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LORD'S LECTURES.

BEACON LIGHTS OF HISTORY.

BY JOHN LORD, LL.D.

AUTHOR OF "THE OLD ROMAN WORLD," "MODERN EUROPE," ETC., ETC.

VOLUME V.

THE MIDDLE AGES.

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BEACON LIGHTS OF HISTORY

MOHAMMED. ^[1]

A.D. 570-632.

SARACENIC CONQUESTS.

[1] Spelled also *Mahomet*, *Mahommed*; but I prefer Mohammed.

The most extraordinary man who arose after the fall of the Roman Empire was doubtless Mohammed; and his posthumous influence has been greater than that of any man since Christianity was declared, if we take into account the number of those who have received his doctrines. Even Christianity never had so rapid a spread. More than a sixth part of the human race are the professed followers of the Arabian prophet.

In regard to Mohammed himself, a great change has taken place in the opinions of critics within fifty years. It was the fashion half a century ago to speak of this man as a hypocrite, an impostor, even as Antichrist. Now he is generally regarded as a reformer; that is, as a man who introduced into Arabia a religion and a morality superior to what previously existed, and he is regarded as an impostor only so far as he was visionary. Few critics doubt his sincerity. He was no hypocrite, since he himself believed in his mission; and his mission was benevolent,--to turn his countrymen from a gross polytheism to the worship of one God. Although his religion cannot compare with Christianity in purity and loftiness, yet it enforced a higher morality than the old Arabian religions, and assimilated to Christianity in many important respects. The chief fault we have to find in Mohammed was, the propagation of his doctrines by the sword, and the use of wicked means to bring about a good end. The truths he declared have had an immense influence on Asiatic nations, and

these have given vitality to his system, if we accept the position that truth alone has vitality.

One remarkable fact stands out for the world to ponder,—that, for more than fourteen hundred years, one hundred and eighty millions (more than a sixth part of the human race) have adopted and cherished the religion of Mohammed; that Christianity never had so astonishing a triumph; and that even the adherents of Christianity, in many countries, have not manifested the zeal of the Mohammedans in most of the countries where it has been acknowledged. Now these startling facts can be explained only on the ground that Mohammedanism has great vital religious and moral truths underlying its system which appeal to the consciousness of mankind, or else that these truths are so blended with dangerous errors which appeal to depraved passions and interests, that the religion spread in consequence of these errors rather than of the truth itself.

The question to be considered, then, is whether Mohammedanism spread in consequence of its truths or in consequence of its errors.

In order to appreciate the influence of the Arabian prophet, we are first led into the inquiry whether his religion was really an improvement on the old systems which previously prevailed in Arabia. If it was, he must be regarded as a benefactor and reformer, even if we admit the glaring evils of his system, when measured by the purer religion of the Cross. And it then simply becomes a question whether it is better to have a prevalent corrupted system of religion containing many important truths, or a system of downright paganism with few truths at all.

In examining the religious systems of Arabia in the age preceding the advent of the Prophet, it would seem that the most prominent of them were the old doctrines of the Magians and Sabaeans, blended with a gross idolatry and a senseless polytheism. Whatever may have been the faith of the ancient Sabaean sages, who noted the aspects of the stars, and supposed they were inhabited by angels placed there by Almighty power to supervise and govern the universe, yet history seems to record that this ancient faith was practically subverted, and that the stars, where were supposed to dwell deities to whom prayers were made, became themselves objects of worship, and even graven images were made in honor of them. Among the Arabs each tribe worshipped a particular star, and set up its particular idol, so that a degrading polytheism was the religion of the land. The object of greatest veneration was the celebrated Black Stone, at Mecca, fabled to have fallen from heaven at the same time with Adam. Over this stone was built the Kaabah, a small oblong stone building, around which has been since built the great mosque. It was ornamented with three hundred and sixty idols. The guardianship of this pagan temple was intrusted to the most ancient and honorable families of Mecca, and to it resorted innumerable pilgrims bringing precious offerings. It was like the shrine of Delphi, as a source of profit to its fortunate guardians.

Thus before Mohammed appeared polytheism was the prevalent religion of Arabia,—a

degradation even from the ancient Sabaean faith. It is true there were also other religions. There were many Jews at Medina; and there was also a corrupted form of Christianity in many places, split up into hostile and wrangling sects, with but little of the spirit of the divine Founder, with innumerable errors and superstitions, so that in no part of the world was Christianity so feeble a light. But the great body of the people were pagans. A marked reform was imperatively needed to restore the belief in the unity of God and set up a higher standard of morality.

