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1926

688TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING,

HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL,
WESTMINSTER, S.W.1, ON MONDAY, APRIL 26TH, 1926,

AT 4.30 P.M.

WILLIAM COLDSTREAM, ESQ., B.A., LATE I.C.S., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed, and signed.

The CHAIRMAN then introduced the Rev. H. U. Weitbrecht Stanton, Ph.D., D.D., as one whom he had long known in the Punjab, and valued for his learning and for his missionary work among Moslems, to read his paper on "The Qur'an and its Doctrine of God."

*THE QUR'AN AND ITS DOCTRINE OF GOD.**

By the Rev. H. U. WEITBRECHT STANTON, Ph.D., D.D.

“THREE threads are woven distinctly through the web of Muslim religious thought. There is tradition (*naql*), there is reason (*'aql*), and there is the unveiling of the mystic (*Kashf*). They were in the tissue of Muhammad's brain, and they have been in his church since he died” (Macdonald, *Muslim Theology*, p. 120). Or, we might put it, Scripture, Theology, Mystical Experience are integral factors in all mature religious thought, certainly in Judaism and Christianity. However men may protest, none of these elements can be entirely absent from such thinking, though the emphasis and the proportion may vary greatly; and the nature of religious teaching

* Quotations are from Rodwell's translation. Fuller references are given in *The Teaching of the Qur'an* (S.P.C.K.), Subject-Index, pp. 75-110.

will also vary according to the adjustment of the credal and ethical elements.

Accordingly our subject has a twofold bearing ; first, on the claim of Islam to be a historical development of Judaism and Christianity, especially in its doctrine of God ; and second, on the relation of this doctrine to the developments of Islam forced upon it by modern thought and life.

MODERN MOVEMENTS IN ISLAM.

These movements have been going on for a century throughout the educated Moslem world, in Turkey, Egypt, Persia, Indonesia, and on the largest scale among the seventy million Moslems of India. From a doctrinal point of view the school of Sayyid Ahmad of Aligarh (known as *nechari*, i.e. upholders of the law of nature) have claimed to revive the *Mu'tazila* or Moslem Rationalism of the early centuries which abated the asperities of extreme fatalism and the crudities of verbal inspiration, and eliminated the miraculous generally. They have remained rather a tendency than a sect. This movement was followed by a more constructive effort on the part of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian (in the Panjab), founder of the Ahmadiya or Qadiani sect. He claimed to be the Mahdi, or Guided One, who should recall Islam from apostasy, the Christ spiritually returned for the same purpose, and later, even Krishna, reincarnate for the Hindus. Freedom in dealing with the Qur'an was gained by allegorizing. He taught that the command to fight for the faith meant striving by persuasion, not by weapons. It was this that recently brought the sect into collision with the 'Ulama of Kabul, resulting in the martyrdom of several Qadianis. They are found chiefly in the Panjab, but also throughout India and in Central Asia and Africa. The more modernist members of the Ahmadiya broke off from the conservatives at Qadian, and made their headquarters at Lahore. They, too, hold to the literal inspiration of the Qur'an, but gain a modern meaning by rationalist interpretation with an occasional dash of scientific phraseology. Of late this section has reverted to Sunnite orthodoxy. Both branches of the Ahmadiya are active in propaganda among Western nations. The Lahore branch has its mosque and offices in Woking ; the Qadianis hope shortly to open a mosque in Putney.

The other organized modern sect is the Persian body known as the Bābī-Bahāi. In 1844 Mirza Muhammad 'Ali of Shiraz

laid claim to be the *Bāb* or "Gate" of revelation which many Shi'ahs were expecting to be opened. He produced a scripture which he called the *Bayān* or "Exposition," superseding the Qur'an. He was executed in 1850, but his movement persisted in spite of violent persecution; it was reshaped by a successor, 'Abdul Bahā, into a kind of liberal deism, with social and ethical teachings largely based on Christian ideas. From him the religion in its new form has taken the name of Bahāi. The adherents in Persia are estimated at 200,000, and they are widely scattered in other lands. The spread of Bahāism has no doubt helped towards the toleration at present extended to Christianity in Persia.

In the unparalleled reshaping of a Moslem people that is now taking place in Turkey the doctrinal element is far less in evidence than the national and social. Islam is still the official religion of Turkey, but the country is breaking away from the quranic legislation as to marriage, criminal justice, and the like, and when promulgating the new Civil Code in the Angora parliament, the Minister of Justice recently predicted as its effect that "the past thirteen centuries would be swept away, and a fruitful era of civilization begin." It is thirteen centuries since Muhammad promulgated the law of the Qur'an. But here, too, life is linked to creed and the one must affect the other.

