gardens are near at hand. Therein are (maidens) refraining their eyes, whom neither man nor demon hath approached before. They are like rubies and pearls. Shall the reward of good works be any other than good? And besides these there are two other gardens of a dark green. In each of them are two fountains pouring forth plenty of water. In each of them are fruits and palm-trees and pomegranates. Therein are agreeable and beautiful maidens, Houris kept in pavilions, whom neither man nor demon hath approached before. They shall recline on green cushions and beautiful carpets."

These tales of the Houris, many writers have shown, are derived from ancient Persian legends about beautiful female spirits who inhabit Paradise and captivate the hearts of men. These 'Pairakas,' as they are called, must often have been described to Muhammad in song and story; and the very word 'hur,' by which he described them in the Qur'an, and which is itself of Persian origin, and derived from the Pahlavi 'hur' meaning 'light,' sufficiently indicates the source of the whole story.¹

The same might be said of the fables of the Qur'an concerning the 'Jinn ' or evil spirits, for the Persian origin of the term - it being derived from the Avestic 'Jaina' - makes it clear that this conception also was derived from the Persians, whose books contain similar stories.

Many other resemblances might be pointed out between

¹ For a discussion on the derivation of this word, see Tisdall's "Religion of the Crescent," p. 171.

the Zoroastrian Mythology and the stories of the Qur'an; but enough has been written to show that one of the sources of the latter was undoubtedly the stories which Muhammad learned from time to time from the Persians with whom he came into contact. The very word for Paradise "firdaus," used so frequently in the Qur'an, is itself of Persian origin, as are not a few other words which have been used by Muhammad to describe conceptions which he borrowed from the Persians. The Muslim historian Abu'l-Fida gives us some interesting particulars of a sect, mentioned more than once in the Qur'an, known as the Sabians.¹ Amongst other things, he tells us, they observed prayer seven times a day. Now the times for five of these prayers correspond exactly with the five Muslim prayers; and as it is clear from Muhammad's references to the Sabians that he had close intercourse with them, it is probable that it was from them the Prophet obtained the practice which now prevails throughout the Muhammadan world.

The facts related above are so well known, that Muhammadan scholars are fain to admit the influence of contemporaneous thought in the formation of the Qur'an. Syed 'Amir 'Ali acknowledges that, "There is no doubt that in the Suras of the intermediate period, before the mind of the teacher had attained the full development of religious consciousness, and when it was necessary to formulate in language intelligible to the common folk of the desert, the realistic descriptions of heaven and hell, borrowed from the floating fancies of Zoroastrianism, Sabianism and the Talmudic Jew, attract the attention as a side picture, and then comes the real essence - the adoration of God in humility and love. The houris are creatures of Zoroastrian origin, so is paradise,

¹ "Hist. Ante-Islamica" (ed. Fleisher), p. 148, quoted in Tisdall's "Religion of the Crescent," p. 143.

(in Persian 'firdaus'), whilst hell, in the severity of its punishment, is Talmudic."1

But if the facts be as described above, how, we ask, can the Qur'an be accepted as the word of God, given in its entirety to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel? It is proved, on the contrary, that the Prophet adopted ideas and doctrines from the Hanifs, Sabians, Zoroastrians and others. The presumption is that the rest of the Qur'an is borrowed also. This we now proceed to show.

1 "Spirit of Islam" (ed. Calcutta, 1902), pp. 235-6.

CHAPTER II

JEWISH BELIEFS AND PRACTICES INCORPORATED INTO THE QUR'AN

WHILST a study of the Qur'an makes it abundantly clear what Muhammad borrowed from the idolatrous Arabs of his time, and also incorporated into his system not a little of Christian truth, yet an investigation into the sources of the Qur'an reveals the fact that Islam is, in the main, little more than Talmudic Judaism, plus the assertion of the apostleship of Muhammad. We purpose in this chapter to prove the truth of this assertion.

It need scarcely be said that Muhammad had ample opportunity for intercourse with Jews, from whom he could learn the stories current amongst them relating to the early patriarchs and others.1 Any comparison of the stories as given in the Qur'an with the Talmudic perversions of scripture histories will make it clear that the Jews of Mecca and Madina communicated their legends to Muhammad, who then recast them and gave them out to the ignorant Arabs as 'revelations' from heaven. It should be remembered that the Talmud was completed a century previous to the era of Muhammad, and cannot fail to have extensively influenced the religious creed of all the Jews of the Arabian Peninsula. In one passage of the Qur'an Muhammad speaks

1 See Geiger's "Judaism and Islam," p.27. (English translation of "Was hat Muhammad aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen," ed. Bonn., 1833).

of a certain Jew as a witness to his mission; in many places his disputes and arguments with them are mentioned, and it is clear that at one time, at least, his relations with them were those of friendship and intimacy. Hence it can easily be understood how easy it was for Muhammad to take the Jewish fables, to which he so frequently listened, and then to work them up in a form such as would commend itself to Arabian ears. There is no doubt that Muhammad was in the habit of questioning the Jews concerning their religion, and the great Traditionist Muslim has preserved for us a Tradition to that effect as follows:-

Ibn 'Abbas records that, when the Prophet asked any question of the people of the Book, they suppressed the matter, and in place of it told him something else, and went away letting him think that they had told him what he asked.

More significant still is the fact that Muhammad excused himself for thus obtaining his materials for his stories, by pretending that he had received a revelation commanding him to do so. Thus in Suratu Yunas (x. 94) we read:-

(O Muhammad) ask those who are reading the book before thee. The Muslim historian Tabari further tells us Khadija (the first wife of the Prophet) read the former scriptures and knew the stories of the prophets." Now Muhammad lived with Khadija for some fifteen years before he began to announce his mission, and when it is remembered that during that period he must also have had close and

frequent intercourse with Waraqa, the cousin of his wife, who was in turn both Hanif and Christian, and was the translator of the Christian scriptures into Arabic, the reader is at no difficulty to understand whence the Prophet obtained his knowledge of the Jewish Rabbinical fables.

We now propose to give examples of the way in which Muhammad adopted the stories of Jewish history which were current amongst his contemporaries; but before doing so, it will be necessary to clear the ground somewhat by reminding the reader of the state of Jewish thought in Arabia at this time. The Jews, especially in the neighbourhood of Madina, were both powerful and numerous; but

the study of the Old Testament scriptures had largely given place to that of the Talmud. The latter was a chaotic arrangement of Rabbinical speculations, comments, and traditions connected with the Hebrew Bible. This encyclopaedia of laws and traditions records the thoughts of a thousand years of the national life of the Jewish people, and in it the oral traditions of the race have been carefully preserved. Yet it is "a literary wilderness," without order or arrangement, often grossly unhistorical, and abounding in puerile fancies and absurd stories. This made up the mental pabulum of the Jews of Muhammad's time, and it was the apocryphal stories of the Talmud which delighted the ears of Jewish audiences, and furnished the basis of instruction in Jewish schools. Thus it was the stories of the Talmud, rather than of the Bible, which Muhammad would learn in his intercourse with the Jews; and we will now proceed to show that the stories of the Patriarchs and others detailed in the Qur'an agree with the, often unhistorical, legends of the Hagadah rather than with the Bible.