It is claimed that Mohammed brought such a reform. He was born in the year 570, of the family of Hashem and the tribe of Koreish, to whom was intrusted the keeping of the Black Stone. He therefore belonged to the highest Arabian aristocracy. Early left an orphan and in poverty, he was reared in the family of one of his uncles, under all the influences of idolatry. This uncle was a merchant, and the youth made long journeys with him to distant fairs, especially in Syria, where he probably became acquainted with the Holy Scriptures, especially with the Old Testament. In his twenty-fifth year he entered the service of Cadijeh, a very wealthy widow, who sent to the fairs and towns great caravans, which Mohammed accompanied in some humble capacity,--according to the tradition as camel-driver. But his personal beauty, which was remarkable, and probably also his intelligence and spirit, won the heart of this powerful mistress, and she became his wife.

He was now second to none in the capital of Arabia, and great thoughts began to fill his soul. His wife perceived his greatness, and, like Josephine and the wife of Disraeli, forwarded the fortunes of her husband, for he became rich as well as intellectual and noble, and thus had time and leisure to accomplish more easily his work. From twenty-five to forty he led chiefly a contemplative life, spending months together in a cave, absorbed in his grand reflections,--at intervals issuing from his retreat, visiting the marts of commerce, and gaining knowledge from learned men. It is seldom that very great men lead either a life of perpetual contemplation or of perpetual activity. Without occasional rest, and leisure to mature knowledge, no man can arm himself with the weapons of the gods. To be truly great, a man must blend a life of activity with a life of study,--like Moses, who matured the knowledge he had gained in Egypt amid the deserts of Midian.

With all great men some leading idea rules the ordinary life. The idea which took possession of the mind of Mohammed was the degrading polytheism of his countrymen, the multitude of their idols, the grossness of their worship, and the degrading morals which usually accompany a false theology. He set himself to work to produce a reform, but amid overwhelming obstacles. He talked with his uncles, and they laughed at him. They would not even admit the necessity of a reform. Only Cadijeh listened to him and encouraged him and believed in him. And Mohammed was ever grateful for this mark of confidence, and cherished the memory of his wife in his subsequent apostasy,--if it be true that he fell, like Solomon. Long afterwards, when she was dead, Ayésha, his young and favorite wife, thus addressed him: "Am I not better than Cadijeh? Do you not love me better than you did her? She was a widow, old and ugly." "No, by Allah!" replied the Prophet; "she believed in me

when no one else did. In the whole world I had but one friend, and she was that friend." No woman ever retained the affections of a husband superior to herself, unless she had the spirit of Cadijeh,--unless she proved herself his friend, and believed in him. How miserable the life of Jane Carlyle would have been had she not been proud of her husband! One reason why there is frequent unhappiness in married life is because there is no mutual appreciation. How often have we seen a noble, lofty, earnest man fettered and chained by a frivolous woman who could not be made to see the dignity and importance of the labors which gave to her husband all his real power! Not so with the woman who assisted Mohammed. Without her sympathy and faith he probably would have failed. He told her, and her alone, his dreams, his ecstasies, his visions; how that God at different times had sent prophets and teachers to reveal new truths, by whom religion had been restored; how this one God, who created the heavens and the earth, had never left Himself without witnesses of His truth in the most degenerate times; how that the universal recognition of this sovereign Power and Providence was necessary to the salvation of society. He had learned much from the study of the Talmud and the Jewish Scriptures; he had reflected deeply in his isolated cave; he knew that there was but one supreme God, and that there could be no elevated morality without the sense of personal responsibility to Him; that without the fear of this one God there could be neither wisdom nor virtue.

Hence his soul burned to tell his countrymen his earnest belief in a supreme and personal God, to whom alone prayers should be made, and who alone could rescue by His almighty power. He pondered day and night on this single and simple truth. His perpetual meditations and ascetic habits induced dreams and ecstasies, such as marked primitive monks, and Loyola in his Manresan cave. He became a visionary man, but most intensely earnest, for his convictions were overwhelming. He fancied himself the ambassador of this God, as the ancient Jewish prophets were; that he was even greater than they, his mission being to remove idolatry,--to his mind the greatest evil under the sun, since it was the root of all vices and follies. Idolatry is either a defiance or a forgetfulness of God,--high treason to the majesty of Heaven, entailing the direst calamities.