Faced in many lands by the life and thought of a new age, Islam is struggling with the difficult task of adjusting its early mediævalism to the demands of a modern world. In so doing the progressive Moslem generally seeks to disown the accretions of his schoolmen and to recur to the one sacred volume as the sufficient expression of faith and practice incumbent on the true Moslem. The quranic doctrine of God has, therefore, much more than an academic interest. Never in the history of Islam has it been brought into such intimate contact with the Christian doctrine, and the results of that contact may perhaps be more reassuring than the candid self-criticism of the Christian Church supposes. Certain it is that the being and nature of God is often represented by the modern Moslem teacher in the light of New Testament ideas. On occasion He is even spoken of as "Father," and the first chapter of the Qur'an is referred to as "the Lord's Prayer of Islam." An average Woking mosque sermon might, in large part, be taken from a collection of Christian discourses. In the Turkish reformation it is the ethical side on which the

approach is most in evidence, but this is bound to affect the conception of the divine character; indeed, the danger there is that of a practical elimination of God. Consciously or unconsciously the Moslem world is seeking after a conception of God which will prevent this disaster. What does it find in the Qur'an ?

THE NATURE OF THE QUR'AN.

In some respects, no doubt, the Qur'an is a highly composite structure, and the study of the elements that went to make it up, and the stages of their incorporation, as well as probable editings by the prophet or others, is fascinating and fruitful. But here we can only deal with the volume as a whole, accepted by the Moslem community for thirteen hundred years. The Qur'an claims to be a scripture like the Pentateuch or the New Testament. It is about the same in bulk as the latter, but, unlike it, is the work of one man who professed to recite the words of God Almighty which he had heard in the Arabic tongue from the angel Gabriel (whom he called the holy spirit), hence its stories, equally with its commands, are divine utterances. Its chapters (*surah*) are divine oracles, divided into verses with more or less of rhythm. Their arrangement is confused, nevertheless it is possible to discern the outline of the growth in teaching during the twenty-one years of Muhammad's prophetic career.

REVELATION AND INSPIRATION.

The Scripture itself is the revelation, *i.e.* the unveiling of divine mysteries or teachings. It is literally *Kalāmu'llāh*, the Word of God. This is asserted most elaborately in respect of the Qur'an itself, but the same is taught of other scriptures. The most characteristic synonym for scripture is *tanzīl* = a missive or rescript sent down from Allah to his apostle. For mankind it is an admonition (*tadhkirah*) to guide them. Inspiration, as the divine afflatus by which the message is conveyed to the messenger, takes a secondary place. The nearest term for it is *wahī*, but this often covers the objective message as well as the subjective method of its imparting. *Wahī* is the speech of Allah to man; it is the source of the quranic oracles, and it was conferred on Noah and other prophets. A conception closely connected with revelation is that of "guidance" (*hudā*). It is from Allah only, but it may lead either to good or evil, for he leads astray whom he will. The guidance was accepted by

Muhammad, as it is by other believers, but rejected by infidels. It was given by the former prophets, and in the Law and the Evangel, and last by Muhammad in the Qur'an, and is to be imparted to others.

THE QUR'AN AS THE FINAL REVELATION.

The bare name occurs in the volume eleven times; with the article "the Qur'an" thirty-six times; with the pronoun "this Qur'an" fifteen times. Generally it applies to one of the oracles or one of the *surahs*, but sometimes to the whole collection, as when it is said in v. 101; "If ye shall ask of such things when the (whole) Qur'an shall have been sent down, they shall be shown to you." It is revealed piecemeal to Muhammad, telling him what he did not know. Its verses are established in wisdom and are set forth with clearness. It is a revelation (*wahî*), a missive (*tanzîl*), an admonition (*dhikrâ*), the Scripture (*kitâb*) *par excellence*, the Word of Allah (*kalâmu'llâh*) in the strictest sense, which descended on the Night of Power, a transcript from the preserved Book. It is the Cord of Allah which binds men to him as long as he pleases; the Discerner (*Furqân*); discriminating, yet lucid and direct, for it is revealed in plain Arabic through the prophet, who is a man of the people. It is a glorious scripture containing good news; it agrees with itself and teaches by repetition, through similitudes of every kind and verses which are both figurative and explicit. It is the final revelation in which there can be no change, absolutely free from error, and comprising all secrets both of Heaven and earth. Yet provision is made for changing circumstances. Muhammad was accused of forgery because he substituted one verse for another. His reply is: "What he pleaseth will Allah abrogate or confirm, for with him is the Archetypal Book" (XIII, 39); and if he cancels a verse or makes the prophet forget one it is only to grant him one equally good or a better (II, 100). Muhammad is to listen carefully to what he hears from Gabriel and not to be hasty in the recital of this Arabic Qur'an while the revelation of it is incomplete. It must be recited with care and in measured tones, and listened to in silence.