In Suratu'l-Ma'ida (v.30-35) there is a curious story connected with Cain and Abel. It is there (verse 34) related that, after Cain had killed his brother,

God sent a raven which scratched the earth to show him (Cain) how he should hide his brother's body. Every student of the Taurat knows that this story is not to be found in the revelation given to Moses; but we are not left in doubt as to where Muhammad learned the legend; for in a Rabbinical work known as the Targum of Jonathan, Pirke Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter XXI, we read, "Adam and his companion sat weeping and mourning for him (Abel), and did not know what to do with him, as burial was unknown to them. Then came a raven, whose companion was dead, took its body, scratched in the earth, and hid it before their eyes. Then said Adam, 'I shall do as this raven has done,' and at once he took Abel's corpse, dug in the earth and hid it."¹ From a comparison of these two passages it is clear that Muhammad had heard from the Jews the fable of the burial of Abel as related in the Rabbinical books, and thinking it derived from the scriptures, repeated it, with slight alterations, as if revealed to him from heaven.

The Qur'an abounds with stories of the Patriarch Abraham. These in many instances flagrantly contradict the Biblical narrative; but a comparison of them with the Rabbinical legends of the Jews, leaves no room for doubt that Muhammad learnt them from the latter during his close intercourse with them. Thus in several places of the Qur'an the story is told of Abraham's being cast into a fiery furnace by order of a king (whom the commentators name Nimrod) because of the Patriarch's refusal to worship idols. It is said in Suratu'l-Anbiya' (xxi. 69, 71) that when Abraham was cast into the fire, God said:-

¹ Tisdall, "The Sources of the Qur'an," p. 63.

O fire, be thou cold, and a preservation unto Abraham, and we saved him. Now it is a curious fact that this legend, which has no basis in scripture, is found in its entirety in a Jewish book called the Midrash Rabba.¹ From the Taurat we learn that the Patriarch Abraham before his entrance into the land of Canaan resided in the city named Ur in the land of Chaldea; but God brought him out of that city and took him to the land of promise. Thus in Genesis XV. 7, we read, "I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees." This city was evidently unknown to the ignorant Jewish author of the Midrash mentioned above; for in his comment on the verse quoted he took the word "Ur," which also means fire, in its bare literal sense, and supposed that God had delivered Abraham out of a fire. So, to explain the verse "I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees," a story was invented of Abraham's being cast into fire by Nimrod, whence he was miraculously saved by God. The whole story is given at length in the Midrash Rabba referred to above, and was well known to the Arabian Jews of Muhammad's time. It is there written, "Now this happened at the time when Nimrod cast Abraham into the oven of fire, because he would not worship the idols, that leave was withheld from the fire to hurt him."

The reader is now in a position to understand the source of the story as it appears in the Qur'an, the author of which was evidently as ignorant of the real meaning of the words the Jewish commentator referred to above. If any further proof were needed to show the utterly unhistorical nature of the whole narrative, it may be found in the fact that Nimrod was not a contemporary of Abraham at all, but preceded him by many years.

¹ Quoted in Geiger's "Judaism and Islam," p. 96.

Another Qur'anic story which has an undoubted Jewish origin is that found in Su'ratu Ta Ha (xx. 90) in connection with the calf which was worshipped by the Israelites during Moses' absence on Mount Sinai. We are there told that the people brought their ornaments of gold and silver and cast them into the fire, after which

in like manner Samiri also cast them in and he brought out to them a corporeal, lowing calf." It is well known that the Taurat contains no mention of the golden calf having lowed; but Rabbinical fables are not wanting in which the story as reproduced by Muhammad is clearly traced. Thus in the Pirke Rabbi Eleazar we read, "The calf having cried aloud, came forth, and the children of Israel saw it." Rabbi Yahuda further preserves a fable to the effect that a man named Sammael secreted himself inside the image and made a cry like a calf in order to lead the Israelites astray.¹ Such is the story which was current amongst the Jews of Arabia in the time of Muhammad. Let it be compared with the narrative of the Qur'an and the reader will easily see that Muhammad, thinking the story which he heard upon the lips of his Jewish contemporaries to be a part of the scripture record, adopted and later gave it out to the ignorant Arabs as though revealed from heaven.

Unfortunately Muhammad failed to rightly understand the allusion to the man Sammael, and, confounding his name with the name of the Samaritans, whom he probably knew to be enemies of the Jews, makes the Samaritan to have a part in the matter. Since, however, the Samaritans

¹ See Geiger, "Judaism and Islam", pp. 130-2.

did not come into existence as a people until some centuries after the event recorded here, it must require a wide stretch of credulity indeed to enable one to believe that this Qur'anic tale also was handed down from heaven by the angel Gabriel.

In the Suratu'n-Naml (xxvii. 44), we find a long story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba in which it is stated that the former sent a letter to the Queen by a bird which he called for the purpose. The story goes on to say that the letter resulted in the determination of the Queen to visit Solomon. When she at length arrived at the palace of the King,

It was said to her, 'Enter the palace,' and when she saw it she imagined that it was a great lake of water, and she uncovered her legs. He said 'verily it is a palace paved with glass.' Hearing this the Queen replied like any good Muslim, "I resign myself unto God the Lord of all creatures."

Every reader of the Holy Bible knows that all this is mere fable, and has no place in the word of God; hence the question naturally arises as to the source of the story. In the Targum of the Book of Esther, a Rabbinical work full of fables and mythical stories, may be found, often in the very same words, practically the whole story as told by Muhammad. In this Targum we read, "Solomon, know that she (the Queen) was come, arose and sat down in the palace of glass. When the Queen of Sheba saw it, she thought that the glass floor was water, and so, in crossing over lifted up her garments." Much more might be quoted from the same book, including the whole incident of the bird-messenger; but enough has been written to show that

the story as found in the Qur'an is nothing more than a Rabbinical tale which Muhammad had learned from the Jews. Let the reader study the real history as found in the Holy Bible (1 Kings X) and he will see what a vast distance separates truth from fiction.

Another fable which Muhammad learned from the Jews and incorporated into the Qur'an, is a fanciful story of God's holding a mountain over the Israelites in order to frighten them. In Su'ratu'l-A'ara'f (vii. 170) we read: -

And when we shook the mountain over them as though it had been a shadow; and they imagined it was falling upon them. This story has no foundation in fact; but it is to be found in a Jewish tract called the Abodah Sarah. The Taurat relates nothing of the kind, but simply states that, while God was giving Moses the Law on mount Sinai, all the people stood beneath, i.e., at the foot of, the Mount. The Jewish commentators, however, soon turned this into a fanciful story of God's holding the mountain over the people; and in the story as found in the Abodah Sarah God is represented as saying to the Israelites, "I covered you over with the mountain like a lid." In another Rabbinical version of the story we read that God "inverted the holy mountain above them like a pot, and said unto them, 'if ye receive the Law, well; but if not, there will your grave be.'" This legend, which was current amongst the Jews of Arabia, must have reached the ears of Muhammad, who, imagining it to be a part of the Biblical story, soon incorporated it into his Qur'an and bade

Muslims for all time to believe in it as a part of the word of God, preserved from all eternity near the throne of God in heaven, and finally sent down to Muhammad by the agency of the angel Gabriel.

