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G. W. WADE.

BIBLE AND KOR'AN.

Oh! East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great judgment seat.
(Rudyard Kipling, *Ballad of East and West.*)

THIS couplet is an epigram, and it is as true as many other epigrams. That is to say, it is only half-true. This vivid distinction between East and West needs serious qualification. The further assumption that the East is all one is false.

"East is East." Not at all. East is sometimes North East and sometimes it is South East. And if we take Syria the land of the Bible for the North East, and Arabia the land of the Kor'an for the South East, we are face to face with a significant contrast. Syria is one of the highways of the world: the land in which from the remotest times the East and the West have met: there East and West

exchanged merchandise, and—a thing more precious than merchandise—language and thought. The names of her great cities mark routes of trade and thought running East and West, as Palmyra, Antioch, Damascus, Tyre, and Beyrout. Arabia on the other hand is a *barrier*, a torrid table-land on which men exist rather than live. To attempt to cross Arabia may mean to leave your own bones to whiten beside the bones of your camel.

The contrast between Syria and Arabia re-appears in the broad contrast which may be drawn between the Bible and the Kor'an. Syria is not one land, but an agglomeration of lands. It stretches from the border of Egypt in the South West to the Taurus range in the North, which divides it from Asia Minor ; in the North East it aligns itself along the Euphrates. It thus includes Palestine. We might almost call it a sub-continent of many peoples, nations, and languages. In early Biblical times there were Hebrews and Hittites ; Phœnicians, Philistines, and Aramæans ; ancient cave-dwellers and ancient and modern nomads. In later times there were Greeks and Greek half-castes and a sprinkling of Latins.

This variety in population was matched by variety in the physical features of the land. There was a long sea-board looking across the Mediterranean to the West. There were ancient trading cities inland. There were pasture-lands almost limitless and there was a considerable desert area. There were waters, streams or lakes, in unexpected places and dark green groves beside them. There are plains and there is Lebanon the great, the snow-white mountain-range. Syria in short is a land of variety. And from Syria, speaking generally, came our Bible, a book—for its size—perhaps the most varied in the world. It was written in two languages—or three, if you count Aramaic. And when you consider that one chief language is Hebrew

and the other Greek, you must confess that in a large sense East and West have indeed met, and met in most significant fashion between the covers of the Christian Bible.

Such is Syria. The story of Arabia is different. In extent it may be ten times the size of Syria, but it has none of the manifold variety of Syria. Sameness broods over all. We may dismiss briefly the Southern district which the Romans called Arabia Felix. We need not conjure up brilliant pictures because an English poet (who had not travelled in the East) could write of—

“Sabaeen odours from the spicy shores
Of Araby the blest.”¹

Arabia as a whole may be described rather as—

“A piece of red-hot sand
With a palm on either hand.”

It is not a white man's country, nor even a comfortable home for the dark-skinned man. Its products are camels, palms, coffee, a few precious horses, goats, and a few cows. In the Interior the population must wander, in order to live, from pasture to pasture. In fact the desert Arabs exist on the edge of starvation for a considerable part of the year. There are, it is true, a few towns (besides Mecca and Medina) in which a settled population lives, but the shadow of the immense empty desert is over all. The townspeople look down on the wandering Bedouin, but they have little justification for their contemptuous attitude. Neither the Town nor the Desert can boast of Art or Literature or of any ease of life. The Arabian peninsula with its 1,000,000 square miles, is a dreary empty starving land in which a scanty population of perhaps five millions cling sullenly to life, without imparting any beauty or variety to it.

This is the general impression we get from reading such

¹ *Paradise Lost*, iv. 162 f.

a modern book as C. M. Doughty's *Travels in Arabia Deserta*. It was in this rude empty burnt-up country that the Kor'an was born.

I need not say that it was not a bookish land. You have heard of ancient Arab poets doubtless, but their poems did not live in writing, but on the lips of reciters. Writing was a rare, strange, almost a magic art, like Reading. All the Education the Arab needed for his simple life was a little MENTAL ARITHMETIC. In Arabia writing was not used for the ordinary amenities of life, but for magic purposes. You did not write yourself, you got a special expert to do it for you, and often for mischief. With a line of writing you might cast an evil spell upon a foe, or (on the other hand) you might bring health to a sick friend, or (yet again) you might protect yourself from some spell which your foe would lay upon you. A book lay off the Highway of the Life of Arabia. Who could read it, nay, how many people dared touch it, for fear lest a dangerous spell was contained in it?