This revelation is its own proof; unbelievers cannot produce its like. Only Allah knows its meaning, but believers accept it as all from Him. In others it increases unbelief and rebellion, but whoso rejects it will be lost.

THE BACKGROUND OF THE QUR'AN.

The records of Arab tradition as to belief in God are scanty. To the Moslem Arab the age before Muhammad was the "days of ignorance." To record their errors was superfluous or sinful, and the Qur'an, which, as the miracle of divine eloquence, challenged all previous literature, effectually set aside the study of such pre-islamic traditions as existed. From the Qur'an itself and allusions in pre-islamic poetry we gather that among the pagan Arabs, more especially in and about Mecca, the idea of a supreme deity was not unknown. He was called *Allah*, the Mighty One, or *Rabb*, the Lord, and was regarded as the creator and preserver of the world. He was called upon as helper in peril and invoked in oaths or vows. He was worshipped in prayer and sacrifice, and a special portion of the offering was set apart for him, but it was not forbidden to worship others. In fact, when the Ka'ba sanctuary was cleansed after the conquest of Mecca by Muhammad, we are told that no less than 360 idols had to be removed. As elsewhere, the worship of the inferior deities who stood nearer to man than the mighty Lord was generally preferred. They were regarded as His sons and daughters and possible intercessors with Him. *Allāt*, as a consort of *Allah*, is mentioned in the Qur'an, besides other goddesses. But they are ineffectual helpers and cannot intercede for their worshippers at the day of judgment; on the contrary they, with them, will be cast into the fire.

More important is the background of Judaism and Christianity from which the bulk of the Qur'an is derived, largely in a distorted form. That derivation took place, partly through tradition already current among the tribes of Arabia, partly through experience of travel and intercourse, partly through personal inquiry from Jews and Christians on the part of Muhammad; never through scrutiny of the original records. Inasmuch as the monotheism of the New Testament is based upon the Old Testament, it is the latter that principally comes into view here. The acquaintance of Muhammad with Judaism and Christianity was not only second-hand and fragmentary, but also coloured by the impure media of Talmudic tradition, apocryphal gospels and Eastern heresies. In the case of the Jewish faith this does not essentially affect the doctrine of God, except for the strange blunder that "the Jews say: Ezra is a son of God" (ix, 30), and this is not further followed up. But in the case of Christianity, its followers

are roundly accused of tritheism (iv, 169); "Say not three; God is only one God; far be it from His glory that He should have a son." "They surely are infidels who say: 'God is the third of three (*i.e.* besides the Messiah and his mother), for there is not God but one God'" (v, 77). At the Day of Judgment God will say: "O Jesus, son of Mary, hast thou said unto mankind: 'Take me and my mother as two gods, beside God?'" and He will say: "It is not for me to say that which I know to be not the truth . . . I spake not unto them aught but that which thou didst bid Me: 'Worship God, My Lord and your Lord.'" In contrast with the sexualized polytheism of Arabia, God is One, unbecetting, unbegotten (cii, 1-4), the angels are not His daughters (xlhii, 14-19). As against contemporary Christian thought, the title "Mother of God" (*theotokos*), given to the Virgin Mary, is misunderstood as meaning that she is the consort of the Divine Being and that the Sonship of Jesus is a physical relationship. The Holy Spirit, as a divine Person, had been eliminated by the Qur'an, and the name given to the archangel Gabriel. We know also that there were early Christian sects in the East, such as the Collyridians, whose doctrine of the Trinity was on these lines, and we are assured by Professor Macdonald (*Aspects of Islam*, p. 247 f.) that "in the Syrian Desert, not very far over beyond the Dead Sea, there are still tribes who call themselves Christians and who worship a Trinity consisting of Father, Mother, and Son."

Whether Muhammad was absolutely illiterate or not is a moot point, but it is certain that he never read either the Old or the New Testament, for there is no evidence to show that these were extant in Arabic at his time or long after. It is clear that the doctrinal background of his prophecy, even as to its central dogma, was cloudy and confused. The shape which he gave to it was chiefly determined by his personality and his religious and political experiences. If it is true that the theology of the Qur'an fundamentally affects its ethic, it is also true that its ethic helps to interpret its theology.

THE UNITY OF ALLAH.

