

Recent Foreign Theology.

French Theology.¹

THE East through Western Eyes is an appetizing title for a critical essay, especially when its authors are the writers of a well-known life of Mohammed. But it is somewhat spacious for this little work, which is really a cry of protest from two devout Moslems at what they feel to be the irreverence with which certain Western scholars handle the Prophet and other personalities and matters, to them very sacred.

Sometimes, as in the case of that indefatigable student of Mohammedanism, Père Lammens, they allege a bias of mind and a fierceness of partisanship, which, they hold, sours the judgment and beclouds scholarship. Upon this matter they may well take courage. It is a long time since a wise soul, whose very name is now almost forgotten, amid all the clash of crusading days, went East to convert the Mohammedan world, by sympathy and admiration and a rational proof that Christianity is better. And Western scholarship, upon the whole, has learned that lesson. Why should it do otherwise? What it desires is truth. And it were a poor thing to seek to belittle any of God's spokesmen, and so dim the splendour of humanity. Moreover, Christian scholars know that it is a niggardly tribute to Christ to feel that one must cheapen others to ensure His uniqueness. Rather is He so magnificent a Figure, that even when these others are depicted at their highest, He towers up among them—by Himself, alone. There is not much conscious bias among real authorities, and perhaps what is troubling our authors here is really that old difficulty Montefiori once summed up with such neat accuracy, that the true history of a religion can never be written, because those who acknowledge it are biased in its favour, while those outside it cannot know the secret of its power.

But our authors feel that things are being made more difficult than they need be, even by authorities

¹ *L'Orient vu de l'Occident*, Essai critique par E. Douet et Sliman Ben Ibrahim (pp. 104. Geuthner: Paris). *Les Penseurs de L'Islam*, Baron Carra de Vaux (vol. i. pp. 383, and vol. ii. pp. 400. Geuthner: Paris). *Les Pauvres d'Israel*, A. Causse, Prof. à la Faculté de théologie Protestante de l'Université de Strasbourg (pp. 172. Librairie Istra; 8 francs). *La Théologie de St. Cyprien*, Prof. D'Alès, à l'Institut Catholique de Paris (pp. 432. Beauchesne: Paris; 24 francs). *La Liberté Chrétienne*, Robert Will (pp. 329. Librairie Istra; 14 francs).

like Casanova, to whose knowledge and fine temper they pay lavish tribute. Their minds recoil from the critical method, resent seeing their holy things teased and fingered, are of opinion that the aim is often not truth but mere novelty; that this itch to be original is a mental disease; are quite sure that the facts are far more likely to be found in the consistent Mohammedan tradition than in some alien's brilliant guesses. In short, they are feeling what all Christendom passed through some thirty years ago, and is still experiencing. Again let them take heart of grace. The Lord Christ remains as profound a Mystery as ever: nothing vital has been lost or even tarnished. And Mohammed, also, will not lose anything that is really his.

But there is truth in their central thesis. It is the old dilemma, 'East is east and West is west, and never the twain shall meet.' Or, as they put it in the motto of their essay, 'Assuredly, you are in one valley, and I am in another.' The Western mind to them seems almost incapacitated from understanding accurately any Eastern faith, and its interpretations of them are apt to be clumsy and crude and laughable. For it works differently; sees the world from an opposite angle, is the child of quite other philosophies. For one thing our passion for logic is unfamiliar to the Eastern peoples. They are not systematizers in our sense; can hold together in their brain without discomfort several doctrines mutually destructive in our view; argue boldly that the scheme of things is too big to be combined in a system wrought out by a human mind, without spilling over. All which is stated, almost finally, in a remarkable passage in one of his introductions by Gibb in his *Ottoman Poetry*, a passage quite uncanny in its insight. So here our authors tell us plaintively that in certain Western books upon their faith and its leading apostles they can find nothing that they recognize; nothing Eastern but the names, which are affixed to monstrosities, made to think as no Eastern ever did. Even Mohammed has a French or British accent! All which, they tell us, has the same bewildering effect on them we would experience if some Chinese scholar wrote on Richelieu or Napoleon, and tricked him out in the full mental equipment of a Chinaman—pigtail, so to speak, and all!