But in the history of the Kor'an the saying applies, *Omne ignotum pro magifico*. Any piece of writing, much more a book, was a wonder to the great majority of Mohammed's countrymen. They heard with respect, perhaps with awe, that the Jews had a book, the *Taurah* (*Torah*), and indeed a second book, the Psalms. Similarly they knew that the Christians had a book the *Injil*, "evangel," or Gospel. But the Arabs of Mohammed's day probably never dreamed that they themselves were to possess a book which would be reckoned along with the Jewish Law and the Christian Gospel as one of the Sacred Books of the World.

It is one mark of the greatness of Mohammed (perhaps even of his sincerity) that he claimed to give his revelations out of a Sacred Book. It was a daring act. The prophet of Arabia spoke as one who was sure of his mission. By claiming to draw from a Divine Book he at once challenged

the two Great Book-religions, Judaism and Christianity. He set himself as a prophet beside Moses and Jesus.

But note that Mohammed's book in fact (like Mohammed's coffin in legend) was suspended between earth and heaven. Mohammed composed the Kor'an, but no written Kor'an existed in his lifetime. Our present recension dates from the Khalif Othman, the third in succession from the Prophet: it dates from about twenty-five years after the death of Mohammed. The really striking part of his claim is that the Kor'an was a truly heavenly book: it was preserved above on strips of silk, and these strips were shown or revealed to the prophet one by one. He learnt by heart each passage, and then the visionary silk was withdrawn. But the Kor'an obtained a wide circulation, though it was not written down. Mohammed's followers learnt chapters by heart and recited them to the heathen Arabs by way of propaganda. In 626 A.D. the Prophet sent a party of forty Moslems who were skilled in reciting the Kor'an to preach in Nejd. But some passages were written down. Thus in the story of the Conversion of Omar, afterwards the second in succession of the Khalifs, a loose leaf containing Sura (Chapter) XX plays the chief part. Omar was told that his sister and her husband had become followers of Mohammed, so armed with a sword he rushed off to their house. There he found another adherent of Mohammed teaching them to recite this Sura. He fell upon them, struck his brother-in-law, and in the scuffle his sister was wounded in the face. Then the impulsive Omar suffered a revulsion of feeling. He demanded to see what they had been reading, read the passage, admired it, and professed himself converted to Islam. But even in this story recitation plays a prominent part. Omar's sister and brother-in-law were learning Kor'an by heart when Omar so violently interrupted them.

The very name *Kor'an* means something "read aloud" or "recited"; and so the earliest passage revealed to Mohammed calls on him to read or recite that which he is shown in vision :

"Recite in the name of thy Lord who created—
Recite. Thy most beneficent Lord
Who taught the use of the pen—
Hath taught man that which he knew not." ¹

In these words (in brief) is Mohammed's claim. There is a heavenly book which he is learning by heart. He will recite it to groups of his followers, and thereby they will learn truths which neither he nor they knew before-time. By degrees the whole heavenly book will become known on earth, because the Prophet is learning it by heart to communicate it to the Believers.

A book preserved in heaven yet now copied in full and found in its thousands on earth—what is this book of wonderful origin like? Well, truly, most Western readers find it very dull, and it must certainly be confessed to be monotonous. The same themes constantly recur.

But we must consider the style of the Kor'an. It is a book which loses much by translation. It is composed not in verse, nor in ordinary prose, but in *rimed* prose, in lines of approximately equal length. When recited in its native Arabic it has a full and solemn sound. Its best passages are in a compressed style, but if we aim at a corresponding conciseness in English, the English reader will be at a loss for the meaning. Further, the Kor'an reports the daily controversial discussions of the Prophet with his Arabian opponents, and these are sometimes dark, and often wearisome.

Nor has the Kor'an been fortunate in its translators. George Sale is honest and accurate, but dull. J. M. Rodwell

¹ Kor'an XCVI.

is often better. Prof. Palmer is often excellent, but his work is uneven.

But there is no doubt that the Kor'an made a deep impression on Mohammed's generation. The Prophet offered the Arabs a sacred book in their own tongue. The story of Omar's conversion is only one of many testimonies to the power of the appeal of the Kor'an to the Arabs themselves. But the passage which made Omar a Moslem leaves the reader cold who reads it in Sale's translation.

