FROM THE ARABIAN NIGHTS TO SPIRIT*

All missionaries to Muslims, like all students of more remote languages, literatures and civilizations, have probably felt the need of some absolutely candid and unprejudiced informant to guide them as to the workings of the Muslim mind, as to its fixed ideas, its unreasoned assumptions, and even as to the real meaning of the words of the languages in which it expresses itself. It is notorious that the dictionaries which profess to render these words into English are often highly misleading, as no one word in one language is ever exactly equivalent to one in another language. Every word has a penumbra of implications and suggestions, of memories and applications, which cannot be represented by other single words. Gradually, as we learn to use any new language, we learn when to employ one word and when another in it; but there are some words, and those of the greatest importance, which may long baffle us. Further, it slowly becomes clear that in the Muslim mind, for example, when it uses such words there is a fundamental difference of attitude, a basal assumption, which to us the word in question itself does not suggest. It is then that the whole matter may be suddenly illumined by a usage in some trivial story which makes concrete and vivid that difference which has baffled us.

I propose to illustrate this from a very ordinary little story in the Arabian Nights. I will show, too, how the Nights may be turned into that candid informant whose help we have all desired and that the diligent student of the Nights is in contact with the naked mind of Islam—and with its naked conduct as well—with a direct immediacy for which he, as a missionary, can never otherwise hope. He cannot expect, nor is it

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* This quarterly follows the spelling of Moslem (for Muslim) and Koran (for Q'uran), but in this article we have permitted the author's spellings to stand.—EDITOR.

indeed desirable, that actual Muslims will open their minds to him with the same frankness as that with which he will find them pictured there. The Nights were written for Muslims by Muslims, with perfect simplicity and unconscious devotion to the Real, and just on account of this simplicity of attitude and unconsciousness of art, they are an indefinitely truer picture of life than any painted by our own hyperconscious devotees to a supposed realism. As I have treated this side of the Nights already in my article on *Hikāya* in the Leyden Encyclopedia of Islam (vol. ii, pp. 303 ff.) I will not develope it here. I will only say that there is a class of stories in the Nights which I believe to have arisen out of deliberate following of the Aristotelian doctrine of "imitation" in literary art.

The story is that of the Merchant and the Jinnī, at the very beginning of the Nights, in which the son of the Jinnī is killed by the merchant, who throws his date "shells" carelessly about. The incident has probably puzzled us all from childhood. Most of us knew, even then, that dates have no shells; but, apart from that detail, it was a hard saying that a Genie—acceptedly some kind of spirit—should be killed by a little thing tossed right or left. The translations in which the "shells" occur all go back to Galland, the primary French translator of the Nights at the beginning of the xviiith century. Why he translated his Arabic as "écorces" and not as "noyaux" nobody knows, but the English translators of his French followed with unanimity and the absurdity survived in English forms long after it had been corrected in the French texts.* But as to the second point Galland was evidently himself puzzled, for he interpolated that the "shell" struck the young Jinnī in the eye. That is not in his Arabic text. He had had the good fortune to happen upon the oldest, as yet, known ms of the Nights, and I transcribe the following passages from a photograph of it which I have and with the help of which I am preparing an

* It is already corrected in the oldest French edition I have (dated 1790) but seems still to survive in all the English renderings of Galland, except that by Edward Foster.

edition: fa-jalas 'alā-l-'ain wa-rabaṭ dābbatahu wa-ḥatta khurjahu wa-'akhraj ba'da tilka-l-quraṣ az-zawāda wa-qalil tamr wa-ṣār ya' kul tamr wa-yarmi-n-nawā yamīnan wa-shimālan ḥatta-ktafā * * * fa-qāla-l-jinnī anta qatalta waladī wa-dhālik annaka lammā ṣirta tarmi-n-nawā yamīnan wa-shimālan kān waladī kamā mashā fa-jā'a¹ niwāya fih fa-qatalathu. It will be seen that this text is neither colloquial nor literary, though it is, if anything, more the latter than the former. It is, I think, a genuine specimen of the story-telling style of the end of the XIVth century in Egypt and I would translate this bit as follows: "So he alighted¹ beside the spring and tethered his riding-beast and put down his saddlebags and took out some of those cakes—his provender—and a few dates and began to eat some dates and to cast the stones right and left until he was satisfied. . . . Then the Jinni said, 'Thou didst kill my boy; because when thou beganest casting the date-stones right and left my boy was there, as it were, walking, and a stone entered him and killed him.'"