If the average Moslem is asked: "What is the way of salvation?" he will reply: "Faith in the *Tauhid* (Unity)"; and if asked: "What is the chief of sins?" the answer comes: "*Shirk*," *i.e.* "associating" (others with God). In this he

faithfully reflects the teaching of the Qur'an. God the One is the supreme Reality, the Thing that really matters. It is this that gives its peculiar dignity and power to the Qur'an, despite its evident lapses and flaws. The absoluteness of Allah stands out first in contrast to polytheism with its importation of the sexual element into the divine nature. God is transcendent. The creature has no community of nature with the Creator, yet the action of the Creator is described in the boldest anthropomorphisms. He is nearer to man than His neck-vein; settles Himself upon His throne; stands upon the watch-tower; plots against the plotter; seizes the rebel by His lying, sinful forelock, and summons the guards of hell. His majesty is absolute. So in the "Verse of the Throne" (II, 256): "Allah! there is no god but he, the Living, the Eternal. Nor slumber seizeth him, nor sleep; his, whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth! Who is he that can intercede with him save by his own permission? He knoweth what hath been before them and what shall be after them; yet nought of his knowledge shall they grasp, save what he willeth. His throne reacheth over the heavens and over the earth, and the upholding of both burdeneth him not; and he is the High, the Great." And in what is probably the latest verse of the Qur'an (v, 120): "Unto Allah belongeth the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth and all that they contain; and he hath power over all things."

The only attitude of the creature is that of adoration, praise and commemoration of His Name. These are the elements of which the set prayers (*Salāt*) of Islam consist rather than of petition.

THE NAMES OF ALLAH.

As in the Old Testament, God has revealed Himself by names which reflect the different aspects of His character. "Most excellent titles hath God; by these call ye on Him" (VII, 179). These excellent titles are the *Asmāu'lhasnā* or "beautiful names" found in the Qur'an or derived from its phrases. They are most commonly reckoned as ninety-nine and recited from a rosary with that number of beads. Broadly speaking, they are reproductions of Old Testament names with a tendency to dwell on the attributes of force, such as the Dominator (*Qahhār*), the Haughty (*Mutakabbir*), the All-Compelling (*Jabbār*), the Avenger (*Muntaqim*), the Slayer (*Mumīt*), the Gatherer into hell (*Jāmi'*), the Misdemeanorist (*Muzill*).

The relationship with the Old Testament is specially noticeable in three very common names. *Allāh* is the contraction of *Al Ilāh* = The Deity, answering to the Hebrew *Eloah* and *Elohim*. *Rabb*, with the meaning of Lord, corresponds to *Adonai*, though from a different root. *Rahmān* = Merciful, was a Jewish form of the root RHM, synonymous in Hebrew and Arabic, and its adoption by Muhammad caused questionings which were appeased by the addition of the Arabic form *Rahīm*, so that the invocation of Islam, *Bismi'llāhi' Rahmāni'r Rahīm* (In the name of God, the Merciful One, the Merciful) contains a standing tautology. The leading Old Testament ideas of absolute power, benevolent rule, and mercy to the weak and erring, are carried on, but their fulfilment in the revelation of the New Testament is eliminated. By the consensus of divines *Allāh* is regarded as the "Name of Essence"; the others are only Names of Attribute.

MORAL AND METAPHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES.

The acid test of all religious thought is the reconciliation of these two categories. How is this envisaged in the Qur'an? This brief review has shown that the metaphysical qualities of self-subsistent unity, omnipotence and omniscience are impressively set forth in terms well suited to the mentality of Arabia in the prophet's age and indeed of no inconsiderable portion of humanity. The constant repetition of the attribute of knowledge is striking, a kind of prophetic re-insurance, remaining in reserve in case the oracle should be wanting in accuracy, and indeed such a provision is made in the words: "What He pleases will God abrogate or confirm; for with Him is the source of revelation (XIII, 39). And again: "Whatever verses we cancel or cause thee to forget, we bring a better or its like (II, 100). But it would be unfair to demand from the prophet-missionary the clarity and balance of a trained theologian. Indeed had he displayed these qualities he would probably never have drawn men as he did and still does. Over against an enervated and divided Christendom and a powerless Arabian paganism, Muhammad is proclaiming the reality of God which has mastered his mind and thought and is still the force behind all that is true and strong in Islam.

The moral attributes are there also. Foremost His mercy which is shown in indulgence to the weakness of His creature and in the provision of an "easy way" to the recovery of the