At last, one day, in his fortieth year, after he had been shut up a whole month in solitude, so that his soul was filled with ecstasy and enthusiasm, he declared to Cadijeh that the night before, while wrapped in his mantle, absorbed in reverie, a form of divine beauty, in a flood of light, appeared to him, and, in the name of the Almighty who created the heavens and the earth, thus spake: "O, Mohammed! of a truth thou art the Prophet of God, and I am his angel Gabriel." "This," says Carlyle, "is the soul of Islam. This is what Mohammed felt and now declared to be of infinite moment, that idols and formulas were nothing; that the jargon of argumentative Greek sects, the vague traditions of Jews, the stupid routine of Arab idolatry were a mockery and a delusion; that there is but one God; that we must let idols alone and look to Him. He alone is reality; He made us and sustains us. Our whole strength lies in submission to Him. The thing He sends us, be it death even, is good, is the best. We resign ourselves to Him."

Such were the truths which Mohammed, with preternatural earnestness, now declared,--doctrines which would revolutionize Arabia. And why not? They are the same substantially which Moses declared to those sensual and degraded slaves whom he led out of Egypt,--yea, the doctrines of David and of Job. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." What a grand and all-important truth it is to impress upon people sunk in forgetfulness and sensuality and pleasure-seeking and idle schemes of vanity and ambition, that there is a supreme Intelligence who overrules, and whose laws cannot be violated with impunity; from whom no one can escape, even though he "take the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea." This is the one truth that Moses sought to plant in the minds of the Jews,--a truth always forgotten when there is slavery to epicurean pleasures or a false philosophy.

Now I maintain that Mohammed, in seeking to impress his degenerate countrymen with the idea of the one supreme God, amid a most degrading and almost universal polytheism, was a great reformer. In preaching this he was neither fanatic nor hypocrite; he was a very great man, and thus far a good man. He does not make an original revelation; he reproduces an old truth,--as old as the patriarchs, as old as Job, as old as the primitive religions,--but an exceedingly important one, lost sight of by his countrymen, gradually lost sight of by all peoples when divine grace is withheld; indeed practically by people in Christian lands in times of great degeneracy. "The fool has said in his heart there is no God;" or, Let there be no God, that we may eat and drink before we die. Epicureanism, in its pleasures or in its speculations, is virtually atheism. It was so in Greece. It is so with us.

Mohammed was now at the mature age of forty, in the fulness of his powers, in the prime of his life; and he began to preach everywhere that there is but one God. Few, however, believed in him. Why not acknowledge such a fundamental truth, appealing to the intellect as well as the moral sense? But to confess there is a supreme God, who rewards and punishes, and to whom all are responsible both for words and actions, is to imply a confession of sinfulness and the justice of retribution. Those degraded Arabians would not receive willingly such a truth as this, even as the Israelites ever sought to banish it from their hearts and minds, in spite of their deliverance from slavery. The uncles and friends of Mohammed treated his mission with scorn and derision. Nor do I read that the common people heard him gladly, as they listened to the teachings of Christ. Zealously he labored for three years with all classes; and yet in three years of exalted labor, with all his eloquence and fervor and sincerity, he converted only about thirteen persons, one of whom was his slave. Think of such a man declaring such a truth, and only gaining thirteen followers in three years! How sickened must have been his enthusiastic soul! His worldly relatives urged him to silence. Why attack idols; why quarrel with his own interests; why destroy his popularity? Then exclaimed that great hero: "If the sun stood on my right hand, and the moon on my left, ordering me to hold my peace, I would still declare there is but one God,"--a speech rivalled only by Luther at the Diet of Worms. Why urge a great man to be silent on the very thing which makes him great? He cannot be silent. His truth--from which

he cannot be separated--is greater than life or death, or principalities or powers.

Buffeted and ridiculed, still Mohammed persevered. He used at first only moral means. He appealed only to the minds and hearts of the people, encouraged by his few believers and sustained by the fancied voice of that angel who appeared to him in his retreat. But his earnest voice was drowned by discordant noises. He was regarded as a lunatic, a demented man, because he professed to believe in a personal God. The angry mob covered his clothes with dust and ashes. They demanded miracles. But at this time he had only truths to declare,--those saving truths which are perpetual miracles. At last hostilities began. He was threatened and he was persecuted. They laid plots to take his life. He sought shelter in the castle of his uncle, Abu Taleh; but he died. Then Mohammed's wife Cadijeh died. The priests of an idolatrous religion became furious. He had laid his hands on their idols. He was regarded as a disorganizer, an innovator, a most dangerous man. His fortunes became darker and darker; he was hated, persecuted, and alone.