The story quoted above is only equalled for absurdity by that of the fallen angels which is found in Su'ratu'l-Hijr (xv. 16-18) where it is gravely stated that the devils endeavour to hear what is going on in heaven, and are then driven away by meteors which are cast at them by the angels. Thus we read:-

We have placed signs of zodiac in the heaven, and have adorned them for the spectators; and We guard them from every stoned Satan except such as steal a hearing; and him doth a visible flame consume; and again, in Suratu'l-Mulk (lxvii. 5) we read:-

We have placed them (the stars) there to be darted at the Satans. So much for Muhammad's explanation of shooting stars! His ideas of the devils attempting to 'steal a hearing' in the courts of heaven, however, are not original, but are simply echoes of a Jewish fable preserved in the Hagigah, where it is said that the demons "listen from behind a curtain" in order to obtain a knowledge of future events. Further comment upon these mythical tales is needless. No intelligent Muslim, we are convinced, can accept them as of divine origin; and their very presence in the Qur'an bears eloquent testimony to the human origin of the book.

Much more might be written to show how much Muhammad was indebted to the Jews for the ideas which he afterwards embodied in the Qur'an; but the limits of this little book compel us to be content with one or two more examples.

As both the Jews and Sabians observed a month's fast in the year, it is not easy to determine which of these sects furnished Muhammad with the similar injunction now found in the Qur'an; but in connection with this fast there is a rule enjoined in the Qur'an which is undoubtedly of Jewish origin. In Suratu'l-Baqarah (ii. 183), we read:-

Eat and drink until ye can discern a white thread from a black thread by the daybreak then fast strictly till night. This ingenious method of determining when the night ended and the day began was not original, however, but was copied by Muhammad from the Jews who, long before, had adopted a similar practice; and in the Mishnah Berakoth we read that the fast began, "when one can distinguish between a blue thread and a white one." Yet Muslims are asked to believe that Muhammad had no part in the composition of the Qur'an:- that the whole was revealed from heaven where it had been kept from all eternity upon the "preserved table." On the contrary, we will now proceed to prove that the very idea of a scripture preserved on a table is itself a plagiarism from the Jews.

In Su'ratu'l-Buruj (lxxxv. 21) we read:-

Yet it is a glorious Qur'an in a preserved table. This wonderful table is much spoken of in Muhammadan tradition. A sample of the fanciful and extravagant stories there found is given below from the Qisau'l-Anbiya'. It is there related that in the beginning, "Beneath the throne God created a pearl, and from the pearl He created the preserved table.

Its height was seven hundred years journey and its breadth three hundred years journey." Then after describing the creation of a pen the author proceeds, "accordingly, the pen wrote down God's knowledge in God's most high creation of everything that He wished unto the resurrection day; the extent that the leaf of a tree moveth or descendeth or ascendeth, and it wrote every such thing by the power of God most High."

This notion of a table upon which the words of God are preserved is an obvious parody of the inspired narrative of the Taurat where we read that God said to Moses, "How thee two tables of stone like unto the first, and come up unto Me into the mount, and make thee an ark of wood. And I will write on the tables the words that were on the first tables which thou brakest, and though shalt put them in the ark."¹ It is specially significant that the very Hebrew word "luach"² used for these tables in the Taurat is that adopted by Muhammad in describing his imaginary table. He had doubtless, often heard from the Jews the story of the tables of stone which were preserved in the ark, and, not wishing for his Qur'an a less distinguished origin, adopted and elaborated the idea of a book written and preserved in heaven itself. The Prophet, however, over-reached himself; and in an unguarded moment made God to say, "We have, since the Law was given, written in the Psalms that my servants, the righteous, shall inherit the earth;"³ so that, for all time, the faith

of Muslims is staggered by the spectacle of a Qur'an which claims to have been written in the beginning of creation, quoting from a book not then two thousand years old. Most intelligent people will regard this as a proof that the Qur'an was written after the Psalms.

1 Deuteronomy x. 1, 2.

2 Hebrew Arabic

3 Suratu'l-Anbiya' (xxi. 105).

If further proof were needed to show that the Qur'an is largely based upon Talmudic Judaism, it may surely be found in the large number of words of Hebrew origin which are found therein. The following words amongst others, are of Hebrew origin, Tabut ; Taurat ; 'Adn ; Jahannam ; Ahbar ; Sabt ; Sakinat ; Taghut ; Furqan ; Ma'un ; Mathani ; and Malakut .¹ The curious will find in Dr. Imadu'd-Din's famous "Hidayatu'l-Muslimin,"² a list of no less than one hundred and fourteen non-Arabic words, together with their original significations, which are to be found in the Qur'an.

1 Geiger, "Judaism and Islam," pp. 30-45.

2 Pages 276-283.

CHAPTER III

CHRISTIAN BELIEFS AND PRACTICES INCORPORATED INTO THE QUR'AN

WE have already pointed out that Muhammad was much less indebted to Christianity for his ideas than to either Judaism or the pre-Islamic idolatry of Arabia. Yet the Qur'an reveals not a few traces of the influence of Christian thought and practice. Thus Jesus Christ is invariably spoken of with the deepest reverence as a Prophet sent from God, to whom was entrusted the Gospel, or Injil, as Muhammad described the Evangel. The many references, to Christians in the Qur'an make it clear that they must have been numerous in Arabia at that time; and Muhammad seems to have entertained no little friendship for them, as may be seen by the following advice given to his followers:-

Thou shalt surely find those to be nearest in affection to them (i.e., true believers) who say, 'We are Christians.'¹ Muhammad certainly had reason to reward the followers of Christ with grateful affection, for it was in the Christian Kingdom of Abyssinia that his persecuted followers found a safe asylum when the oppression of the Meccans had become intolerable.

1 Suratu'l-Ma'ida (v. 85).

Muhammad had many opportunities of learning of Christianity, both during his journeys into Syria and also in Arabia itself. We have already pointed out that Waraqa, the cousin of his wife Khadija, was at one time a Christian and was well versed in the Christian scriptures; later on, not a few Christians became Muhammad's followers, and from Mary, his Coptic wife, also he could easily learn the Scripture and especially the apocryphal stories then current amongst the Eastern Christians. Thus it would be easy for Muhammad to take these stories and give them out in his own eloquent Arabic as though revealed from heaven. Muhammad's contemporaries had no doubt that he did so, and frequently charged him with obtaining the help of certain well-known persons. Thus, for example, in Suratu'n-Nahl (xvi. 103, 105) we read:-

They say, 'thou art only a forger' ... they say, 'verily a certain man teacheth him.' The tongue of him at whom they hint is foreign; while this (Qur'an) is in the plain Arabic.