It is from Sura (Chapter) XX :

"We send not down the Kor'an that thou mayest have sorrow,
But as a warning to the God-fearing,
It is sent down from Him who created the earth and the lofty
heaven.

The Merciful is established upon the Throne ;
To Him belongeth that which is in heaven and earth and that
which is between them and that which is under the earth.
And if thou would'st pray with loud voice, remember that
He knoweth that which is secret and well-hidden.

Allah ! There is no other God but He ; to Him belong the
Beautiful Names."

This is a literal rendering of the passage, but an Arab would at once miss the rime or assonance with which each verse ends. An effort may be made even by one who is not a verse-maker, to represent the curious effect of the rime in this passage. Below is a rendering which is *not* literal, but reproduces the jingling endings of the first few verses. The same rime does in fact go on for 135 verses, but courage would fail to attempt further :

"Not to vex thee give we Kor'an in thy hand,
But for him, who is pious as a warning command
From the Creator of Earth and Heaven's lofty strand.
See the Throne of the Merciful stand,
For He is lord of heaven, sea, sky, and land.
Cry not aloud, for He knoweth e'en secrets hid deep in the sand,
And to Him the sole God belong the Great Names in their glorious
band."

After this introduction we find an abrupt offer to narrate the story of Moses, and, so *vv.* 8-99 tell, incidents from the life of Moses : the Burning Bush ; the Mission to Pharaoh ; the Birth of Moses ; the ark with the babe floating on the river, the long contendings with Pharaoh ; the Crossing of the Red Sea ; the manna and quails : the making of the Golden Calf " which lowed " for Israel to worship.

Vv. 100-111 describe the Day of Resurrection (Judgment).

Vv. 112-3 give a warning to the Prophet himself : " Be not over-hasty, before the revelation thereof (i.e. of the Kor'an) shall be completed unto thee, but say, *Lord, increase my knowledge.*"

Vv. 114-121 tell of the Fall of Adam and expulsion from the Garden.

Vv. 122 ff. contain an Admonition for the Meccans : their immunity from punishment means only that Allah gives them some respite.

Vv. 130 (Touching passage) Exhortation to the Prophet himself to be patient, and not to covet the prosperity of the Unbelievers.

This Sura, which contains 135 verses, may be taken as representative of the range of topics found in the Kor'an.

The Greatness of Allah, the Delights of Paradise, the Terrors of the Day of Resurrection, the excellence of the Kor'an, the certainty of the punishment of the Unbelievers, and finally re-assuring words for the Prophet himself—these and some stories from the Old Testament make up the greatest part of the Arab Scripture. For a single chapter there is a good deal of variety, and yet the Kor'an as a whole is a monotonous book. The topics which we found in Sura XX occur again and again in other Suras.

It is (we cannot forget) a One-man book. While the Old and New Testaments have many authors, the Kor'an

has Mohammed only. It could hardly help being monotonous, for though Mohammed began as a Poet, he soon became just a Preacher, and he came from a dry and dreary land. He even made things monotonous which before had been full of life and movement. Thus he took the stories of the Old Testament, e.g. those of Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses and Solomon, and dared to re-tell them. He was not successful in this rash adventure. He added apocryphal details which he learnt no doubt from the Jews who were settled in north Arabia, but he failed to add any freshness to the old narratives. On the contrary as a preacher he put some of the dulness of his preaching into the mouths of the Patriarchs. He makes them talk like good Moslems, and sometimes they actually declare that their religion is Islam. And once at least we get such a passage as this :

“O ye people of the Scripture, why do ye argue concerning Abraham ? . . . Abraham was not a Jew, nor a Nazarene, but he was orthodox, a Moslem, and not a worshipper of many gods.”¹

Before passing to a formal comparison between the Bible and the Kor'an we should notice one immense service to the cause of Religion which the Arab Scripture has performed. No doubt the Kor'an falls behind both the Old Testament and the New in religious and moral worth. But let the Prophet of Islam have his due. He did nobly maintain the Unity and the Greatness of God, and millions in Asia are the better to-day because of his preaching. Further, he did hold up a higher standard of conduct than the Arabs had known before him.

On the moral side there are passages in the Kor'an of real value. But it must be added that even such passages are often interrupted by a jarring note. Thus in Sura XVII is a notable passage which reminds us of the Decalogue. Here are some phrases from it :

¹ Kor'an iii 58 ff.

