

The Voice of History

MOHAMMED—HIS METHODS.

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for they did not leave off their barbarous cruelty at the very last; yet did God avenge Himself upon them both in a manner agreeable to justice. As for John, he wanted food, together with his brethren, in these caverns, and begged that the Romans would now give him their right hand for security which he had often proudly rejected before. But for Simon, he struggled hard in the distress he was in, till he was forced to surrender himself, as we shall relate hereafter; so he was preserved for the triumph, and to be then slain, as was John condemned to perpetual prison. And now the Romans set fire to the extreme parts of the city, and burned them down, and entirely demolished its walls.

Mohammed—His Methods.

Washington Irving's, *Mohammed and His Successors*.

In his usual charming and attractive style, Irving, after recording the wonderfully rapid progress and conquests of the Mohammedan religion, points out to us in the following paragraphs the treachery and militarism by which this false prophet sought still further to expand his tyranny. From it we may see how thoroughly different in principle is the religion of Islam and of Christ, the one endeavoring to conquer by the sword, the other by the power of truth. The more the pity that in the Middle Ages, through the anti-Christian confusion of the powers of the State and of the Church, Mohammedan ideas should have crept into Christendom, and blind leaders of the blind should have endeavored to spread the kingdom of peace by means of the sword. May the history of these misguided attempts teach the followers of Him who said, "My Kingdom is not of this world," to adhere to this fundamental principle, and to trust His promise, "They that are of the truth shall hear my voice."

We come now to an important era in the career of Mohammed. Hitherto he had relied on argument and persuasion to make proselytes, enjoining the same on his disciples. His exhortations to them to bear with patience and long-suffering the violence of their enemies almost emulated the meek precept of our Savior, "If they smite thee on the one cheek, turn to them the other also." He now arrived at a point where he completely diverged from the celestial spirit of the Christian doctrines, and stamped his religion with the alloy



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of fallible mortality. His human nature was not capable of maintaining the sublime forbearance he had hitherto inculcated. Thirteen years of meek endurance had been rewarded by nothing but aggravated injury and insult. His greatest persecutors had been those of his own tribe, the Koreishites, especially those of the rival line of Abd Schems; his vindictive chief, Abu Sofian, had now the sway at Mecca. By their virulent hostility his fortunes had been blasted; his family degraded, impoverished, and dispersed, and he himself driven into exile. All this he might have continued to bear with involuntary meekness, had not the means of retaliation unexpectedly sprung up within his reach. He had come to Medina, a fugitive seeking an asylum, and craving merely a quiet home. In a little while, and probably to his own surprise, he found an army at his command; for among the many converts daily made in Medina, the fugitives flocking to him from Mecca, and proselytes from, tribes of the desert, were men of resolute spirit, skilled in the use of arms, and fond of partisan warfare. Human passions and mortal resentments were awakened by this sudden accession of power. They mingled with that zeal for religious reform which was still his predominant motive. In the exaltations of his enthusiastic spirit, he endeavored to persuade himself, and perhaps did so effectually, that the power thus placed within his reach was intended as a means of effecting his great purpose, and that he was called upon by divine command to use it. Such, at least, is the purport of the memorable manifesto which he issued at this epoch, and which changed the whole tone and fortunes of his faith.

"Different prophets," said he, "have been sent by God to illustrate His different attributes: Moses, His clemency and providence; Solomon, His wisdom, majesty, and glory; Jesus Christ. His righteousness, omniscience, and power.—His righteousness, by purity of conduct, His omniscience, by the knowledge He displayed of the secrets of all hearts; His power, by the miracles He wrought. None of these attributes, however, have been sufficient to enforce conviction, and even the miracles of Moses and Jesus have been treated with unbelief. I, therefore, the last of the prophets, am sent with the sword! Let those who promulgate my faith enter

into no argument nor discussion, but slay all who refuse obedience to the law. Whoever fights for the true faith, whether he fall or conquer, will assuredly receive a glorious reward."

"The sword," added he, "is the key of heaven and hell; all who draw it in the cause of the faith will be rewarded with temporal advantages; every drop shed of their blood, every peril and hardship endured by them, will be registered on high as more meritorious than even fasting and praying. If they fall in battle, their sins will be at once blotted out, and they will be transported to paradise, there to revel in eternal pleasures in the arms of black-eyed whores."

Predestination was brought to aid these belligerent doctrines; every event, according to the Koran, was predestined from eternity, and could not be avoided. No man could die sooner or later than his allotted hour, and when it arrived, it would be the same, whether the angel of death should find him in the quiet of his bed or amid the storm of battle.