Baidawi's comment on this significant passage is worth careful notice. He says is:-

It is said that he (the person referred to) was a Greek slave belonging to 'Amir ibnu'l-Hadrami. It is also said that Jabara and Yasara, two sword-makers of Mecca, used to read the Taurat and Injil, and that the Prophet was in the habit

page 26

of going to them and listening to what they were reading. Imam Husain comments thus, "It is related that there was a slave belonging to 'Amir ibnu'l-Hadrami, named Jabara (and according to some a second slave named Yasara) who used to read the Law and the Gospel, and Muhammad used, when he passed, to stand and listen."

It is worthy of note here that in reply to the charge that he was helped in composing the Qur'an by these persons, Muhammad does not specifically deny the imputation. All he can reply is that the person or persons referred to are foreigners, and could not therefore compose so elegantly in Arabic. But we are not concerned to prove they did. What we do assert is that Muhammad learnt the main outlines of the Biblical and Apocryphal stories from Jews and Christians with whom he was frequently brought into contact, and then by his own poetic genius, fashioned them into the forms they now take in the Qur'an. We certainly have shown that he had ample opportunities for so doing.

We had occasion to point out in the last chapter that it was Talmudic perversions of holy Scripture, rather than the sacred records themselves which were current amongst the Jews of Arabia in the time of Muhammad. The reader will fail to rightly apprehend the nature of the influence which Christianity exercised upon Muhammad, unless the character of that Christianity be properly understood. Arabia has been called "The Mother of heresies." Certain it is that from the earliest times that land had offered a refuge for the many heretical sects of Christians who had been expelled from the Roman Empire on account of their dangerous heresies. The Christianity of Arabia in the time of Muhammad was buried under a senseless mass of superstition and degradation. Saint worship and Mariolatry had taken the place of true religion, and a mass of fanciful apocryphal

literature had usurped the place of the Bible. It has been well said that had Muhammad been brought into contact with a purer form of Christianity, there would probably have been one false religion the less in the world, and one Christian reformer the more. As it was, the blasphemous extravagances of the Mariamites, Collyridians and other heretical Christian sects repelled the Arabian reformer, and led him to denounce the teaching of these people as nothing less than polytheism. It was Muhammad's misfortune that he identified this mass of superstition with true Christianity, and thus became the founder of a faith which led back to the legal bondage of Judaism. Any comparison of the Apocryphal stories which were current amongst these wanderers from the pure teaching of the Bible with the stories of the Qur'an will, at the same time, make it evident that Muhammad accepted many of their fables as a portion of the Gospel record, and thus, believing them to be true, incorporated them into the Qur'an. We give below one or two examples which will make this clear.

In Suratu'l-Kahf (xviii. 8-12, 25) there is a curious story of seven youths who went to sleep in a cave and awoke again only after a period of three hundred and nine years. We there read, "Dost thou consider that the inmates of the cave, and of al-Rakim, were one of our wondrous signs. When the young men took refuge in a cave, they said, 'O Lord! grant us mercy from before thee, and order for us our affair aright.' Then We struck their ears with deafness in the cave for many a year; then We awakened them that We might know which of the two parties could best reckon the space of their abiding." "And they remained in their cave three hundred years and nine years over."

This mythical story, which is absolutely devoid of foundation, was current in Arabia long before the time of Muhammad. It is found in the writings of a Syrian, named Jacob

of Sarug,¹ who died in 521 A.D., and which purports to tell the story of seven young men of Ephesus who fled from the persecution of the Roman Emperor Decius. They took refuge, it is said, in a cave where they fell asleep, and only awoke some one hundred and

ninety-six years later to find Christianity everywhere triumphant. Muhammad must often have heard the legend, from the Christians of Arabia and Syria, and imagining it to be true, pretended that he had received it as a Divine revelation.

Another story of the Qur'an which has a distinctly Christian origin is that relating to the childhood of the Virgin Mary. Nothing is more striking to the thoughtful reader than the silence of the genuine Gospels concerning the person of the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ; but in a community where the pure teachings of the Gospel were hidden under a load of superstitious beliefs, and where Mariolatry had taken the place of true worship, it is not surprising to find a number of legendary stories in which, with extravagant detail, the events of the Virgin's life are related. These Apocryphal stories were current amongst the Christians of Arabia, and were almost certainly well known to Muhammad. The latter, however, was too ignorant of the contents of the genuine Gospels to detect their spuriousness, and consequently found no difficulty in introducing them into his 'revelations' as a part of the message sent down to 'confirm the previous Scriptures'.

From Suratu Al-i-'Imran 2 we learn that, in her childhood, Mary was brought to the temple of Jerusalem which was henceforth her home until the birth of Christ. During her residence there, the Qur'an tells us, it was signified by lot who was to be her guardian. Thus we read:-

1 The account is found in a homily in the "Acta Sanctorum." See Tisdall, "The Sources of The Qur'an," p. 147.

2 Suratu Al-i-'Imran (iii. 39).

Thou was not present with them when they cast lots with reeds which of them should rear Mary. This story, as every reader of the Gospels knows, is not to be found in the inspired record. It is, however, found in its entirety in the Apocryphal books of the heretical Christians who lived in Arabia in the time of Muhammad. Hence its source is clear. Thus in both the "Protevangelium of James the Less,"¹ and in the Coptic "History of the Virgin" the incident of casting lots for the guardianship or, as it is there styled, the right to become the husband of Mary is fully related. In the former we are told that when Mary reached the age of twelve a council of the priests was held to decide upon her future after which "an angel of the Lord stood by him (Zacharias) saying 'Zacharias, Zacharias, go forth and call together the widowers of the people, and let them bring each a rod, and to whomsoever the Lord God shall show a sign, his wife shall she be.'"

Another Qur'anic story connected with the Virgin Mary which Muhammad borrowed from the Apocryphal Gospels, or rather from the lips of his Christian acquaintances, is that of the palm-tree, found in Su'ratu Maryam (xix. 22-5). We there read: -

1 See Tisdall, "The Sources of the Qur'an", pp. 156-8.

And she conceived him; and retired with him to a distant place; and the pains of childbirth came upon her near the trunk of a palm-tree. She said, would to God I had died before this, and had been a thing forgotten, forgotten quite. And he who was beneath her called to her; 'grieve not thou, thy Lord hath provided a rivulet under thee; and do thou shake the body of the palm-tree, and it shall let fall ripe dates upon thee ready gathered, and eat and drink and calm thy mind.'