divine favour which frail man may have forfeited by his negligence or transgression. And there is also His justice in virtue of which He punishes and rewards both here and hereafter. But the element of justice is weak. Among the "Beautiful Names" it occurs only once (*'Adl*) and that not as taken from the Qur'an but from Tradition. It does not seem to enter into the glory for which He is adored, nor does it curb His almightiness, for not only can He lead astray whom He will, but He can and does permit in the specially favoured one what would be reprehensible in others (as in the matter of plurality of wives) (xxxiii, 49-52). The New Testament idea of conscience as God's witness in the heart of man is not brought out in the Qur'an. The absolute power is irresponsible, as far as moral standards which we know of are concerned. The attribute of Holiness, so strongly emphasized in the Old Testament, is reflected in the *Quddus* (= *Qādash*) of the Qur'an, but it is there used only once in LIX, 23: "He is God, beside whom there is no deity, the King, the Holy." The meaning is obscure, and little light on it is gained from Moslem divines. It would seem to convey rather the transcendent aloofness of God from the creature than His absolute separation from evil as negating His moral perfection. *Al Wudūd*, "the Affectionate," occurs twice (XI, 92; LXXXV, 14) in connection with Mercy and Indulgence. Allah is affectionate to those who are obedient to His messenger and ask His forgiveness. This falls far short of the New Testament designation of Love as an inherent divine attribute, the necessary forthgoing of His nature, in fact the ultimate "Name of Essence." That "God is love," determines the exercise of His Power, His Wisdom and every other quality. The quranic idea of God has fallen back from this supreme reconciliation of the metaphysical and moral attributes of God. The former dominates the latter, Power overrides Justice.

This view of the divine character is borne out in the teaching of the Qur'an on Creation and Judgment.

Creation is an act of Allah's absolute power. "He is the wise Creator. When He desireth aught his command is but to say: 'Be, and it is.'" "He turned to the heaven which was then but smoke, and to it and to the earth he said: 'Come ye, whether obediently or against your will.' They said: 'We come obediently.'" The details resemble those of Genesis with Talmudic supplements. "He it is who hath made the heaven and the earth in six days: His throne had stood ere this upon the

waters, that He might make proof which of you would excel in works." He created the earth in two days, then placed the firm mountains upon it and made the whole fruitful in four days, and spread over it the vault of heaven without pillars, with the sun and the moon, each moving swiftly in its sphere. Creation is made to set forth Allah's truth; all creatures are a sign from him, and join in praising him; even the shadows, as they rise and fall, are prostrating themselves in worship before him. Creation is a sign to convince unbelievers, while it witnesses the goodness of Allah to men. The creation of man is twofold: the first of water and of dust making male and female, the second by sexual procreation which is repeatedly insisted on in detail as a proof of Allah's power over man and His care for him. As Allah has brought forth all things, so He will call them back and remake creation at the resurrection.

Yet there seem to be traces in the Qur'an of hypostases or personal distinctions within the deity; though here interpretation is uncertain owing to the lack of clearness in Muhammad's reminiscences of the teaching which he had heard from Jews and Christians. At the creation of the seven heavens Allah revealed to each its own *amr*, i.e. command or bidding (see xli, 11 (cp. Ps. cxlviii, 6). In xxxii, 4: "He ordains the *amr* from the heaven to the earth"; and in lxv, 12: "It is Allah who hath created seven heavens and as many earths; the divine *amr* cometh down through them all." We are reminded of the Memra or divine Word of the Targums, an emanation from God which carries the imperative message of His will to the creation. Connected with this *amr* is the idea of the spirit proceeding from God. "They ask thee of the spirit (probably Gabriel). Say: The spirit *proceedeth* from the command (*amr*) of my Lord" (xvii, 87). In the plenitude of his power Allah bestows him. "Exalted beyond the dignities, Lord of the Throne, he sendeth forth the spirit *proceeding* from his *amr* on whomsoever of his servants whom he pleaseth, that he may warn of the Day of Meeting" (xl, 15). Muhammad claims to have received this spirit: "Thus did we inspire thee with the spirit *proceeding* from Our *amr*" (xlii, 52). But still more emphatically is this gift of the spirit claimed for Jesus: "Some of the Apostles We have endowed more highly than others . . . and We have given Jesus, the Son of Mary, manifest signs, and We strengthened him with the holy spirit" (ii, 254). The addition of the title "holy" in this passage is almost certainly an echo

of Christian phraseology. The clash between the discordant elements is shown in IV, 169. "The Messiah, Jesus, Son of Mary, is only an apostle of God and His Word which He cast into Mary and a spirit from Him." This close linking of Allah, His Word and Spirit, reminds us forcibly of the prophetic utterance of the servant of Jehovah in Isa. xlvi, 16: "From the time that it was there am I, and now the Lord Jehovah hath sent me and His Spirit." It is through the Word and the Spirit that Allah reveals himself, yet in the next verse the conception of a Divine Trinity is rejected with horror.