- "Set not up another god with God lest thou sit thee down disgraced, helpless."
- "Thy Lord hath ordained . . . kindness to parents . . . Say not unto them, *Fie* . . . but speak to them both with respectful speech. And defer humbly to them out of tenderness."
- "And to him who is of kin render his due, and also to the poor and to the wayfarer; yet waste ye not wastefully. For the wasteful are brethren of the Satans."
- "Kill not your children for fear of want. . . . Verily the killing of them is great wickedness."
- "Have nought to do with fornication; for it is a foul thing and an evil way."
- "Neither slay any one whom God hath forbidden you to slay, unless for a just cause. . . ."
- "And touch not the substance of the orphan, unless in an upright way."
- "And give full measure, when you measure. . . . This will be better, and fairest for settlement."
- "And walk not proudly on the earth, for thou canst not cleave the earth" (*vv.* 23-29).

This is a very noble passage. It is haunted however by two ghosts. Two facts of Mohammed's life well known to Moslems must have limited the application of these precepts. The prohibition of fornication was not inconsistent (if the prophet's example be followed) with great sexual license. The prohibition of slaughter yet allowed the Moslem to put men and women to death very freely, provided that they could be described as "the enemies of God."

A second striking passage of moral contents is found in Sura XXIII. 1 ff. :

"Blessed are the Believers,
 Who humble themselves in Prayer,
 Who turn away from lewd talk,
 Who do alms deeds,
 Who guard their bodies in purity
 Save for their wives and for their slaves. . . .
 Who observe their trusts and their covenants."

Again, a noble passage but for the permission of polygamy and of co-habitation with slaves. Thereby it misses the Christian standard.

Thus we may say that there is a marked difference between Mohammed the Theologian standing absolutely for the Unity and Greatness of Allah, and Mohammed the Moralist. As a Moralist he is no doubt "on the side of the angels," but we do not hear a quite decided note when he speaks of moral duties. Then we are impressed rather with his moderation, his good sense. He appears as the Statesman who wants to keep his people within bounds of average decency, and not as the Teacher of Righteousness.

When we turn to the Bible we get something morally great which we miss in the Kor'an. Even the Old Testament supplies this. No doubt much of the morality of the Old Testament is merely tribal. The Christian finds positive faults and (on the negative side) serious gaps in Hebrew morality. But, on the other hand, there are flashes of white-heat of moral indignation from the Hebrew Scripture, which it would be a moral calamity to lose. Here we miss something in the Arab Scripture. In the Kor'an Mohammed tells the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife with added details, almost as though he would dwell on it. In Genesis "Moses" passes swiftly through the story, leaving to stand out in the memory only the indignant protest, "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"¹ And it is in the Hebrew Scripture that David, the darling of the Hebrew people, stands out shamed and confounded with the rebuke, "*Thou art the man. . . . Therefore the sword shall not depart from thy house for ever.*" The Hebrews, again, were no doubt given to bloodshed, but it is in the Hebrew Scripture that the story of the Syrians surprised in the midst of Samaria is told. "The king of Israel said unto Elisha, *My Father, shall I smite them, shall I smite?* And he answered, *Thou shalt not smite them. Wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword*

¹ Gen. xxxix. 9.

and with thy bow? Set food and drink before them, and let them eat and drink and so go to their Master."¹ From the Hebrew Prophets we might heap up instances of such burning words spoken for the right, but two will suffice. You will remember—you cannot forget—Isaiah's condemnation of the Earth-hunger of the wealthy: "Woe unto you that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no room, and ye can dwell by yourselves in the midst of the land."² And one passage out of many from Amos:

"Ye that put away the thought of the evil day,
 And love to oppress men by forms of law;
 Who lie upon beds of ivory, . . .
 And eat the fatted calf;
 Who sing a catch to the sound of the viol,
 Who drink wine by the bowl-full,
 And use the finest ointment,
 But have no care for the wounds of Joseph."³

I draw contrasts from the Old Testament because it seems hardly fair to confront Mohammed's well-meant moral exhortations with the creative power of the Sermon on the Mount or with St. Paul's Panegyric on Love.