The Gospels on the contrary, tell us that Christ was born in the town of Bethlehem in or near an inn. In this case, again, the source of the story repeated by Muhammad can be clearly traced; for the Apocryphal Christian books contain similar legends and relate many fanciful stories connected with the birth of Jesus. These were popularly repeated amongst the Christians of Arabia, and must often have reached the ears of Muhammad, who doubtless imagined them to be part of the genuine Gospel record. In the Apocryphal work entitled the "History of the Nativity of Mary and the Infancy of the Saviour" the whole story of the palm-tree in its main features may be clearly traced. The few variations in the details may be sufficiently accounted for by the fact that these stories were probably repeated from hearsay; but any careful comparison of the story as found in these spurious Gospels with that repeated by Muhammad in the Qur'an will make it clear that the latter is simply taken from the former, and then represented as a direct revelation from God. That the reader may see how close the resemblances are we give below a quotation from the Apocryphal work mentioned above. After recording the flight of Joseph and Mary with the child Jesus the narrative proceeds, "and Joseph hastened and brought her (Mary) to

1 See Tisdall, "The Sources of the Qur'an", p. 162.

that palm-tree, and took her down off her beast. When Mary sat down she looked up to the top of the palm-tree, and seeing it full of fruit said to Joseph, 'I desire if it be possible, to take of the fruit of this palm-tree.' Then the child Jesus, who with a joyful countenance lay in his mother, the Virgin Mary's bosom, said to the palm-tree, 'O, tree, lower thy branches and refresh my mother with thy fruit.' Instantly the palm-tree at this word bowed its head to the sole of Mary's feet; and they all plucked the fruit which it bore, and were refreshed and the palm-tree instantly stood erect, and streams of very clear, cool, and very sweet water began to come forth from amid its roots."

Every reader of the Qur'an knows that it contains several references to the Lord Jesus Christ, and mentions certain stories connected with His birth, some of which are not to be found in the genuine Gospels. These stories, like that of the palm-tree, can also be traced to Apocryphal sources, and show conclusively whence Muhammad drew the materials which he afterwards recast and embodied in the Qur'an. One of these legends has reference to certain miracles said to have been performed by Christ in His infancy. One allusion to them may be found in Suratu'l-Ma'ida (v. 109-110) where we read:-

When God shall say, O Jesus! son of Mary! remember My favour upon thee, and upon thy mother; when I strengthened thee with the Holy Spirit that thou shouldest speak unto men in the cradle and when grown up. And when I taught thee the Scripture and Wisdom and the Law and the Gospel, and when thou didst create of clay as it were the figure of a bird by my permission, and didst breathe thereon, and it became a bird by my permission.

Now the genuine Gospels have nothing of all this; on the contrary, it is distinctly stated that the first miracle of Jesus was wrought after the beginning of His public ministry at thirty years of age. In the Injil (John ii. 11) we read, "This beginning of His signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory." A reference to the spurious Gospel of the Infancy, "The Gospel of Thomas the Israelite," and other Apocryphal works, however, makes it clear that the legend must have been current in Arabia in the time of Muhammad. The latter must often have heard it repeated by his Christian contemporaries, and, imagining it to be part of the genuine Gospels, incorporated it into his Qur'an. On no other theory can the extraordinary likeness between the two narratives be accounted for. Let the reader, for example, remembering the Qur'an version quoted above, read the following from the "Gospel of Thomas the Israelite," a spurious and fanciful work of late date which was never regarded as inspired by any Christian sect. It is there written that "The child Jesus when five years of age was playing by the road by a dirty stream of running water and having brought it all together into ditches immediately made it pure and clean, and all this by a single word. Then having moistened some earth he made of it twelve sparrows, Jesus clapping his hands at the sparrows cried aloud to them 'Go off.' So they clucking flew away.1

1 For a further account, see Tisdall, "The Sources of the Qur'an," p. 175.

The 'Gospel of the Infancy,' another fanciful romance, also tells us that when Jesus was in the cradle He spoke to His mother, and acquainted her with His Divine Mission.

Much more could be written to show that Muhammad was indebted not a little to the heretical Christians of his time for the legendary tales and religious conceptions which are now found in the Qur'an; but the limits of this little book compel us to be content with one more example. The reader who desires to study the subject further should consult the learned works of Tisdall, Sell and Geiger whence most of the material for these chapters has been drawn.

We cannot conclude this chapter, however, without a reference to the "balance" so frequently referred to in the Qur'an. Islam teaches that at the Judgment Day a balance will be produced in which the actions of men will be weighed. Those whose good deeds preponderate will enter paradise, whilst those whose evil deeds out-weigh the good will be cast into hell. Thus in Su'ratu'l-'Araf (vii. 7, 8), we read:-

The weighing on that day shall be just; and they whose balances shall be heavy are those who shall be happy; but they whose balances shall be light are those who have lost their souls, for that to Our signs they were unjust.

This conception of the Qur'an is taken from an Apocryphal work entitled the "Testament of Abraham,"¹ which

¹ Published in "Texts and Studies," vol. ii, No. 2, and quoted in Tisdall's "The Sources of the Qur'an," p. 200.

was written in the second or third century of the Christian era. A mythical story is there related of the Patriarch Abraham's ascension to heaven, where he beheld, amongst other marvels, the great throne of judgment. And, the story proceeds, "On it sat a marvellous man and before him stood a table like unto crystal, all of gold and fine linen. And on the table lay a book; its thickness was six cubits and its breadth ten cubits. And on the right and left of it there stood two angels holding paper and pen and ink. And in front of the table was seated a bright beaming angel holding a balance in his hand ... and the marvellous man who was seated on the throne was himself judging and proving the souls, but the two angels who were on the right and on the left were registering. The one on the right was registering the righteous acts, but the one on the left the sins. And the one in front of the table, the one who held the balance, was weighing the souls."

We might go on to show that many other of the doctrines of the Qur'an such as the denial of the death of Christ, the resolving the Christian Trinity into a tri-theism consisting of the Father, the Son and the Virgin Mary were derived by Muhammad from the Gnostic and other heretical sects of Christians who flourished in Arabia in his time. Enough, however, has been written to show that much of the Qur'an can be traced to Apocryphal Christian sources; whilst the Christian reader will also perceive how false is the claim that the former "confirms" the preceding scriptures - the Taurat and Injil.

CHAPTER IV

PORTIONS OF THE QUR'AN CALLED FORTH BY THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE TIME

WE are convinced that a careful and unprejudiced study of the Qur'an will prove beyond doubt that large portions of it were deliberately framed by Muhammad to suit his own ends. This is a grave charge, and we now proceed to substantiate it. It should ever be remembered that "a comparison of the historical facts in the life of Muhammad with the various portions of the Qur'an connected with them is necessary, if that life is to be intelligently understood. Another and equally important result of such comparison is that it shows the gradual way in which the Qur'an came into existence, and how admirably the revelations fitted in to the local circumstances, and gave what was claimed to be divine authority and support to the varied actions of the Prophet. In this way alone could his change of policy be justified and he himself be protected from the charge of time-serving and inconsistency."¹ Such a study alone will enable the reader to understand such questions as a change of the Qibla from Jerusalem to Mecca, the substitution of an order to "Kill the idolaters wherever ye find them"² for the pacific policy of "No compulsion in religion,"³ as

¹ Sell, "Historical Development of the Qur'an," p. 1.