The quranic doctrine of Predestination is very explicit though not very logical. For the purposes of exhortation a power of choice is assumed, but the hearers are often reminded that this power itself is in the hands of Allah. The determinism of the Qur'an is summed up in the word *qadar*, i.e. measuring. The well-known word *qismat* is not used in this sense in the Qur'an, but its meaning is the same, viz. apportionment. *Qadar* expresses the divine act or decree which determines the apportionment of the lot of all things, animate or inanimate. As for the future it fixes the weal or woe of sentient beings in the life to come, so in the past it determined the creation of all things, the actions of men, belief and unbelief, obedience and disobedience, and all the events of life as well as its limits, for Allah's behest is a fixed decree even in accidental matters such as that of the wife of Zaid (XXXIII, 38). The fate of men and cities is written in their book, on a clear register, containing all secret things. Yet those who use this as an excuse for their unbelief stand condemned; "The truth is from your Lord, so let him who will believe; and let him who will disbelieve" (XVIII, 28). And even to Muhammad, Allah says: "What befalls thee of good it is from Allah, and what befalls thee of bad it is from thyself" (IV, 81). But a survey of the whole leaves the matter summed up in the words "Allah do all beings in the heavens and in the earth adore, whether they will or no" (XIII, 16). Had he pleased there would have been no idolatry. "Allah is the Creator of everything; He is the One, the Dominant" (XIII, 17).

The contrast to the New Testament is brought out most strikingly of all in the quranic rejection of the idea of Fatherhood in God. "He is God alone" seems to involve: "He begetteth not," because the prophet could only understand this in a physical sense. The absolute Power may allow of indulgence to the weak and erring or to the special favourite, but never of any

likeness of nature between the Creator and the creature. As a creature man is *'abd* (slave); as a believer he has added nothing to this status. The insistence of the Qur'an on the bounty and benevolence of God in the creation is frequent and sometimes eloquent, therein following the Bible; all the more marked is the entire absence of a divine image of man, the starting-point of the Old Testament and the culmination of the New. To the Qur'an Incarnation can only connote defilement. A Kingdom of God there is, but it is the Kingdom of Power only; the Kingdom of Grace that overcomes sin through Divine and sinless suffering is not so much denied as ignored; Jesus was not crucified.

How far does the quranic ethic correspond to this conception of God?

Islam is obedience to God as speaking through His apostle. He rules both faith and state. Religion is to be propagated by physical force as well as by preaching. The Islamic law of death for apostasy, which for twelve centuries crushed out evangelism in Moslem lands, is in essential accordance with quranic teaching. It extends into social life. Not only is it laudable to fight to spread the faith. Slavery, polygamy and easy divorce are all legitimate, and woman, as the weaker, is subject to according disability. Yet further, to the very root of ethical conception does this contrast go. The Qur'an puts forward an admittedly imperfect man as supreme guide in religion to supersede the perfect Man set forth in the Evangel. The modernist Moslems who see this difficulty seek to meet it on the ground that the ethic of Jesus, while ideally the highest, was impracticable for ordinary mortals, and therefore a less exalted but more practical example is better suited to humanity. If the quranic conception of God as ultimately above morality were sound, then it might be a suitable expedient on the part of the arbitrary Ruler to devise an "easy way" which He could accept, though falling short of moral perfection, and to send a prophet who gave an example of that way. But that way lies the denial of a God who is worthy of absolute devotion and unshakable belief, and it is against that danger that the Qur'an offers no effectual safeguard.

DISCUSSION.

Mr. PERCY O. RUOFF said: Dr. Stanton has pointed out with a good deal of force that the Quranic doctrine of God has much more than an academic interest. In a brief sketch of the developments

of Islam forced upon it by modern thought and life, he cites some of the consequent disintegrating movements at work in different parts of the world. This is of extreme interest and importance from the point of view of missionary work, as many iron barriers are now being broken down, and doors are being opened for the entrance of Christianity.

Perhaps the paper concedes a little too much on p. 183, para. 1, in affirming an exact correspondence between the Biblical and the Qur'anic connotation of the titles of God. In any case, the conception and elaboration of the doctrine of God in the Qur'an is immeasurably below the revelation of the title and meaning assigned to Jehovah in the Bible. For instance, let anyone take any passage or collate any number of passages from the Qur'an, and place them side by side with, for example, such majestic, glorious and awe-inspiring passages as Isa. xl, and at once the contrast is apparent, and the inferiority of the Qur'an revelation of God appears. Where can a section be found to compare with the words (Isa. xl, 15, 17), "Behold the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance : behold He taketh up the isles as a very little thing. . . . All nations before Him are as nothing ; and they are counted to Him less than nothing, and vanity."

There are, moreover, two notable matters which are absent from the Qur'an, (1) great prophetic utterances, and (2) the conception of the holiness of God and its correlation to man's life.

After all, the Quranic conception of God is very limited in range, notwithstanding the fact that it presents God as Creator, Omniscient, Omnipotent, Governor, Judge, Rewarder of the actions of men, and the God who investigates and adjudicates upon men's matters on the Day of Resurrection. In chap. xv of the Qur'an there is this remarkable statement concerning God : " He hath created the heavens and the earth to *manifest His justice*." It is this attribute of Justice which receives more notice than any other in the Qur'an. The marvel is, considering all things, that the Qur'an has maintained such immense influence for thirteen centuries.