This evidently means that the young Jinnī was walking, as a man would, on the ground and that the date-stone pierced him so that he died. It will be noticed, too, that the merchant does not dispute either the possibility or the probability of such a thing happening. It was a strange accident, but quite possible. How, then, can we explain it, and whither will the explanation lead us?

In the preface to his English translation of Galland's French Edward Foster notices this apparent absurdity and tells how it was explained to him by Warren Hastings. "There are accounts of people having been killed by date-stones, which were shot at them in a particular manner with both hands. Those persons, who are in the habit of doing this, will send the stone with such velocity as to give a most violent blow. And it is in this manner that prisoners are sometimes put to death; a man sits down at a little distance from the object he intends to destroy, and then attacks him by repeatedly

¹ The context seems to require this translation of *jalasa*, but it is very strange.

shooting at him with the stone of the date, thrown from his two forefingers; and in this way puts an end to his life."²

This must strike us as a very oriental method of execution, both in slowness and in cruelty; but Warren Hastings is an excellent authority. A further development of this same explanation was given to me by a former student of mine, the late R. S. Emrich of Mardin, from his own experience. While riding with his shaykh, a Muslim of education and position, through some wild and broken country, he noticed that his shaykh alighted from his horse and gathered a number of small pebbles. He mounted again and they rode on, and the shaykh kept slinging pebbles right and left from the tips of his forefingers, using the spring of the stiffly held forefingers as propelling force. Naturally, Mr. Emrich asked what that meant, but the only answer he could get was, "I must protect myself." It appeared, however, that the place was one reputed to be a haunt of the Jinn. This evidently means that the Jinn are afraid of being injured by such small rapidly flying missiles and will keep their distance.

We have thus a parallel to the case of the merchant and his date-stones. But how can the Jinn be thus injured? For the answer to that question we must go back to their origin. According to the usual statement the angels were created of light, mankind of clay and the Jinn of smokeless flame. The angels and mankind are not our present subject, but it may be worth while to say that I know of no Qur'ānic authority for the origin of the angels (but there is a tradition from 'A'isha to the above effect in the *Lisān*, iii, p. 189) and that an excellent short statement of their nature will be found in Baidāwī's commentary on Qur. ii, 28 and at greater length in the "Dictionary of Technical Terms," pp 1337 f. From these it is plain that the angels for orthodox Islam are specifically material, although of a very fine substance (*ajsām latīfa*) and capable of as-

² Edward Forster's translation appeared first in 1802. I quote from an edition of 1842, p. xxvi.

suming different forms. The phrase describing the substance of the Jinn is more difficult. It occurs only in Qur. iv, 14, *min mārijin min nār*, "of a *mārij* of fire," and on the meaning of *mārij* the lexicographers and commentators are entirely at odds. The oldest exegetical traditions are collected in Tabarī's *Tafsīr*, vol. xxvii, pp. 66 f. and the views of the lexicographers in the *Lisān*, vol. iii, p. 189 and partly in Lane, p. 2704 c. The meaning of the root is very obscure—"mix," "cause to flow," "be confused, spoiled"—and the principal interpretations of the phrase are, "a confused, mixed flame of fire," i. e. with blackness and different colours in it, or "a pure flame of fire," i. e. without smoke. One of the most picturesque paraphrases given in the *Lisān* might be rendered, "a flashing fire-brand full of strong flame." But in Qur. xv, 27 the Jinn are said to be formed out of "fire of the *samūm*," the hot and penetrating wind of the desert. In both passages the object seems to be combined with the ideas of fiery flame and extreme tenuity of substance. But, for all this, I strongly suspect that behind *mārij* is concealed one of the foreign words of which Muhammad was so fond.

Again the Qur'ān tells (xv, 18; xxxvii, 7 ff.; lxxii, 8, 9, but see especially Baidāwī on xxxvii, 7 ff.) how the Jinn and Shaitāns used to ascend to the lowest heaven and listen to the angels and thus gather information, and how they were chased away from the walls of heaven with *shuhub*, "firebrands" and *rujūm*, "missiles." The traditions tell that at the birth of 'Isā they were cut off from a third of heaven and at that of Muhammad from all the rest; but still they make the attempt, although at deadly peril. For these meteors and shooting stars may utterly destroy them, their greater fire overcoming the lesser fire of the Jinn, as Baidāwī explains, and burning them completely up. Of this there are several cases in the Nights. It will be remembered how Badr ad-Din (N. xxii) was put down asleep at the gate of Damascus because the 'Ifrit was burned up by *shuhub* and the 'Ifrita could carry him no further.

