

## ARABIAN STORIES FOR CHINESE READERS

There was published at Peking a few months ago, a new book by a Moslem named Li T'ing Hsiang, which is not without interest as showing what an intelligent Moslem of the present day contributes towards the revival of Islam in China. The book is a collection of strange stories from the Koran and other "reliable histories," and is given a title which may be translated "Marvels recorded for exhortation to goodness." In his preface the compiler says: "Among men there are always a few at the extremes of wisdom and foolishness, but most of the people in the world are average people. In general it is the nature of men to be good and not evil, and it is men's inclination or disposition to love the good and hate the evil; if people are exhorted in accordance with this nature and disposition, there are none who may not be made good. The True Lord gave the Books and sent the prophets and made all the worthy and superior men on purpose to exhort people to goodness: but the minds of men are unstable and they often dislike what is old and delight in anything new. As regards the Koran and the Traditions and the books of the sages, men look at them in a cursory manner without finishing them, and in their reading they get tired and sleepy; if they see fiction or stories of something marvellous they are alert with double energy; their feelings are easily worked up to weep or pity, to sympathize or to be angry with the characters of the story.

"As it is my duty to help in instructing and reforming people, I have looked among my old books and selected some wonderful stories with the purpose of arousing people from their lethargy, and I have made this book and called it 'Marvels recorded for exhortation to goodness.' The book is made up of selections from the Koran and other reliable histories, and although the stories are wonderful yet they are true, and while extraordinary, they are

only a few of others equally so. They are all concerned with our religion and will serve to stir up the good in men's hearts and to reprove their evil thoughts; it is my wish that those who read this book may not regard it as an ordinary story book."

The book contains fifty selections, of unequal length and differing values; as fables with morals something might be said for them; but when we are assured that they are "true" and that some are extracted from the "incomparable Book," every jot and tittle of which is perfect and to be believed, then we feel that they give a lamentable exhibition of the credulity and the standard of intelligence expected of the Moslem readers of China in this age of world-progress in other ways. A few selections are herewith given in translation to indicate the value of the book, and to show one of the latest methods of arousing interest and strengthening the faith in the Moslem religion in China.

1. EXALTED VIRTUES COMMAND SUBMISSION. A good man named Abdullah was travelling in company with other merchants on a trading trip, and as they came to a thicket among the hills those who were in front saw before them a lion asleep on the path; they were all afraid to proceed but turned back and fled. Abdullah was behind and as he came up he saw them fleeing and asked what was the matter, so they told him about the lion. Abdullah dismounted from his beast and walked up to the lion and took hold of it by the ear and said: "Begone! Begone!" The fierce lion got up, and with head bent down and ears drooping, it wagged its tail and went off. The other merchants greatly wondered at this and asked Abdullah how came it to pass, and he answered: "The Prophet said: 'If a man can fear God and cultivate himself to the utmost sincerity, then all things will obey his command; man is the most noble of all between heaven and earth, and the most intelligent of all creatures; if he is a perfect man, why need he fear a lion, which, although fierce, is only a beast.' " When they heard these words, they all acknowledged the loftiness of his virtue.

*Comment.*—Men and all things in creation exist by

the decree of God and are subject to the commands of God; but prophets and worthies only are able to have perfect manhood and to be in harmony with God so as to completely follow all the commands of God; as they do this, all beasts are bound to respect and obey them.

**LIFE LENGTHENED BY CARING FOR THE STARVING.** In the time of the prophet Musa, (Moses) there was an Israelite named Naibuer who was wealthy and liked to do good deeds and give alms; at fifty years of age he was still without a son on which account he was grieved and could not sleep at nights; his wife told him that the prophet Moses could prevail with God and he ought to go and ask for his interest in the matter of getting a son. The man followed this advice and went and besought Moses, who granted his request. After prayer, Moses said: "God will give you a son, but his life will be cut off on the day of his marriage." In his joy at the promise of a son, Naibuer forgot the sorrow contained in the prophecy, so did not speak of it. In due time a son was born, for which the father gave thanks and offered sacrifice and made a great feast to which relatives and friends came with their congratulations.