The Rev. A. H. FINN said : Dr. Weitbrecht Stanton is so thoroughly master of his subject that it would be very rash of anyone

to criticize his utterances. Yet there are a few questions I should like to ask for my own information, not by way of criticism.

How far is the term "prophet" (*Nabī*) applied to Muhammad in the Qur'an? In the Muhammadan profession he is called "apostle" (*Rasūl*).

What of Muhammad's claim to be the promised Paraclete? The story, as I heard it, was that Muhammad, anxious to find some authorization for his mission in the New Testament, came across a not very erudite Christian who confused the word *παράκλητος*, Comforter (John xiv, 16, 26), with *περικλυτός*, the Illustrious. Muhammad therefore claimed that his own name, the Praised One, showed that he was the Illustrious One promised.

Is not the essential meaning of *tanzīl* something "sent down," not necessarily a "missive or rescript," but a message sent down, whether written or oral?

Would not "submission" be a better rendering of *Islam* than "obedience"? Submission would, of course, include obedience, but has a somewhat wider scope.

Mr. WILLIAM C. EDWARDS said: I am sure that we have all greatly enjoyed the lecture to which we have just listened. Since so many millions of Muhammadans are our fellow-subjects in the Empire, we ought to know more about the religion which they profess. I hope that the lecturer will often come again and give us several lectures upon this little-known subject.

I have several times read in the Qur'an and tried to get some light upon the tenets of Islam. I have found the Qur'an very vapid and insipid. Even such *surahs* as "He Frowned" seem without much meaning. I imagine that Muhammed was an Arab youth who came in touch with Christians (I presume Nestorians), who taught him something of the New Testament. Read the *surah* "Mary" and other places to see how tenaciously Muhammad holds the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, which some so-called Churchmen have abandoned. He must later have come in touch with Jewish Rabbis and got fired with an ambition to become a prophet. Knowing his Abrahamic descent through Ishmael, he seems to have become attracted to Judaism and repelled from the debased and almost idolatrous practices of professing Christians. It is to his credit that he rejected all idolatry and alcohol.

I was wandering one day in the Garden of the Virgin at Heliopolis. I had been wondering how it came to pass that Islam had almost swept away the Eastern Churches, when I noticed an Egyptian statue in a sort of rockery and, as usual, with the head broken off : then it flashed upon my mind : “ Surely God permitted Islam to destroy a corrupt Christianity because, but for that, might not even the Church of Athanasius have become utterly and entirely corrupted by idolatry ? ”

Travelling for a day in India with an intelligent Muhammadan, he said to me : “ Why do not the Christians and Muhammadans unite to destroy Hinduism, that horrible and debasing form of idolatry ? ” “ Well,” I said, “ it is to the credit of Muhammad that he destroyed idolatry in Arabia, but in some respects you Muhammadans are farther off from God than these Hindus. These men have a sense of sin and are seeking an atonement. I do not find that in you. You have no Infinite atoning Saviour to put away sins for ever by substitutionary death.”

At the All Nations Bible College we had an ex-Muhammadan student, who said : “ That was what I sought, but what I sought in vain in Islam, but found in Christ—forgiveness to the repentant sinner through the death of the Son of God.”

When in Bankipore I was the guest of a well-known leading Indian Muhammadan. After a great deal of discussion, in which *perhaps* I scored, he brought out his great artillery. “ You Christians are often drunkards and we never.” (“ Never,” I mused, for, alas ! I had heard sad stories of secret drunkenness even amongst them.) But I said nothing except this : “ I own that in this matter Muhammad set a good example, but all Christians are not drunkards ; and true Christians *never*,” but before I could get any further he almost shouted : “ Your religion is drink ; your highest religious ceremony, to which all must go, compels you to drink alcohol.”

I was glad to be able to say : “ I am an abstainer. I never drink alcohol. All the ministers that I know are also abstainers, and at the service we call the Lord’s Supper we use the wine that is guaranteed to be *non-alcoholic*, and known as ‘ Tent ’ wine.”

Mr. THEODORE ROBERTS pointed out that the alternative title of the Institute was “ Philosophical Society,” and he was disappointed

that the lecturer, while inserting much irrelevant matter about present-day Muhammadan sects, had not shown philosophically how the Qur'an doctrine of God had led to Christianity being superseded by Muhammadanism in Palestine, its native country, and over vast regions from the Persian Gulf to the confines of Constantinople, and from the Arabian Sea to the Pillars of Hercules (Gibraltar itself is named after a Muhammadan), all within a century of the death of the Prophet. These were the lands of the Apostles, and of the great fathers of the Church, such as Jerome, Eusebius of Cæsarea, Athanasius, Origen and Clement and Cyril of Alexandria, Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine (in his latter years), and were permanently conquered by the followers of the Arabian prophet.