But it does not need the angels of Allah and shooting stars to destroy a Jinnī or an 'Ifrīt. Men can destroy them too, if they only know how. My old pupil's shaykh knew how, and the merchant in the Nights accepted his unwitting deed as perfectly intelligible. It is the belief, too, of the Egyptian populace that a Jinnī or 'Ifrīt is a body of fire covered with a thin skin. If the skin is broken in any way he flares up and all that is left is a small burnt mass, which they compare to an old shoe, perforated by fire and burned to a cinder. In Sophia Poole's "Englishwoman in Egypt" (London, 1884), a collection of letters written in 1842-4 by the sister of E. W. Lane, when living with him in Cairo, there is a long account of the troubles they had with a haunted house (vol. i, pp. 72 ff., 199 ff.; ii, p. 9). The narrative is not as full and exact as modern psychological research requires; but it affords a good book-case of an oriental haunting with poltergeist phenomena added. The haunters (*'āmirs*) were a saint—his sainthood was fixed by his drawing water from the well in the court, performing his *tahāra* and going through the *salā*—and an 'Ifrīt; that he was not only an 'Ifrīt but a Shaitān was shown by his throwing dust in the right eye of the *bawwāb*. So the *bawwāb* destroyed him with a double-loaded pistol and all that was left was the burnt up shoe-sole described above. In J. S. Willmore's "Spoken Arabic of Egypt" similar stories are told.

In this way, then, the son of the Jinnī must have died. The swiftly slung date-stone was quite enough to pierce to his central fires; they rushed out and he burnt up. His demise was quite normal for the Muslim mind; for it there is nothing strange in the story. But what does all this mean for the missionary? Does it do any more than illustrate the, for him, essential queerness of that mind? I think it does, and I wish now to work out some of the ideas as to words and their meanings which it brings.

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⁸ The best statement of the meanings of this word which I know is in the *Lisan*, vol. iii, pp. 289 ff.. The *Lisan* is always fuller than Lane.

To angels and Jinn and Shaitans alike the word *rūḥ* can be applied. We, without thinking, translate that word "spirit." Are we right in doing so, or are we indolently leading ourselves astray? Or, to put the matter otherwise, is there (i) any other English translation for *rūḥ* than "spirit" and (ii) is there any other Arabic translation of "spirit" than *rūḥ*? Probably every missionary has been told some time or other, "We don't think of spirit—or *rūḥ*—as you do." This came out recently very forcibly in Dr. Harrison's most interesting account of his expedition to the Wahhābī capital, ar-Riyād. On his cart and on hand-bills he had what seems to us the simplest, most fundamental and most inoffensive statement, "God is a Spirit," *Allahu rūḥ*. For the Wahhābīs it was the most horrible blasphemy, and he had to suppress it. Evidently, for them, it meant that God was a material being, one of the Jinn family. This would be a return to the pre-Islamic heathenism, for the Meccans had asserted that there was a kinship (*nasab*) between the Jinn and Allah (Qur. xxxvii, 158) and that the Jinn were partners of Allah (vi, 100).

It may, therefore, be said that, while we can, perhaps, safely render *rūḥ* with "spirit," if we always remember that it does not really mean "spirit" as opposed to "matter," we cannot render "spirit" with *rūḥ* unless we explain that this is a new use of *rūḥ* and also make perfectly clear the sense in which we now use it. The last condition, it is safe to say, will be fulfilled with difficulty. Yet, it may be the only way out and we know the strain which was put upon Greek words by the early Christian usage. St. Paul could use πνεῦμα and balance πνευματικός against ψυχικός but was he always completely understood? That native Arabic-speaking Christians have for centuries used *rūḥ* in this sense will not greatly help the matter; but there are some Qur'anic passages which may be a bridge, and some Muslim theologians have made a beginning in that direction.