That is the central difficulty, which ought to compel us all to a becoming modesty. This little

book brings it back to the mind with vividness. And yet the authors never fail in that wise rule laid down in the Koran, 'Do not dispute on religion with the people of the Book (that is to say, with Jews and Christians) except with the most perfect courtesy.'

If we are ever to know one another, East and West, we must have the facts. And here, in *The Thinkers of Islam*, is a work such as we require. These are the first two volumes of what is ultimately to grow to five in all, and that, as the Preface remarks truly, is a mere selection, a bunch or two of flowers gathered out of an almost endless field stretching from Spain to China, from Mohammed to our day. Rulers, historians, political writers, and tales, are followed by geographers, mathematicians, and men of science. Behind them are to come a volume on Law and Mohammedanism, another on Philosophy, Theology, and Mysticism, and last one on the Sects and Modern Thought. In running through this programme, one is struck by the absence of poets, and that very forcibly in view of the enormous mass of Arabic and Turkish poetry, and the huge place it holds in Persian literature. But, evidently, they are to be brought in under other heads, and justifiably enough. Firdousi, *e.g.*, appears, legitimately, under the historians; and others will crowd in among the mystics and philosophers. The work begins at the circumference, and leaves the best till near the end. It is too soon for the great philosophers, for Attar's fascinating *Lives of the Saints*, for the Sufis, for Al Ghazzali and his autobiography—to be linked with Richard Baxter's *Self Review* as among the most honest books existing. All that is still to come. Yet even in these two initial volumes, what a bewildering pageant passes before the eyes, what splashes of colour, what mighty names, what a sense of sunlight and romance and witchery! Haroun-al-Raschid; Saladin, with the splendour of his chivalry; Tamerlane, with his Memoir, claiming, although with so much blood upon his hands, to be the most compassionate of men, who has won the love of all God's creatures! Akbar the tolerant and catholic-minded, for the term thinker is given a wide scope, and includes the makers of the Empire; Tabari, dry but accurate, for as a rule the Arab historian is a collector of facts and not a theorist; Mas'oudi, with his interest in the whole world; Makkari and his vivid pictures of Moslem Spain; Firdousi, ever popular with his

own people, though wearisome to us; the glamour and spell of *The Thousand and One Nights*; adventurers like Sindbad the Sailor; Omar Khayyam, introduced, not for his quatrains, but as the author of the most famous work on Algebra; the long line of astronomers; Avicenna, with his Canon of Medicine, insisting like ourselves on games and breathing exercises; and Averroes, and dozens more. Strange figures flit across the stage—a German knight who, going East to fight for Christendom, becomes a Moslem, ends by being Sultan! Elizabeth of England, scared by news of the Armada, and begging for a Turkish fleet! But probably the most remarkable mind so far is Ibn Khaldoun, whose Prolegomena to his great history is certainly one of the most memorable books ever written. Here is a man who with his modernness, with his inquiry into how things happened, why states arose, how peoples are affected by their climate and a dozen other things, picking with unresting fingers at many of our present problems, worried by the crowding of folk into towns, watching how empires rise and die, seems born before his time, and in his outlook is our own contemporary. This is a useful book, and it will grow in interest as it proceeds.

Such a mass of achievement all born, in a sense, of some wild Arab tribes is staggering enough. And yet is it, after all, as wonderful as the story which Professor Causse depicts for us in *The Poor of Israel* with a swift rush that whirls us through the years? A nomadic people establish themselves in a land half conquered, settle down there as a race of peasants, with a kind of horror of culture and art, with a simple clan life, and a primitive family religion. By and by there come prosperity, kinship, a land flooded with foreign luxuries, a new ease and selfishness. Voices are raised in protest, in appeal to hold by the old simpler ways. But more and more religion becomes centralized in the new capital, and increasingly divorced from the people's daily life, though the prophets still plead and warn; and those who gathered the law together still point to the past as the ideal, or in Deuteronomy forward to a golden age which will reproduce and perfect it. In time, caught by great currents, the little state is dashed to pieces, blotted out, its folk a mere huddle of slaves lost in the hordes of mighty Babylon. But in their hopeless plight some of the captives dream great dreams, and croon songs to their own sore hearts, and clutch