² Suratu'l-Baqarah (ii. 188).

³ Ibid (ii. 257)

well as the many contradictory injunctions relating to the domestic affairs of the Prophet. That Muhammad did on a certain occasion succumb to the temptation to forge a revelation upon the Quraish is amply testified by numerous Muhammadan writers, including such well-known authorities as Ibn Hisham, Tabari, Yahya' and Jalalu'd-Din. The circumstances of the Prophet's fall are as follows. One day, we are told, he entered the holy sanctuary of Mecca, and began to recite the Suratu'n-Najm (liii). The long-continued opposition of the Quraish had disheartened the prophet, and he longed for some means of gaining the good-will of his opposers. The temptation to compromise was great, and the prospect of reconciliation with those who maligned him too alluring to be withstood. The prophet fell, for when he came to the words, "Do ye see al-Lat and al-'Uzza and Manat the third (idol) besides" (vv. 19-20) he added, to the delight of his hearers, the words, "These are the exalted females, and verily their intercession is to be hoped for." The Quraish

were delighted and joined the Prophet in worship, saying "Now we know that it is the Lord alone that giveth life and taketh it away, that createth and supporteth. These our goddesses make intercession for us with Him, and as thou hast conceded unto them a position we are content to follow thee." But Muhammad soon repented of his rash compromise, and withdrew the words of commendation which he had used regarding the Arab idols, substituting in their stead the words now found in the Qur'an:-

What! shall ye have male progeny and God female? This were indeed an unfair partition. These are mere names

page 37

and your fathers named them such. (vv. 21-3). Then, to cover his fault, he produced yet another revelation in which God is made to comfort him by the reflection that he was in good company, for former prophets had been tempted in precisely the same manner by the devil, who was the author of the whole mistake. Thus in Suratu'l-Hajj (xxii. 51) we read:-

We have not sent an apostle or prophet before thee but when he read, Satan injected some (error) in his reading; but God shall bring to nought that which Satan hath suggested.

The incident related above is such a grave one that we quote at some length to show that its truthfulness is vouched for by the highest authority; for if thus early in his career the prophet of Arabia so easily fell into the temptation to compose a passage in order to gain the good will of his enemies, it is manifest that later on when worldly ambition loomed so large in his horizon, the temptation to do so would be doubly great. We quote, therefore, below, the account of the incident given by Mu'alim:-

On the different rendering of , see Sell's "Historical Development of the Qur'an" (ed. 1905), pp 36-7.

It is related by Ibn 'Abbas and Muhammad ibn Ka'b al-Qarzi and other commentators besides that when Muhammad saw that his people (the Quraish) retired from him and opposed him, and rejected that (Qur'an) which he had brought them from God, he wished in his heart that some such word would come to him from God by which friendship might be established between him and his people, and an inducement held out to them to believe. And it came to pass that one day he was in the temple of the Quraish when God sent down Suratu'n-Najm. And the Prophet recited it, and when he arrived at the words 'Do ye see al-Lat and al-'Uzza and Manat the third (idol) besides,' Satan placed upon his lips what he had longed for in his heart: 'These are the exalted females, and verily their intercession is to be hoped for.' When the Quraish heard this they rejoiced.

Another form of the story is given in the Mawahibu'l-Luduniyyah, as follows:-

1 p. 169. p. 136.

The Prophet (on whom be blessing and peace) was reading Suratu'n-Najm in Mecca, and when he arrived at the words 'Do ye see al-Lat and al-'Uzza' and Manat the third (idol) besides,' Satan cast upon his lips the words 'these are the exalted females and verily their intercession is to be hoped for,' and the idolators said, 'he hath spoken well of our goddesses'. And he worshipped and they worshipped; and then was sent down this verse, 'We have not sent an apostle or prophet before thee into whose reading Satan did not cast (some error).'

It is to the credit of the Apostle that he so soon repented of the fall related above, and ever afterwards consistently opposed idolatry in every form; but the experience gained did him little good, and we soon find him again changing his utterances to suit his own ends. Thus when the Prophet fled to Madina, a persecuted and helpless man, he soon recognized the necessity of conciliating, and if possible winning to his side, the numerous and powerful communities of Jews who lived there. For this purpose he made Jerusalem his Qibla, and for some considerable time continued to pray in the direction of the Jewish city; but when at last all efforts to win the Jews to his side failed, and his own position had become strengthened by the accession of numerous Arabs, he felt the necessity of once more trying to woo the Quraish to his side, and for that purpose brought forward a "revelation"² again making the Ka'ba the Qibla. Thus in Suratu'l-Baqarah we read:

1 Suratu'l-Hajj (xxii. 51).

2 Suratu'l-Baqarah (ii. 138-9).

We appointed the Qibla towards which thou didst formerly (pray), only that We might know him who followeth the Apostle from him who turneth back on his heels. This (change) seems a great matter, unless unto those whom God hath directed. But God will not render your faith of none effect, for God is gracious and merciful unto man. We have seen thee turn thy face towards heaven, but We will cause thee to turn thyself towards a Qibla that will please thee. Turn therefore thy face towards the holy temple (of Mecca) and wherever ye be, turn your faces toward that place.

Good Muhammadan exegetes admit these facts; thus Jalalu'd-din says:-

After his flight he (Muhammad) ordered (his followers) to turn to the Temple at Jerusalem; this, however, which was done to conciliate the Jews, held good for six or seven months only, and then he changed it again.¹

'Abdu'l-Qadir admits that the Prophet wished to make Mecca his Qibla once more, and says

¹ Quoted by Geiger, "Judaism and Islam," p. 14. See also Tafsiru'l Jalalain in loco.

He wished that he might receive a command to pray towards the Ka'ba, and for this reason he kept his gaze fixed on the heavens, if perchance an angel might appear with a command for him to pray towards the Ka'ba.¹ It is not strange that, under the circumstances, the Apostle soon found a way to gratify his wish, and that a "revelation" appeared sanctioning the change.

Another arbitrary command which Muhammad gave out in the early years of his residence at Madina has reference to the Jewish fast; and it too, like the Jerusalem Qibla, was afterwards revoked. The following story will illustrate the charge, and show how local circumstances called forth various arbitrary laws from Muhammad, who afterwards repealed them with equal alacrity when necessity arose. Thus Kazim tells us that:-

It is said that when the Apostle of God came to Madina, he found the Jews fasting on 'Ashura. He asked them their reason for so doing, and they answered; 'Because on this day Pharaoh and his people were drowned, but Moses and his followers were saved;' on which Muhammad said, I stand in closer connection with Moses than they do and then he commanded the fast-day 'Ashura. This fast,

¹ "Tasiru'l-Mada'ih'l-Qur'an," p. 22.