If, as is the case, a religious man takes his character from the God he worships, this conquest can only be accounted for by recognizing that the Qur'an set forth a better doctrine of God in His unity than was prevalent among the Greek Christians of that time, who had, by their speculations on the relationships of divine Persons to One Another, deprived their doctrine of God of all reality.

It is to the shame of Christianity that in the city where our Lord died the chief religious building, erected on the site of Solomon's Temple, contains these words written round its dome—"God is One; there is no Son of God"—a denial, however, which implies the insistent claim of the Son of God to recognition.

While the message of the Old Testament seems to be "There is one God," in contrast to polytheism, that of the New is rather "God is One" (Gal. iii, 20, &c.), because He is now revealed in three Persons.

Mr. Roberts was privileged to have the friendship of a Muhammadan priest who had been converted to Christianity and became a medical missionary, and he remembered his telling him how, in reading the Old Testament with a Jew, in his unconverted days, he had found no difficulty in interpreting the prophecies of Isaiah concerning the victories of the Servant of Jehovah as applying to Muhammad, but found that those concerning the sufferings of God's Servant had no application to the Arabian prophet, but must refer to that Lord Jesus, whom he was thus led to accept as his Saviour.

Mr. HOSTE asked the lecturer how far a sense of sin or a recognition of the holy claims of God against the sinner were present among Moslems? He remembered visiting Bangalore in 1910, and being taken by a friend to meet a company of a reformed sect of Moslems, who were willing to meet with Christians on a sort of half-way platform. He was warned "to be very careful not to go too far." Paul's sermon on Mars Hill was chosen for consideration, and as long as the majesty of God and the folly of idolatry were the truths dwelt on things went well, but as soon as there was the slightest reference to the need of a Saviour the ice seemed to get thinner and thinner; and when at last the speaker determined to take a definite plunge and bare witness to the fact that God was Infinitely Holy and had righteous claims against the sinner, and that all had been fully met by the Perfect Atonement of Christ, to be received by faith, opposition was quickly aroused. Mr. Hoste remembered a certain General Haig, much interested in Christian missions in North Africa, saying how, on one occasion, when dining with an Arab Sheik in that country, he expressed his admiration at the devotion of his fellow-guests (Moslems all) who at a certain moment, fell to prayer in the most zealous and apparently reverent way. The Sheik only remarked, "Is all your baggage securely locked? for there is not one of these men who would not cheerfully rob you if he got the chance." Mr. Hoste supposed that the Christian sermons with which the lecturer said the Moslem addresses at the Woking Mosque would bear comparison, would be of the Modernist or Unitarian type.

Mr. AVARY H. FORBES said: I should like to ask the lecturer if he does not think that Muhammad's conception of God, as given in the Qur'an, is a very degraded one; *firstly*, in promising "the faithful" a sensual Paradise of the grossest kind?—a promise which must encourage Moslems to value and cultivate the animal appetites of our nature; *secondly*, in the shocking idea that part of the pleasures of Paradise will be the witnessing of the tortures of the lost (*surah VII*); and does not this tend to justify the cultivation of the malicious passions of the mind? *thirdly*, in exhorting "the faithful" to propagate Islam by the sword (*surah XLVII*).

If Muhammad's "voices," or revelation, came to him from above

(as he always maintained that they did), do not the foregoing facts show that he was "disobedient unto the heavenly vision?"

I am given to understand that nowadays educated Moslems are somewhat ashamed of such teaching, and either twist the words into a different meaning, or else fight shy of discussing the subject altogether.

THE AUTHOR'S REPLY.

In acknowledging the kind reception of his lecture, Dr. Weitbrecht Stanton remarked that he had intentionally put the modern sects of Islam in the foreground, both because they were endeavouring to adapt the quranic idea of God to the exigencies of modern thought and life, and because it is they who use the idea so modified as the basis of their propaganda in Western lands.

The supersession in the Near East of the Christian conception of God by that of Islam illustrates the adage *Corruptio optimi pessima*. A lifeless speculative creed was superseded by a crude but virile one. It teaches us still to stress the first article of the Creed of undivided Christendom, "I believe in One God."

Muhammad is called both *Nabi* and *Rasul* in the Qur'an, the first as the recipient of revelation from Allah, and the second as its messenger to mankind.

The sense of sin as contrariety of will to God is undeveloped. God is merciful to those who commit only venial faults and avoid great sins, the chief of which is *shirk* (polytheism).

The character of God as manifested in the ethic of the Qur'an is touched on briefly in the last paragraph. The new doctrines of Islam are two: first the apostleship of Muhammad with his view of Allah, and second the command to fight till all acknowledge Him. The unity of the One God consists in His power: the unity of His Kingdom welcomes the co-operation of force.