When the son was grown up, Naibuer's wife advocated an early marriage, to which the husband agreed, so with befitting ceremony the boy was betrothed to the daughter of a wealthy family, and the day fixed for the marriage; it was then that Naibuer told his wife of the prophecy of Moses, on which she was greatly alarmed and wept unceasingly. Her husband said to her: "It is Fate; do not worry lest you make God angry; we can only submit."

On the appointed day Naibuer was outwardly joyous with the guests, but in his heart he was much troubled. During the feast there appeared a student of the Book who, because his travelling money was all used up, had been three days without food and he could hardly walk but just crept up to the door and asked for food; Naibuer saw and pitied him and personally hastened down the steps and assisted him into the hall and quickly gave him food. When the man had eaten, in gratitude he secret-

ly prayed for his benefactor and his descendants, desiring that the succession might continue without break; God granted his request and decreed added life to the son.

Naibuer went about that day with heavy heart, and could not sleep the whole night, but listened for the dreaded news; but on the day following there was no sickness, nor yet on the next day; so he inquired of Moses, who asked God what was the reason why the expected had not happened, and God told Moses that he had been pleased with the sincere and good action of Naibuer in saving the starving, so he had granted the prayer of the student. Moses reported this and Naibuer praised God and hereafter was still more zealous and earnest in well-doing.

*Comment.* The giving of a single meal may be a very small matter and I would not deceive anybody by implying that it can in itself confer lengthened life for the giver; the Way of Heaven is not so easy as that. But when a man had been without food for three days he was in extremity, and although one meal may be but little, yet in this case to get it meant life, and not to get it meant death; hence a meal in such a case was the saving of a life. Moreover when Naibuer saw the man in such dire necessity he hastened to his relief and assisted him up the steps, his outward actions thus testifying to the sincerity of his heart. The Book says: "If you are compassionate to men, God will be compassionate to you"; and as this principle is true there can be no doubt about the lengthening of days told in this story.

**THE STORY OF SAMSON.** In the main this follows the scriptural account, but differs where Samson is captured and his body is cut up and his head is kicked about as a football; his heart was taken out and hung over the city gate. Although his body was dead, his soul was still conscious and he prayed to God saying: "O, God, Thou art the Compassionate; save in this bitter extremity; Thou art the Just, give blessing to the good and calamity to the evil; Thy great power is omnipotent, with Thee are the commands of life and death. When I was alive I left undone many good things, and I now pray that Thou,

O God, will give me back my body and restore my life." God answered his prayer and gave one thousand times more strength than he had before; he gave a great shout at which the walls of the city fell down and the people were terrified; the opposers were all destroyed and the rest submitted. Samson then thanked God for His grace, and day and night cultivated virtue and worshipped unceasingly, and had years added until he died at the age of eighty-three years and four months.

*Comment.* The heart of man is difficult to fathom; even in jesting one should be on one's guard, and the closest conversation between husband and wife often has a way of leaking out, so that one cannot be too careful. As a man Samson was lacking in wisdom and discretion, so he came to grief at the hands of an ignorant but scheming woman. Yet the sincerity of his virtue was such as to move God to restore him to life in order that he might destroy the enemies and restore lustre to the correct Faith; so Samson may rightly be numbered among the prophets.