at God there in the dark. And some adventurous spirits go straggling back, from time to time, to the old land, spurred by the vision of a greater, cleaner empire that they are to build. And it all ends—partly in nothing, and partly in a new priestly aristocracy with its new pomps and claims. But 'the poor' still dream their dreams, still cling to God, still feel a pride in their own poverty, are still sure God will justify them in the end, though nothing ever seems to come to prove it. What has it all to do with us, this queer obsession of those people long ago? Only that the voices raised to protest against their wrongs were the prophets who still thrill us like a trumpet blast, and still arrest us in God's name; that the songs they sang there in the darkness are the Psalms which haunt us; are, in parts, the most perfect of all expressions of our deepest feelings, our most intimate moods; that their impossible dreams came true, thank God, in our Lord Jesus Christ. But is there anywhere a stranger or a more unlikely tale than this amazing fragment of real history?

Will the perennial problem of authority and liberty ever be solved? Here are two books that raise it all again with vividness. Professor D'Alès has given us a scholarly and detailed study of *The Theology of Cyprian*, that dignified and lovable and sincerely religious figure, with his affection for Christ, and his enviable experience of how remarkably the faith works out in actual life and character. And this man, with such right to speak, lays it down that implicit obedience to the Church's authority and teaching is of the essence of salvation, carries matters the full length. When, irritated by his leniency towards those who had 'lapsed' under persecution and wished to be restored, certain sterner spirits broke away and founded a new Christian sect, he denounced them as worse than the lapsed; declared their Church to be no Church, their sacraments no sacraments, their sense of Christ's presence sheer delusion. They are outside the ark, and doomed. At all costs the unity of the Church must be maintained. There is, and can be, no Church, except one. And as one looks over the centuries, so full of party spirit, and dissensions, and energy immeasurable, that might have gone to the winning of the world, spent in internecine strife; and out across the earth, still largely outside of the kingdom, filled even yet with the old din and babble, have not his fears been justified; and was

it not a gracious dream, his dream of unity which, in an ideal world, would surely have come true?

And yet here is Pasteur Will, with a work no less scholarly and thorough, on the religion of Luther, whose whole contentings were founded, line on line, on his own actual experiences of what God had done in him—and it is named, legitimately, *Christian Liberty*. For if for him the foundation was justification by faith, the structure built on it was freedom. And he too carried matters the full length, claimed this as a first necessity of any real salvation. In things political, indeed, he compromised, and counselled a submission there which, thinks our author, is responsible for the alienation of the German masses to-day from the Church. And in certain lines he gave back somewhat ere the end. But in the heyday of his power he would not compromise on this at all. Lose this, and all is lost. 'Pope,' he cries in one place, 'this is what you and your councils have decided. But I too have the right of judgment, and can ask myself, "But do I accept this your decision, or do I not?"' In later years the Anabaptists taunted him with having set up a new paper pope in his doctrine of the verbal Inspiration of Scripture, which has had dismal consequences for the Church. And yet he freely exercised, what he claimed as his right, to differentiate between the true and the outworn in Scripture. 'We will found on the authority of Christ against the Scriptures.' Well, who is to decide? Will it ever be settled, this old clash about the fundamentals? or must men just agree to differ? Will some spirits always find a peace and restfulness in passing from the difficulties of decision into the blind acceptance of what the Church's authority lays down for them—the kind of peace many felt in the army—to be a part of a great machine—not theirs to think or plan, but simply to wait and obey? Will others always find that quite impossible; insist on coming to God for themselves, on their own feet, to look at Him with their own eyes, to think it out with their own minds, to have it at first hand? As Fraser of Brea found no peace until he learned that each man is an original, and need not, cannot indeed, reproduce any other man's experience. There are twelve gates into the holy city, says that wise dream of a catholic mind, and some face east, some west, some north, some south; and people, travelling in exactly opposite directions, reach the same goal at last.

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