² Quoted by Geiger "Judaism and Islam," p. 26. A similar Tradition, recorded by Ibn 'Abbas, is given in the Mishka'tu'l-Masibih, in the chapter on fasting.

which is still observed on the tenth of Ramadan as a voluntary and meritorious fast, affords clear proof of the way Muhammad borrowed from other systems when he wished to do so, and refutes the claim that he received his religious injunctions by direct revelation.

Another story which illustrates the very human origin of the Qur'an is the one told by many Muhammadan commentators with regard to Muhammad's marriage with Zainab the divorced wife of his adopted son Zaid. Zaid was known as the "Son of Muhammad," and had taken to wife a beautiful woman named Zainab. One day, we are told, the Prophet happened to visit the house of Zaid and found Zainab in a dress which ill concealed her beauty. The Prophet was smitten by the sight, and exclaimed in admiration "Praise be to God who turneth the hearts of men."¹ Zainab overheard the words, and forthwith acquainted her husband with the fact. The latter then divorced his wife, and offered her to Muhammad; but the Prophet hesitated to consummate a marriage with the divorced wife of his

adopted son, and so, anxious to avoid the scandal which he knew would follow, solved the difficulty and justified his immediate marriage with Zainab by a "revelation" commanding him to take her to wife. This extraordinary piece of "revelation" is to be found in Suratu'l-Ahzab (xxxiii. 37-8) and runs as follows:-

But when Zaid had determined the matter concerning her (Zainab), We joined her in marriage unto thee, lest a

1 Hayatu'l-Qulub," vol. ii, Part 53.

crime should be charged on the true believers in (marrying) the wives of their adopted sons." Can the intelligent Muslim reader believe, we ask, that the words quoted above are indeed the words of God? Is it not rather self-evident that the whole passage instead of being a revelation direct from God, was deliberately framed and promulgated by Muhammad in order to justify his conduct.

Another revelation put forward by Muhammad to justify a change in his domestic affairs is the one found in Suratu't-Tahrim (lxvi. 1-2) in which permission is granted to him to break his oaths. The story which is told by many commentators is as follows. Muhammad having shown too great a partiality for a slave girl named Mary, aroused thereby the jealousy of his numerous wives, who rebuked him so sharply that he took a solemn oath not to touch the maid again. But the Prophet found the promise easier to make than keep, and his longing for the beautiful Coptic slave girl proving too strong for him, he forthwith solved the difficulty, and justified a renewal of his relations with her by the following revelation in which permission is given him to break his oaths:-

O Prophet! why holdest thou that to be prohibited (haram) which God hath made lawful to thee, from a desire to please thy wives, since God is Lenient, Merciful? God hath allowed you release from your oaths. We abstain from further comment on this passage, and content ourselves with asking the intelligent Muslim to earnestly consider whether it is possible that these words of the Qur'an were, ages before the creation, written upon the preserved table in heaven. In this connection, there is a Tradition preserved

by Muslim,¹ which offers a suggestive comment upon Muhammad's domestic legislation. It is recorded that:-

'Ayesha said, 'I was reflecting upon the women who had given themselves to the Prophet (upon whom be mercy and peace), and I said, What! does a woman give herself away? Then God sent down the revelation, 'Thou mayest decline for the present whom thou wilt of them and thou mayest take to thy bed her whom thou wilt, and whomsoever thou shalt long for of those thou hast before neglected, and this shall be no crime in thee.² I said, 'I see nothing in which your God doth not hasten to please you in your desires.'

The numerous and contradictory injunctions of the Qur'an with respect to Jihad, or religious warfare, furnish another example of the Prophet's temporising policy. Any chronological study of that book will make it clear that in the early stages of Islam when Muhammad was a helpless and persecuted refugee, devoid of the means of enforcing his teaching by the stern argument of the sword, he uniformly inculcated a policy of mildness and toleration in dealing with non-Muslims. Thus in Suratu'l-Baqarah (ii. 257) we read:-

Let there be no compulsion in religion; but when fortune had smiled upon him and he found him

1 Mishkatu'l-Masabih, Babu'l-Isharati'n-Nasa'i.

2 Suratu'l-Ahzab (xxxiii. 51).

self surrounded by a band of warlike Arabs lusting for plunder, his 'revelations' underwent a remarkable change, and the faithful were urged with vehement persistence to,

Kill them (the infidels) till all strife be at an end, and the religion be all of God's;¹ whilst the very last. Sura revealed contains these uncompromising words

O Prophet! contend with the unbelievers and the hypocrites, and be severe unto them, for their dwelling place shall be hell."

Kill the idolators wheresoever ye shall find them, and take them (Prisoners) and besiege them, and lay wait for them in every convenient place.³

Muhammad often appealed to the beauty of the Arabic Qur'an, and its inimitable style of composition, in proof of his contention that it was from heaven. He was not loth, however, when a more than usually striking sentence met his ears, to add it to his own collection in order to enhance the latter's value. Arabic literature furnishes us with not a few instances of such plagiarism, of which the following, may be adduced as examples. Baidawi tells us that:

1 Suratu'l-Baqarah (ii. 184).

2 Suratu't-Taubah (ix. 74)

3 Suratu't-Taubah (ix. 5).

1

'Abdu'llah bin Sa'ud bin Abi Sarih was an amanuensis of the Prophet. And, when the words descended 'We created man of fine clay;'² and when the words were finished. Then brought We forth him by another creation;' 'Abdu'llah exclaimed 'Blessed therefore be God the most excellent of Makers. He has created man in a wonderful manner.' Upon this (Muhammad) said, 'Write those (words) down, for so it has descended.' But 'Abdu'llah doubted and said, 'If Muhammad speak truth, then on me also has inspiration descended as upon him; and if Muhammad speak falsely, then verily I but spake as he did.'

It is clear from this story as given by Baidawi that Muhammad was so pleased with the beauty of the expression used by his disciple that he immediately decided to give it a place in his Qur'an, where it still stands and, in order to do so, claimed that the very identical words had "descended" upon him also. 'Abdu'llah was naturally delighted with the compliment paid to his words, and henceforth boasted that on him also inspiration had descended. This, however, called forth the indignation of the Prophet, who proceeded to pour out the vials of his wrath upon 'Abdu'llah in the following words - which good Muslims are also expected to believe were "revealed":-

1 Tafsiru'l-Baidawi (ed. Cairo), p.184.

2 Suratu-l-Muminun (xxiii. 12).

3 Ibid, verse 14.

1

Who is more wicked than he who forgeth a lie concerning God, or saith 'this was revealed unto me,' when nothing hath been revealed to him. From this story, which is also told by Imam Husain, it is self-evident that the style of the Qur'an can no longer be regarded as a miracle, for here we have a verse uttered by one 'Abdu'llah Ibn Sa'ud, which is fitted to take rank with the rest of the Qur'an, and, indeed, can in no way be distinguished from it. Moreover, it is clear that if Muhammad could thus claim as a revelation, and insert in the Qur'an, words which were uttered in his hearing by one of his followers, it would be equally easy for him to claim the same authority for the stories which he heard at various times from Jews and Christians.