Such were the doctrines and revelations which converted Islamism all of a sudden from a religion of meekness and philanthropy to one of violence and the sword. They were peculiarly acceptable to the Arabs, harmonizing with their habits, and encouraging their predatory propensities. Virtually pirates of the desert, it is not to be wondered at, after this open promulgation of this religion of the sword they should flock in crowds to the standards of the prophet. Still no violence was authorized by Mohammed against those who should persist in unbelief, provided they should readily submit to his temporal sway, and agree to pay tribute; and here we see the first indication of worldly ambition and a desire for temporal dominion dawning upon his mind. Still it will be found that the tribute thus exacted was subsidiary to his ruling passion, and mainly expended by him in the extension of the faith.

The first warlike enterprises of Mohammed betrayed the lurking resentment we have noted. They were directed against the caravans of Mecca, belonging to his implacable enemies, the Koreishites. The first three were headed by Mohammed in person, but without any material result. The fourth was confided to a Moslem named Abdallah Ibn Jash, and

who was sent out with eight or ten resolute followers on the road towards South Arabia. As it was now the holy month of Radjab, sacred from violence and rapine, Abdallah had sealed orders not to be opened until the third day. These orders were vaguely, yet significantly worded. Abdallah was to repair to the Valley of Naklah, between Mecca and Tayef (the same in which Mohammed had the revelation of the Genii), where he was to watch for an expected caravan of the Koreishites. "Perhaps," added the letter of instruction shrewdly, "perhaps thou mayest be able to bring us some tidings of it."

Abdallah understood the true meaning of the letter and acted up to it. Arriving in the Valley of Naklah, he descried the caravan, consisting of several camels laden with merchandise, and conducted by four men. Following it at a distance, he sent one of his men, disguised as a pilgrim, to overtake it. From the words of the latter the Koreishites supposed his companions to be like himself, pilgrims bound to Mecca. Besides it was the month of Radjab, when the deserts might be traveled in security. Scarce had they come to a halt, however, when Abdallah and his companions fell on them, killed one and took two prisoners; the fourth escaped. The victors then returned to Medina with their prisoners and booty.

All Medina was scandalized at this breach of the holy month. Mohammed, finding that he had ventured too far, pretended to be angry with Abdallah, and refused to take the share of the booty offered to him. Confiding in the vagueness of his instructions, he insisted that he had not commanded Abdallah to shed blood, or commit any violence during the holy month.

The clamor still continuing, and being echoed by the Koreishites of Mecca, produced the following passage of the Koran:—

"They will ask thee concerning the sacred month, whether they may make war therein. Answer: To war therein is grievous; but to deny God, to bar the path of God against His people, to drive true believers from His holy temple, and to worship idols are sins more grievous than to kill in the holy months."

Having thus proclaimed divine sanction for the deed, Mohammed no longer hesitated to take his share of the booty. He delivered one of the prisoners on ransom; the other embraced Islamism.

The above passage of the Koran, however satisfactory it may have been to the devout Moslems, will scarcely serve to exculpate the prophet in the eyes of the profane. The expedition of Abdallah Ibn Jasch was a sad practical illustration of the new religion of the sword. It contemplated not merely an act of plunder and revenge, a venial act in the eyes of Arabs, and justified by the new doctrines by being exercised against the enemies of the faith, but an outrage also on the holy month, that period sacred from time immemorial against violence and bloodshed, and which Mohammed himself professed to hold in reverence. The craft and secrecy also with which the whole was devised and conducted, the sealed letter of instructions to Abdallah to be opened only at the end of three days, at the scene of the projected outrage, encouched in language vague, equivocal, yet sufficiently significant to the agent; all were in direct opposition to the conduct of Mohammed in the earlier part of career, when he dared openly to pursue the path of duty. "Though the sun should be arrayed against him on the right hand, and the moon on the left." All showed that he was conscious of the turpitude of the act he was authorizing. His disavowal of the violence committed by Abdallah, yet his bringing the Koran to his aid to enable him to profit by it with impunity, gives still darker shades to this transaction; which altogether shows how immediately and widely he went wrong the moment he departed from the benevolent spirit of Christianity, which he at first endeavored to emulate. Worldly passions and worldly interests were fast getting the ascendancy over that religious enthusiasm which first inspired him. As has well been observed: "The first drop of blood shed in his name in the holy week displayed him a man in whom the slime of earth had quenched the holy flame of prophecy."