Thus thirteen years passed away in reproach, in persecution, in fear. At last forty picked men swore to assassinate him. Should he remain at Mecca and die, before his mission was accomplished, or should he fly? He concluded to fly to Medina, where there were Jews, and some nominal converts to Christianity,--a new ground. This was in the year 622, and the flight is called the Hegira,--from which the East dates its era, in the fifty-third year of the Prophet's life. In this city he was cordially welcomed, and he soon found himself surrounded with enthusiastic followers. He built a mosque, and openly performed the rites of the new religion.

At this era a new phase appears in the Prophet's life and teachings. Thus far, until his flight, it would seem that he propagated his doctrines by moral force alone, and that these doctrines, in the main, were elevated. He had earnestly declared his great idea of the unity of God. He had pronounced the worship of images to be idolatrous. He held idolatry of all kinds in supreme abhorrence. He enjoined charity, justice, and forbearance. He denounced all falsehood and all deception, especially in trade. He declared that humility, benevolence, and self-abnegation were the greatest virtues. He commanded his disciples to return good for evil, to restrain the passions, to bridle the tongue, to be patient under injuries, to be submissive to God. He enjoined prayer, fastings, and meditation as a means of grace. He laid down the necessity of rest on the seventh day. He copied the precepts of the Bible in many of their essential features, and recognized its greatest teachers as inspired prophets.

It was during these thirteen years at Mecca, amid persecution and ridicule, and with few outward successes, that he probably wrote the Koran,--a book without beginning and without end, *disjecta membra*, regardless of all rules of art, full of repetitions, and yet full of lofty precepts and noble truths of morality evidently borrowed from the Jewish Scriptures,--in which his great ideas stand out with singular eloquence and impressiveness: the unity of God, His divine sovereignty, the necessity of prayer, the soul's immortality, future rewards and punishments. His own private life had been blameless. It was plain and

simple. For a whole month he did not light a fire to cook his food. He swept his chamber himself and mended his own clothes. His life was that of an ascetic enthusiast, profoundly impressed with the greatness and dignity of his mission. Thus far his greatest error and fault was in the supposition that he was inspired in the same sense as the ancient Jewish prophets were inspired,--to declare the will and the truth of God. Any man leading such a life of contemplative asceticism and retirement is prone to fall into the belief of special divine illumination. It characterized George Fox, the Anabaptists, Ignatius Loyola, Saint Theresa, and even, to some extent, Oliver Cromwell himself. Mohammed's supreme error was that he was the greatest as well as the last of the prophets. This was fanaticism, but he was probably honest in the belief. His brain was turned by dreams, ecstasies, and ascetic devotions. But with all his visionary ideas of his call, his own morality and his teachings had been lofty, and apparently unsuccessful. Possibly he was discouraged with the small progress he had made,--disgusted, irritated, fierce.

Certainly, soon after he was established at Medina, a great change took place in his mode of propagating his doctrines. His great ideas remained the same, but he adopted a new way to spread them. So that I can almost fancy that some Mephistopheles, some form of Satanic agency, some lying Voice whispered to him in this wise: "O Mohammed! of a truth thou art the Prophet of the living God. Thou hast declared the grandest truths ever uttered in Arabia; but see how powerless they are on the minds and hearts of thy countrymen, with all thy eloquence, sincerity, and fervor. By moral means thou hast effected comparatively nothing. Thou hast preached thirteen years, and only made a few converts. Thy truths are too elevated for a corrupt and wicked generation to accept. Even thine own life is in danger. Thou hast been obliged to fly to these barren rocks and sands. Thou hast failed. Why not pursue a new course, and adapt thy doctrines to men as they are? Thy countrymen are wild, fierce, and warlike: why not incite their martial passions in defence of thy doctrines? They are an earnest people, and, believing in the truths which thou now declarest, they will fight for them and establish them by the sword, not merely in Arabia, but throughout the East. They are a pleasure-loving and imaginative people: why not promise the victors of thy faith a sensual bliss in Paradise? They will not be subverters of your grand truths; they will simply extend them, and jealously, if they have a reward in what their passions crave. In short, use the proper means for a great end. The end justifies the means."

Whether influenced by such specious sophistries, or disheartened by his former method, or corrupted in his own heart, as Solomon was, by his numerous wives,--for Mohammed permitted polygamy and practised it himself,--it is certain that he now was bent on achieving more signal and rapid victories. He resolved to adapt his religion to the depraved hearts of his followers. He would mix up truth with error; he would make truth palatable; he would use the means which secure success. It was success he wanted, and success he thus far had not secured. He was ambitious; he would become a mighty spiritual potentate.

So he allowed polygamy,--the vice of Eastern nations from remote periods; he promised a sensual Paradise to those who should die in defence of his religion; he inflamed the

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