The celebrated Muslim writer Jalalu'd-din as-Syuti has left us conclusive evidence that Muhammad was in the habit of incorporating into the Qur'an such words and sentences of his followers as attracted his attention and secured his approval. Thus in his famous Itqan we read that:-

In the tenth part (of this work) are recorded those verses of the Qur'an which descended upon the tongue of certain of the companions of Muhammad.

In another tradition preserved by Tirmidhi from Ibn 'Umar we read:-

1 Suiratu'l-An'am (vi. 93).

The Prophet of God (on whom be blessing and peace) said, 'Verily God placed the truth upon the tongue and heart of 'Umar.' So noticeable was Muhammad's repetition of 'Umar's words that Jalalu'd-din tells us the companions of the prophet said:-

Has not the Qur'an been revealed according to the sayings of 'Umar. Mujahid records another tradition to the same effect. He says

The Qur'an descended according to the opinion of 'Umar. From these traditions it is perfectly clear that 'Umar was the real author of certain portions of the Qur'an. Muslim literature, in fact, furnishes us with not a few examples of such passages.¹ For example, in the Qur'an we read:-

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Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel ... or Michael, verily God is an enemy to the unbelievers. These words were originally spoken by 'Umar to some Jews, and so pleased with them was Muhammad that he forthwith repeated them as a part of the Qur'an. The whole story is told by Baidawi thus:-

1 See further in "Hidayatu'l-Muslimin," pp. 224-6.

2 Suratu-l-Baqarah (ii. 91-2)

It is said that 'Umar once entered a school of the Jews, and asked them about Gabriel. They replied, 'He is our enemy; he reveals our secrets to Muhammad; he is also the messenger of wrath and punishment. Michael, on the contrary, brings us prosperity and plenty.' Then 'Umar said, 'What is their position with regard to God?' and the Jews replied, 'Gabriel on His right, and Michael on His left, but between these two there is enmity.' But he said, 'God forbid what it should be as you say; they are not enemies, but you are more unbelieving than the Himyarites. Whosoever is the enemy of either angel, he is the enemy of God.' Then 'Umar went away and found that Gabriel had preceded him with a revelation; and Muhammad said to him, 'Thy Lord hath already agreed with thee, O 'Umar.'

Another authentic tradition handed down to us by Bukhari reveals the origin of three other passages of the Qur'an, and proves conclusively that Muhammad largely added to his work from the sayings of those around him. These traditions, rationally interpreted, absolutely refute the claim that the whole Qur'an was revealed from heaven, and, on the contrary, support the assertion made at the beginning of this book that it is the product of Muhammad's own genius. The Tradition of Bukhari referred to above runs thus:-

1 Tafsiru'l-Baidawi (ed Cairo), p. 20.

It is recorded by Bukhari and others that 'Umar ibn Khattab said, 'In three things I agreed with my God (that is, with the Qur'an). (The first is that) I said, 'O Prophet of God, if we were to say our prayers in Abraham's place, (it would be better).' Then a revelation came down, 'Take the place of Abraham for the place of prayer.' (The second is that) I said, 'O Prophet of God, good and had people come to your house; if you shut up your women it will be better.' Then came down the verse of the veil upon the Prophet. (The third is that) the wives of the Prophet were quarreling, and I said to them, 'It may be that the Lord will divorce you and give the prophet better wives than you in exchange.' Then came down a revelation like I had spoken.' As a matter of fact the three verses referred to by 'Umar may still be found in the Qur'an today in the Suratu'l-Baqarah (ii) and the Suratu't-Tahrim (lxvi).

Many more passages of the Qur'an could be quote which Muhammad borrowed from the lips of his friends; the limits of this little book force us to desist.¹ The reader who desires to pursue the subject further may consult Dr. Imadu'd-Din's famous Hidayatu'l-Muslimin where the matter is dealt with at length. Enough has been written, however, to show how mistaken is the belief that the Qur'an was revealed from heaven by the agency of the angel Gabriel. At the beginning of his career, and when the great truth of

1 The curious may find them in Jalalu'd-din as-Suyti's "Itqan" i. 43. et seq.

the Unity of God laid hold of his soul, Muhammad may have been deluded into the belief that he was inspired; but later on in his career there can be no doubt - the Qur'an itself being witness - that he deliberately forged a number of passages to suit his own purposes.

The great mass of the Qur'anic revelations, however, as we have seen, simply consists of various elements derived from existing materials, which were adopted by Muhammad and cast into the forms which they now assume in the Qur'an. The Prophet himself never tired of reiterating the statement that the Qur'an was sent down

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Confirming the scriptures which were before it. Those Scriptures of the Jews and Christians were admitted by Muhammad himself to be

2

Complete as to whatever is excellent, and an explanation very question, and a direction and a mercy. That being so, what need, we ask, for a subsequent revelation? Any careful study of the Bible will convince the unprejudiced reader that the Christian dispensation is to last until the second coming of Christ to judgment; that the Gospel is to be preached to all the nations, and that the kingdom of Christ is a Kingdom which shall have no end. In the Gospel the work of redemption is completed, and it is left to the Christian Church to make known to a sinful world the glad story of salvation through the blood of

1 Suratu'l-Ma'idah (v. 52). On the guardianship of the Qur'an over the Bible, see Sell's "Historical Development of the Qur'an" (ed. 1905), pp. 106-7.

2 Su'ratu'l-An'am (vi. 155).

Christ. There is thus left neither room nor necessity for a subsequent revelation; Christ is "the first and the last"¹ and "neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved."²

Let the Muhammadan reader earnestly consider these facts, and he will come to see how impossible it is that the Qur'an can be a revelation from God. In that book he is commanded to believe the Gospel; yet a belief in the Gospel must necessarily lead to the rejection of the Qur'an for the latter denies many of the leading truths of the former. In short "Muhammadans are in the awkward predicament of being obliged by their religion to believe in what explodes their religion. They are commanded to believe in two contradictions. They are commanded to accept Jesus as a Prophet and, at the same time, to accept Muhammad. They are enjoined to receive the Old Testament Scriptures as a revelation, although nothing is more obvious in those Scriptures than that the history of Judaism develops into and finds its completion and end in Christianity; and they are enjoined to believe in the New Testament Scriptures, although these writings so distinctly claim to be the final revelation, that it is impossible to find room for the claims of Muhammad as the ultimate revealer of God's will.³ Let the reader search those "former Scriptures" of which Muhammad spoke so highly, and he will find in them the way to eternal life.

1 Injil, Revelation (i. 17).

2 Injil, Acts (iv. 12).

3 Dods, "Muhammad, Buddha and Christ", pp. 15, 16.

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