It is unanimously accepted that Muhammad himself was not a systematic theologian. He often used tech-

nical terms and expressions; but they were debris of previous systems and were used by him without clear understanding. One of these was our present word *rūḥ*, and with regard to it Muhammad himself realized that he was out of his depth. He, therefore, shut down discussion with a command from Allāh (Qur. xvii, 87): "Say thou [O Muhammad], 'The *rūḥ* is of my Lord's affair,' " *min amri rabbi*. But contradictory passages enough were left in the Qur'an to puzzle later commentators. Thrice it speaks of "angels and the *rūḥ*" (lxx, 4; lxxviii, 38; xcvi, 4). Four times there is mention of "the holy *rūḥ*" (*rūḥ al-qudus*, ii, 81, 254; v, 109; xvi, 104). "Jesus is a *rūḥ* from Allāh" (iv, 169) and later Islam has even called Him *rūḥu-llāh* and "the *rūḥ*". Allāh made Adam symmetrical and breathed (*nafakha*) into him some of His *rūḥ*" (xv, 29; xxxii, 8; xxxviii, 72) and similarly into Maryam (xxi, 91; lxvii, 12). There are, besides, passages where *rūḥ* means, evidently, "angel" and especially the angel of revelation and others in which *rūḥ* is associated with angels or is a direct influence from Allāh (xvi, 2; xix, 17; xxvi, 193; xl, 15; xlii, 52; lviii, 22). In these last passages Muhammad's own thought is often most obscure, and we are left guessing between concrete angelic ministrations and an influence like that of the Holy Spirit in Christian theology. That Muhammad was in contact with a doctrine of the Holy Spirit of one kind or another can hardly be doubted. It remained, however, for him amorphous and contradictory because it clashed when thought out to the end with his fundamental antithesis between Allāh and all else than Allāh; between the creative Will and the created universe. And in this antithesis lies the difficulty which orthodox Islam finds in our antithesis between spiritual and material. All creation must be material for it is "other than Allāh" and Allāh alone is spiritual. So, while "material" can be rendered exactly by *māddī*, there is no exact and unambiguous word for "spiritual". 'Aqlī means "belonging to the 'aql or reason," νοητός, "noetic," and *ma'nawī* is "mental, ideal, intellectual"

and is not at all spiritual in its atmosphere.

But before the fact of the religious consciousness such a position as this could not stand. A Muslim with a real religious experience, however orthodox in theology he may be, must recognize that there is a vital relation between himself and Allah. He may not be willing to say, "Est Deus in nobis"; but there must be in him something, somehow, of the Divine. It is true that he may leave the matter there and decline, out of fear of soul-destroying error, to speculate further. But if he is a thinking man as well as a religious man he must go on and bring together, by some device, his theology and his experience. Muhammad, with his utterly unsystematic mind, had left the two unreconciled. But the following generations of Muslims could not do that; and, however they might shrink from extreme mystical theories, they had to reach a possible view of the human soul and its relation to Allah.

Such a view is developed by al-Ghazzali in one of his smaller treatises, *Al-maḍnūn aṣ-saghīr*.⁶ In form it consists of answers to questions addressed to him by some of his more advanced students on subjects not suited for public discussion. For al-Ghazzali, like practically all the Muslims, believed in an economy of teaching, and declined to go beyond a certain point in discussing theological questions with those who, he thought, might be, thereby, rather injured than advantaged. This method was perfectly understood and accepted at the time, but those little, esoteric tractates have been sometimes misunderstood in later times and have led to accusations of disingenuousness, at the least. For myself, I do not think that he always realized the implications of his views and arguments; but that he was a conscious pantheist, concealing out of fear his true position, I do not believe. In this case he developed what is no more than a Christian view of the soul, and many Muslims at the present time would accept it. But many would not, and among these would virtually

⁶I use a Cairo edition of 1303. It has been translated into Spanish by Asín in his "Algazal" (Zaragoza, 1901), pp. 692-733. What I give here is an outline only; al-Ghazzali supports all his positions with scholastic dialectic.

be all the Hanbalites and the straiter party of the Ash'arites. The Wahhābites, whom Dr. Harrison met at ar-Riyād are Hanbalites, more immediately of the school of Ibn Taimīya, and to them this doctrine would be an abomination.

The Qur'anic passages, xv, 29; xxxii, 8; xxxviii, 72, mean, says al-Ghazzalī, that Allah makes the embryo a purified and balanced compound fit to receive and retain the *rūḥ* as a wick after being soaked with oil can retain fire. The "breathing" or "blowing" is a metaphorical expression for this kindling, as it were, of the light of the *rūḥ* in the "wick" of the embryo. It may be illustrated, on the one side, by the light of the sun which illuminates things whose nature it is to be brought out by light, i. e. the variegated things under the sphere of Air, and, on the other side, by the polish of a steel mirror which only when polished reflects what is in front of it. But it must not be thought that this outpouring of the *rūḥ* means any change in Allah who creates it. It is not like the pouring of water from a vessel upon the hand, nor even of the rays of the sun, if these are thought of, as some erroneously think, as separated from the body of the sun. The light of the sun is the cause of the production of a thing which resembles it in quality of light although much weaker than it. Similarly the object reflected in the mirror is the cause of the reflection which resembles it; there is no joining nor separating but a simple causal relationship.