The greatness of Mohammed does not lie in his moral teaching. He was, like Luther, a man of one idea. Luther stood with memorable firmness for the doctrine of Salvation by Faith alone. Mohammed in like fashion stood for the doctrine of Salvation obtained by the confession of the Unity of God. But Mohammed's steadfastness was even more admirable than Luther's, because he sprang from one of the most fickle and wayward peoples on the earth. The Arabs, as Doughty saw them in 1876-8, were almost inconceivably infirm of purpose. They never continued in one stay. They promised and forgot their promises; they threatened and suddenly changed to a smile. A little

¹ 2 Kings vi. 21.

² Isa. v. 8.

³ Amos vi. 3-6.

steadfastness on the part of a lonely unarmed European was enough to turn them from their purpose. Rudyard Kipling's description of the Bandar Log might have been meant for them.

But Mohammed stood like a rock amid shifting sand. He first conquered his countrymen, and then he led them. His well-known answer to his uncle, Abu Tālib, when he was urged for the sake of his clan—a powerful appeal to an Arab—to give up his preaching, is thoroughly characteristic of the man. "Were the sun to come down on my right hand and the moon on my left, and the choice were offered me of abandoning my mission or perishing in the achievement of it, I would not abandon it."¹

Mohammed was in this deadly earnest because he himself believed in the Paradise (*el-jannah*, "the Garden") and Gehenna (*Jahannam*) which he preached. The language of the Kor'an is frightful. "Thou shalt see the sinners on that day bound together in the fetters : their inner garments shall be of pitch, and fire shall cover their faces."² And again, "The fruit of the tree of *Ez-Zakkūm* shall be the food of the sinner : like the dregs of oil it shall boil in the belly. It shall be said, Take ye him and drag him to the midst of hell : then pour upon his head tormenting boiling water."³ Equally realistic, on the other side, are the terms in which the pleasures of Paradise are set forth. "The sincere servants of God shall have a certain provision of fruits in the gardens of delight upon couches opposite one to another. A cup shall be carried round unto each of them from a flowing spring, white, delicious to the drinkers. . . . And beside them shall be modest wives, having large and beautiful eyes and a skin as fair as the eggs of the ostrich."⁴ And, again, "Beneath the gardens shall

¹ T. W. Arnold, *Preaching of Islam*, p. 13.

² Sura xiv. 50 f. ³ Sura xlv. 43 f. ⁴ Sura xxxvii. 39 ff.

run rivers ; the believers shall be adorned therein with bracelets of gold ; they shall wear green raiment of fine brocade and of thick brocade, reclining therein on thrones." ¹

Passages such as these are not infrequent in the Kor'an. There can be little doubt that Mohammed took such threats and promises in the literal sense.

In all this the Kor'an stands in contrast to the Bible. To consider the Old Testament first, the Hebrew Scriptures contain no doctrine of a future Heaven and Hell. Indeed the intimations of a future life found there are both few and faint. So we may conclude that there is no indication of a Hell of torment, even in the grim words of Isaiah lxvi. 24. The rebellious dead in that passage suffer no living pain ; only the horrible sight of their corpses is a standing lesson and a warning to the living.

Nor, again, can Daniel xii. 2, a passage of singular reticence, be stretched to contain such a detailed doctrine of the Day of Resurrection as the Kor'an sets forth again and again. The Hebrew prophet is content to say, " Many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to æonian life and some to reproach, to æonian abhorrence."

When we turn to the New Testament (outside the Book of the Revelation) we find the case much the same. There are many references to future Rewards and Punishments, but these are commonly made either in the course of parables, or at least in parabolic language. The language is varied, and one metaphor succeeds another. There is no fixed doctrine of Hell. The name Gehenna is used, but the Kor'anic picture of Jahannam is not given.

The most noteworthy fact is the reticence of detail which prevails in the New Testament as to future punishment. There is a mention of fire, and of æonian fire, it is true, but the Kor'anic details of the sufferings of sinners in the fire

¹ Sura xviii. 30.

are absent. The language both of the Gospels and of the Pauline Epistles is stern enough, but it is uncoloured and unlaboured. The main punishment suggested is that of exclusion from the Presence of God or from the Marriage Feast of the Lamb.

So also with regard to future reward. Apart from the parabolic description of the New Jerusalem in the Apocalypse, no picture of Paradise is given in the New Testament. But, on the other hand, the Apocalypse itself contains promises of reward for the righteous which are better than anything contained in the Kor'an. Of the faithful, the Lord proclaims, "They shall walk with me in white." Of the new Jerusalem to which they shall be admitted it is said, "The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein : and his servants shall do him service : and they shall see his face." This promise of communion with God and his Christ is better than any promise of the Kor'an. The Moslem is taught to look for Heaven, not for the Divine Presence.

