

the sky; omens pointed to naught but disaster. Now that crescent lay athwart the fairest portion of the globe, one point resting on the Hellespont, the other on the Spanish Pyrenees. That crescent was borne aloft on the banners of myriads of victorious Saracens, who pressed hard upon Christendom with a determination to blot it from the earth. The onward course of the crescent was stayed only after centuries of heroic effort,—after the best blood of Europe had been poured forth in torrents.

The meteoric appearance of this new faith, the exploits of its tenzied hosts, are unique enough to command the attention of the world through all ages. Mahometanism was and is great. An exception to the rule that great institutions are developed, not created, its foundation was the work of one man. All the essentials of the religion of the Koran, all the powers that transformed and revitalized Arabia, became potent with the warrior-prophet Mahomet. At the dawn of Arabian history he stands, behind him the black night of Fetich worship, before him a belt of light, not the brightness of the Christian day, indeed, but still a zone of light ever broadening in its course down the ages until to-day Mohametanism is upheld by one-fifth the human race; over one hundred and eighty millions of human beings regard the Koran as the guide-book of the road to Paradise.

The prophet is at once the most highly praised and the most deeply execrated of mortals. Looking from the stand point of a devout Musselman our vision must penetrate the haze of twelve hundred years of religious adoration and we see in him a god. Gazing through the hot vapors from the venom of his foes, he appears a depraved sensualist, a deliberate imposter, and arch-hypocrite. To judge him fairly it is not necessary to cast aside all religious prejudice and don the impartial ermine. Broad charity not only permits but demands that whatever there is of good in the life of any man should be uncovered. Christian toleration will not endeavor to check admiration for traits of character shown in a foe, or enthusiasm over heroic deeds accomplished by an enemy.

Follow Mohamet through his eventful life. Rest on his lowly tomb at Medina and balance well the deeds and misdeeds of the great reformer. An innocent youth and pure early manhood, a call to take up his mission at an age when rest is most welcome, are not marks of imposture. Thirteen years of ridicule and persecution after the mission was announced,—thirteen long years of suffering with but a handful of converts and nothing in the future save a forlorn hope,—could not have been borne by a designing hypocrite. He carried the load with manly patience. In the caves of Mount Hira he had passed in prayer and meditation the holy months of a decade of years. Worshipping as a simple believer in the crude faith of the day, his devotion was interrupted by mysterious voices. Unseen bells mingled their chimes with his simple supplication, and falling into a trance he often held communion with angels and saw beyond the portals of eternity the walls of Paradise.

A diseased body had done its work. The earnest man was buffeted by nervous shocks, driven to despair by mental hallucinations. Suspecting that the sights and sounds that haunted him were but phantoms from his own fevered brain, he called in vain for the messenger of death to relieve him from his agony of apprehension. At length the voices grow stronger. The highly-wrought

mind has yielded to the strain, shadows take shape and form, dim specters become realities, and doubt and fear are past. Gabriel appears with revelations from God, and invests Mahomet with the dignity of a prophet. No general ever received his commission from the hands of his king with more faith in its genuineness than did this distracted Arab take from creations of his own diseased brain authority and instructions for evangelizing the world. With life-work mapped he left the gloomy mountain, feeling, believing, *living* the truth of the newly learned formula. "There is no god but God, and Mahomet is his prophet."

Enthusiasm born of deep conviction can be but feebly imitated. If the trials of the first years of the faith prove the prophet to be deeply sincere, his influence upon his companions throughout life shows that he was no hypocrite. Men watched every movement, studied every phase of character, saw his entire life, and believed. Kinsmen and bosom friends were the first to attach themselves to his cause, but not thorough selfish motives,—his boundless enthusiasm compelled belief. In bitter persecution at Mecca, when malice hurled the stone and sharpened the dagger; in the flight to Medina to escape the fury of the rabble and the swords of their own tribesmen, his little band of followers never wavered in their devotion, never doubted that he was crowned with divine favor. In prosperity, when all Arabia bowed before the throne of Islam, deepest piety was found among those who stood nearest, who felt most strongly the magnetism of the spiritual monarch. Unflinching loyalty followed him through life, and when he died the calamity seemed so great that comrades threw themselves on their swords over his grave in despair. Hearts will go out, admiration will be felt for a life tried in this crucial personal test and not found wanting. Carlyle would place Mahomet on his roll of heroes for this alone.

Turn the searching light of inquiry on this character let the rays of truth fall on every side, and many places will be found black only because they have rested in the shadow. Was he cruel and sensual? Serious charges, these, and not without foundation. But cruelty and sensuality seethed in the race before him and faults in this direction prove only the weakness of the flesh. If he overthrew the church wherever his arms penetrated and built on its ruins the mosque, in few cases was the change to be deeply deplored. Image worship and mystery, atheism and corruption, deluding the masses under the name of Christianity, fell before the advancing standards of Mahomet, and it was well. Did he frame revelations to suit his own needs? Implicit faith in his own prophetic power made every striking thought appear the voice of the Infinite. The soaring mind, dazed by its elevation and confused by success must not be too savagely attacked if it seemed to blend with the Almighty Spirit. The needs of the man thus became the needs of his God, and it is not unreasonable to believe that the most arbitrary and selfish revelations were conscientiously regarded by Mahomet as expressions of divine will.

He was ambitious, but what ambition! A roof of palm leaves, the simplest food known to frugal Arabia, rough clothing, hard labor, and severe discipline,—all these when he had the power to demand the luxuries of the world. An absolute monarch with few temporal desires,