A DEAD PRIEST RECALLED TO LIFE. The Appointed Prophet Jesus on his travels came to a certain village and tried to instruct and reform the people who said to him that as he called himself a special prophet he ought to be able to show them some miracle. Jesus asked what they would like him to do, and they said that there was in the neighborhood a grave of a priest who had been dead over one thousand years, and if Jesus could call him back to life they would believe. Jesus said that God was all-powerful and this was only a small matter; so he went with them to the grave and after making two obeisances he lifted his hands in prayer and the grave opened and the dead man, whose name was Tulabu, came out of the cavity and knelt down before the prophet and repeated the Kalima—"there is no deity but God and Jesus is His Prophet." Jesus said to him: "You died as a Buddhist priest (probably priest of idolatry is meant but the term Buddha is used) over one thousand years ago and now you have attained to the correct Faith; in your ordinary life you must have done something good, will

you tell us what it was?" The priest puzzled over it for some time and then remembered and said: "When I was alive I was one day passing a mosque and stepping inside I saw a student of the Book who in weariness had fallen asleep leaning on the table under the lamp, and the Book was thrown on the ground; I cleansed my hands and lifted the Book up to the table and quietly retired without the student having awakened." Jesus said to all around: "Listen to this! Tulabu was a man on the wrong road, but he did one good act with the sincerity of which God was pleased, and therefore today he is called forth to life again and has attained the Faith." The people were all moved to repeat the creed that there is only one God and Jesus was the Apostle of God, and they all followed the holy Faith.

A WARNING TO THE COVETOUS. The prophet Jesus on his travels saw a shepherd beating a skull with the handle of a whip, at which he wondered and asked the reason. The shepherd replied that the skull contained some gold coins which he was trying to get and could not without breaking it to pieces. "Alas!" said Jesus, "God made man the most noble of all things; what can have been the crime of this man that not only is his body scattered, but his very bones are broken to pieces?" The skull was moved by the Holy Spirit and spake as follows: "Woe is me! In life I was an official in high position, but I did not care about governing the country nor did I consider the people; I was ungrateful for the mercies I received and went on as if I believed in neither heaven nor hell, and as if I had never heard of the heavenly books; I only cared about receiving bribes and gathering wealth, and though I got much I was never satisfied. When I was about to die I commanded my family that when dead my hands were to be filled with gold and my shoes also, and that my mouth should have gold put in it. Time has passed away and my grave has collapsed and my bones have been exposed and the gold being seen has been taken by people; only the coins in my mouth are left and this shepherd having seen them is trying to get at them by beating my skull about." The prophet wrote

this matter in a book as a warning to all covetous people, showing that those who lust inordinately after gold will have no peace either in life or in death.

SALVATION BY GRACE, NOT BY MERIT. The Angel Gabriel told Mohammed that in a cave on a certain island there was a devout man, an *Abd*, who had praised and worshipped God unceasingly for 400 years. The Prophet greatly admired and asked what was the outcome of such devotion. The angel said that in the after world God told this man that he would have to enter heaven relying upon His grace, upon which the *Abd* replied that such was not in accordance with the Koran which said that the world was a place in which to accumulate merit in order to enter heaven; he had been working for four hundred years, and if he now simply depended upon God's grace, what was the good of all his merit? He could enter heaven by means of his merit, so why should he rely upon grace? God told him he could go on trusting in his merit, and as the man proceeded towards heaven he suffered much on the way from the heat of the sun and from thirst, and at length meeting a man with some water, he was so desperate that he parted with the merit of two hundred years in exchange for some water. Some time after drinking the water he wanted to micturate but was unable to do so and suffered great agony; he then saw a doctor and in exchange for relief he gave his remaining merit of two hundred years, and arrived at the gate of heaven with nothing to his credit, when he became conscious of his mistake and prayed God for forgiveness. God reminded him that he had parted with all his merit for common things which on the earth had been given to him freely, and after all he had nothing of his own to trust to to enter heaven. On the man begging for forgiveness and mercy, God forgave him and he was permitted to enter heaven, entirely by the favour of God.

Other stories of the fairy and fabulous kind are included in the collection, including that of the man who was changed into a woman for twelve years and was changed to a man again, all while his wife was cooking

some fish; this being because he doubted that Mohammed could have gone to the heavens and back in a single night. Another story is from the "Arabian Nights" and tells of the man who understood the language of his domestic animals, and had to beat his wife for her importunate curiosity. Perhaps enough has been given above to indicate the scope of this latest book and the fresh effort to stimulate the Moslems of China.

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