Yet we may confess that Mohammed had a commission from God to teach an elementary religion to peoples and tribes who were not capable of receiving more advanced teaching. Certainly the Christians of Syria and Egypt who were conquered soon after the Prophet's death were fallen from pure Christianity and were unable to give to the idolaters of Arabia a religion better than their own. Both on the doctrinal and on the moral side the followers of Jesus had become unfaithful. Athanasius and his adherents had taught the doctrine of *Trinity in Unity* in the fourth century, but by the beginning of the seventh the doctrine of the Unity had become grievously obscured. In part this was due to an incautious cult of the Blessed Virgin, which had been growing for two centuries in popularity. It became widely believed among the heathen that

Christians worshipped not one God but three, the three being the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Virgin herself. Hence, it is written in the Kor'an :

“ When God shall say on the day of resurrection, O Jesus, son of Mary, hast thou said unto men, Take me and my mother as two deities beside God,—Jesus shall answer, Far be such a dishonour from Thee ! ” ¹

It is not surprising that non-Christians should have thus accused Christians of being polytheists, when we read the language actually used by the Eastern emperor Heraclius in 628 A.D. (four years before Mohammed's death) in announcing to the people of Constantinople his victory over the Persian king Chosroes. Heraclius, after reciting Psalm c. as a thanksgiving, proceeds to say :

“ Chosroes the presumptuous, the hater of God is fallen, he who exalted himself . . . against our Lord Jesus Christ the true God and against His spotless mother, our blessed Lady who brought forth God yet remained ever-virgin (*θεοτόμου και ἀειπαρθένου*.)

And again :

“ We announce how God and our Lady who brought forth God worked with (*συνέπραξεν*) us and our Christ-loving armies beyond all that man could imagine.”

And, finally :

“ And so we have cheerful confidence towards our Lord Jesus Christ the clement and almighty God and towards our Lady who brought forth God that they will guide all our affairs in accordance with their clemency.” ²

Can we be surprised as we read such language that the Arabian prophet supposed that the Virgin was reckoned by Christians as one of the Ever-Blessed Trinity ? Have we any right to be indignant if Moslems believe that Christians associate “ other gods ” with God ? Had not Mohammed good reason for calling us polytheists—worshippers of more gods than one ? The incautious language

¹ Sura v. 116.

² *Chronicon Paschale* (Bonnae, 1832), vol. 1, p. 727 ff.

which is sometimes used about the Blessed Virgin is, in fact, dangerous. Had Christians followed the example of the reserve of the New Testament writers on this subject, we should not have been open to attack in the pages of the Kor'an.

Unfortunately it was not only on the doctrinal side, but also on the moral side that Christianity was weak in Mohammed's day. The theological controversies of three centuries had done double harm to the Church. In the first place they had to a large extent destroyed the sense of brotherhood between Christian and Christian. In the second place they had turned the Church aside from the pursuit of the Christian life to waste her strength on endless dogmatic discussion. The great Moslem triumph over Christian peoples does surely illustrate the warning given 600 years before by our Lord : "The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." Christians were not bringing forth the fruits of the Gospel, and so were worthy of chastisement. The early Moslems, on the other hand, had good fruits to show ; they feared God, kept their word and used charity towards their brethren.

Among the four chief duties of religion as taught in the Kor'an is Prayer. Prayer is there taught by example as well as by precept. Indeed, the first Sura of the book is a prayer which is recited not only daily, but several times a day. It is as follows :

"In the name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful. Praise be to God the Lord of the Worlds, the Compassionate, the Merciful, the King of the Day of Judgment. Thee only do we worship, and of Thee only do we seek for help. Guide us in the right way, the way of those to whom Thou showest favour, not of those with whom Thou art angry, nor of those who go astray."

A second prayer, given in Sura II, verse 256, is also used in the daily devotions, though not by all Moslems. It is called the Verse of the Throne, and is much admired :

“Allah, there is no God but He, the Living, the Everlasting. Slumber overtaketh Him not, nor sleep. To Him belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth. Who is he who shall intercede with Him, save by His permission ? He knoweth what was before, and what cometh after ; and none shall comprehend aught of His knowledge, save as He willeth. His throne is a canopy over the heavens and the Earth, and the keeping of them is no burden to Him ; for He is the Most High, the Almighty.”