The *rūḥ*, again, is not something abiding in the body, like water in a vessel, nor as an attribute or accident abides in a substance; it is a substance existing in itself, not in the heart or brain, nor in space at all. It is not a body and cannot be divided, and you cannot predicate spatial relationships of it any more than you can predicate knowledge or ignorance of a stone. So it is neither inside the body nor outside, joined to it or separated from it. To justify such description corporeality is needed. And here al-Ghazzalī attacks boldly the question of economy in teaching. Why was the Prophet,

in Qur. xvii, 87, forbidden by Allah to discuss the nature of *rūḥ*? Because men are of different degrees of understanding. There are the anthropomorphic Karrāmites and the Hanbalites who cannot accept such a conception as this, even in the case of Allah; for them an entity (*mawjūd*) must be corporeal, a *jism* at which you can point. How, then, can they think of the human *rūḥ* as uncorporeal? With the Ash'arites and the Mutazilites the case is not so bad. They can conceive of an entity which is not in a direction; but they will not extend that possibility beyond Allah. This is because they say that two different things cannot be in one place; otherwise the two things are the same and not different. And they extend this argument to two different things not in place at all. In that case they say that the two things cannot be distinguished. But in this they err, for distinguishing does not take place simply by locality but also by time and by definitions and essential natures. Two bodies may be distinguished by being in two places, and two qualities, such as the being black may be in one substance at two different times and different accidents such as color and taste and cold and moisture may be in one body at one time and yet be distinguishable by their definitions and essential natures. If, then, accidents thus differing can be conceived, much more can be conceived things similarly differing apart from space.

Similarly, they err in their objection that this is to make comparison (*tashbīḥ*) between Allah and mankind and to ascribe to the *rūḥ* of mankind the most individual of the qualities of Allah, the being free from space and direction. For many qualities of Allah are ascribed to mankind, as hearing, seeing and speaking, and being apart from space and direction is not His most individual quality; but, rather that is His being *qayyūm*, existing in and through His own essence. Every other being exists through Allah's essence; has, in truth, only a borrowed, derivative existence.

But what does Allah mean when He says that this *rūḥ* is *His rūḥ*, when all creation is by Him? Is it a

part of Him poured out on the recipient, as when one gives alms to a beggar and says, "I bestowed upon him some of my wealth?" The answer is to refer back to the metaphor of the sun pouring out "some of its light" upon the object. The resultant light upon the object is in a sense of the same genus as the light of the sun although weakened in the extreme. So with Allah; this human *rūḥ*, being apart from space and direction, is similar and related to Allah, though so infinitely weaker, and has the power, being different from all corporeal things, of knowing and studying all things.

Al-Ghazzali takes a different view of Qur. xvii, 87 from that which I, following Zamakhsharī in his *Kashshāf*, have stated above; it is a much disputed passage because of the different possibilities of meaning in the word *'amr*. Ghazzali here connects it with the distinction between *'ālam al-'amr* and *'ālam al-khalq*, "the world of (divine) command,"—and "the world of measure" understanding *khalq* here as *taqdīr*, "to measure" and not in its more usual meaning, "creation." The spirits (*arwāḥ*), then, of men and of angels belong to this World of Command which is an expression for all entities which exist apart from sense and form, direction and space, and do not come under dimension and measure. But, of course, this does not mean that they are uncreated and existent from all eternity. There follows a bit of dialectic to prove that these spirits are created. It is more interesting in its incidentals than in its primary object. For example, al-Ghazzali rejects any kind of panpsychism once the spirits are joined to their bodies; how, then, could Zaid know something and 'Amr not know it? But this difference and personality is through their being joined to material bodies and not by their own nature. This difference, however, when so gained, is permanent and they retain it after they are separated from their bodies. It is plain, too, that al-Ghazzali is very anxious to rule out any possible pre-existence of souls.

Such, then, is his answer to the question of the *rūḥ*, and it lies very far apart from the killing of Jinn with

date-stones. Over the space between the two the Muslim mind still wanders. It is a space full of infinite possibilities, and I should be glad to hear from any missionaries who, on discreet inquiry, may get reactions to any of the ideas reproduced above.

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