These two prayers are worthy of some study. The first of them is readily recognised as a prayer : it is addressed to God ; and it is singularly comprehensive, as, indeed, true prayer tends to become. It begins with an Ascription, “Praise be to God ” ; it continues with an act of devotion, “Thee do we worship ” ; it ends with petition, but petition on the grand scale, “Guide us in the right way.” There is, it seems, no impatient clamour for some particular earthly boon. The prayer is spiritual.

The second instance, quoted above, is a prayer in substance but not in form. It is a meditation on the Greatness of God : it is thoughtful praise. On the positive side the actual contents of the two Kor'anic prayers give no handle to hostile criticism. But it must be confessed that a richer vein of prayer is to be found in the Bible.

As regards the New Testament it is enough to say that it contains the Lord's Prayer. But the Old Testament also contains great prayers, such as the prayer ascribed to Solomon at the Dedication of the Temple. The occasion was special, but the prayer has a universal character. It is a pattern of devotion and of supplication.

It opens like the Kor'an with an ascription of praise to God (1 Kings viii. 23). Solomon said :

“O JEHOVAH the God of Israel, there is no god like Thee in heaven above or earth beneath ; who keepest covenant and mercy.

But will God in very deed dwell on the earth ? behold heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee ; how much less this house that I have builded ! ”

Then the prayer turns into petition : it becomes a kind of Litany full of human touches :

“When thy people Israel are smitten before the enemy, because they sin against Thee ; if they turn again . . . and pray in this house : then hear Thou in heaven, and forgive. . . .

When there is no rain because they sin against Thee ; if they pray towards this place, and turn from their sin . . . then hear Thou in heaven, and forgive. . . .

If there be in the land pestilence, blasting, or mildew, or locust . . . every prayer of every man who shall spread forth his hands towards this house . . . then hear Thou in heaven, and forgive. . . .

Moreover, as for the stranger, who is not of Thy people Israel, when he shall come and pray towards this house . . . then hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling place, and do according to all the cry of the stranger.”

They are extracts only, but they are enough to show that 1 Kings viii. 23-53, has the characteristics of a great prayer : its note of praise is lofty ; its sympathy is human ; its sense of sin is true ; its appeal is comprehensive ; in all difficulties the resource is to the one God. There is no suggestion that for some special need the help of some other God or spirit may avail.

But we cannot touch the subject of Prayer in the Old Testament without thinking of the Psalter. All the chief elements of Prayer are found here—Adoration, Praise, Thanksgiving, Meditation, Confession, Petition. The Kor'an, as I have said, also contains Prayers—prayers, indeed, of a high order. But there is no wealth of Prayer in the Kor'an to compare with the contents of the Psalter. Once more it must be confessed that the Arab Bible is found wanting.

Christian charity will not wish to dwell on the defects of the Kor'an ; rather Christian love of truth will confess that God did not leave Himself without witness in the arid land of Arabia. But Christians cannot forget that while Mohammed pays lip-service to our Lord as " a prophet," he shows no sense of the unique significance of the person of Jesus. The Kor'an introduces the name of our Lord only for the sake of an anti-Christian polemic. It describes Him as an " Apostle to the children of Israel," who undertook to give life to birds formed of clay and promised to heal the blind and the leper and to raise the dead. He did not die on the Cross : he was crucified only in appearance. In Islam there is only a legendary Jesus.

In the Gospels, on the other hand, Jesus is an historical figure for all but hypercritics. And of this figure we are driven to confess, " A greater than Mohammed is here." His moral precepts are unqualified by concessions to human weakness. The standard is kept high. And the Christ is consistent throughout. With much in the political conditions of the time to tempt him—almost to compel him—to appeal to the sword, he refused to use the external force of steel against men's bodies, and still more to use the internal force of thaumaturgy against men's minds and consciences.¹ The last word of the Kor'an is, " Kill those who join other gods with Allah, wherever ye shall find them."² The last words of the Gospel are, " Put up thy sword into its sheath," *and* " My kingdom is not of this world ; if it were of this world, then would my disciples be fighting, but now is my kingdom not from hence."³

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¹ Matt. xvi. 1-4.

² Kor'an ix. 5.

³ John xviii. 11, 36.