

PART I
SOURCES

CHAPTER I

PRE-ISLAMIC SOURCES

The sources of the life of Jesus vary in origin, language and importance. The primary sources are the Canonical Gospels, Acts and Epistles. Hebrew sources must, however, come first, since Jesus lived among Jews. And the Canonical Gospels must come last. They sum up the events of the life of Jesus and his teachings. Pagan sources, the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts and Epistles and the writings of early Christian Fathers must come in between. I will deal with the facts as given in the Holy Quran and the *Hadith* last of all.

Hebrew Sources

It might be supposed that the earliest mention of Jesus and his teachings ought to be found in the Talmud. But such is not the case. Except for a few references found in them, which are of a later period, and rather in the nature of vituperations and polemics against the founder of a religion which the Jews hated, we find hardly anything in them. The reason for this silence is not far to seek. Judaea under the Herods and Roman procurators witnessed a period of disturbance and confusion, and the appearance of Jesus was so inconspicuous an event that his contemporaries hardly noticed it; and by the time Christians had become a powerful sect, the *sages of the Talmud*, being far removed from the time of Jesus, were content with popular current stories regarding him and turned them into subjects of ridicule and blasphemy. These Talmudic references, it appears, were deliberately intended to contradict events as recorded in the Gospels. For example, the Gospels said that Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit : the Talmud retorted that he was born without a father but as the result of an irregular union;¹ for he was, according to the Talmud, a “Sinner in Israel.” In the Talmud and *Midrash* Jesus is identified as *ben Stada* and *ben Pandera*. But now it is admitted on all hands that *ben Stada* was the Egyptian false prophet referred to by Josephus,² who is also mentioned in the Acts; and *Yeshu ben Pandera* is an appellation resulting from a calumny which need not be repeated here, though Klausner gives it in full detail on the strength of Origen and suggests, in light vein,³ that it originated from the word *Panthera*, a leopard. Again, reference is made to the “uncleanness” of Mary, which is nothing but a malicious defamation of Maryam, mother of Jesus.

The *Toldoth Yeshu*, or, as it is sometimes called, *Ma’ash Talui*, is a book which the Christians did their best to destroy. The only reference in it which is worth mentioning is that R. Shemin *ben ’Azzeri* speaks of Mary as *esheth ish*,⁴ a married woman, who had given birth to Jesus.

1. Barnes, Bishop E.W., *The Rise of Christianity*, 89.

2. Josephus, *Antiq.*, 20 : Wars, 2 : 8.

3. Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 23.

4. *Yeb.*, 4 : 3, 49.

The silence of Jewish writers regarding Jesus is still more striking. There is, to begin with, Philo of Alexandria, who interested himself in the welfare of Israel and was born about thirty years before the Christian Era and did not die until it had lasted fifty-four years. Yet in his more than fifty works which have come down to us it is impossible to find even a single reference to Jesus or his followers. Justus of Tiberias was himself born in Galilee about the supposed date of the crucifixion, and lived in that country amongst men who, it is natural to suppose, were still powerfully stirred by the Gospel preaching. Yet in his two great works, a history of *The War of Independence* and a *Chronicle of Events from Moses to Agrippa II*, who died in 100 C.E., he makes not the smallest reference to Jesus.

It has been asserted that we are in a better position with Josephus, the great Jewish historian, who was born in 37 C.E. and died towards the end of the first century, and who thoroughly knew the history of Galilee. In his remarkable history of the *Wars of the Jews* he speaks of twelve persons bearing the name of Jesus, who are other than Jesus of Nazareth, but he does not mention him at all. In his Jewish *Antiquities*, however, the following remarkable passage occurs:

At that time there lived Jesus, a holy man, *if man he may be called*, for he performed wonderful works, and taught men, and they joyfully received the truth. And he was followed by many Jews and many Greeks. He was the *Messiah*. And our leaders denounced him. But when Pilate had condemned him to the Cross, those who had loved him at first did not deny him. *For he appeared to them after having risen from death on the third day. The holy Prophets had, moreover, predicted of him those and many other wonders.* The race of the Christians takes its name from him and still exists at the present time.¹

In another place we find:

Festus was now dead, and Albious was but upon the road; so he (Ananus) assembled the Sanhedrin of Judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, *who was called Christ*, whose name was James, and some others, and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.²

Now Josephus was a Jew, and I have italicised the words which no Jew could ever have written. Is this then a blatant Christian forgery?

The style, says Moore, is a clever imitation of Josephus, but he points out that in both places there is a short digression.³ Photius, writing in 860 C.E., referring to these passages, says:

1. Josephus, *Antiq.*, 18 : 3.

2. Josephus, *Antiq.*, 20 : 9, 1.

3. Moore, *Judaism in the First Century of the Christian Era*, 1 : 20..

However, I have found in some papers that this discourse was not written by Josephus, but by one Caius, a Presbyter.¹

Clement of Alexandria, who cited from the *Antiquities*, never mentioned any of these testimonies. Tertullian was equally silent, implying thereby that these testimonies were not in the copies of his age. He had particular occasion in his disputes with Jews to quote Josephus, above any other writer, to prove the completion of the prophecies of the Old Testament in the destruction of Jerusalem; yet he never quoted the passages mentioned above, though he did refer to other passages in the works of Josephus. But Origen was more definite. He recorded that Josephus did not believe Jesus to be the Messiah. He, therefore, could not have read the italicised words in his copy of the *Antiquities*. The first ancient author to note these passages was Eusebius,² who lived in the fourth century. So an early Christian copyist of the third century, who could not bear the idea that Jesus should find no place in the great works of Josephus, interpolated the passages to glorify his god. Dean Farrar, while admitting that these passages were subsequent “forgeries”, says:

Josephus . . . a renegade and a sycophant . . . did not make any allusion to . . . Christ . . . His silence on the subject of Christianity was as deliberate as it was dishonest.³

Pagan Sources

As with Jewish records, the lack of Pagan testimony also seems incredible. Only a firm resolve and an intense desire to extract information from a witness who has nothing to tell could discover a few passages from Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny the Younger and Celcus. They tell us nothing beyond that in Judaea there had existed a Jew named Jesus, sometimes called *Christo*, who taught people and did wonderful works and was killed by Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius and that he had a special sect which also existed in Rome fifty years after his death, and that, on account of this community, the Jews were expelled from Rome.

I will only mention the alleged report of Pilate which he is supposed to have sent to Tiberius regarding the death of Jesus, and the notorious *Letter of Lentulus*, the so-called *Governor of Jerusalem*, addressed to the Senate and People of Rome concerning the personal appearance and teachings of Jesus. Both these documents are now admitted to be forgeries, and Dobshutz styled the first as “an obvious fabrication” and the second “a preposterous forgery of medieval origin.”

1. Photius, *Cod. Lile.*, 48.

2. Eusebius : *Ecc. Hist.*, I : II.

3. Farrar, *Life of Christ*, 46.

Christian Sources

The Epistles

The earliest of all Christian sources are the Epistles of Paul. Of about the same period are the Epistles of Peter, James and others contained in the New Testament.

The authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the three Pastoral letters (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) are no longer attributed to Paul. Indeed, their authenticity is not even maintained. They have been excluded by a majority of independent critics from the Pauline Canon.

Paul or Saul, was one of the contemporaries of Jesus; but he did not know him and had not seen him. He, however, testified to having seen him in a vision on his way to Damascus.¹ Three years after, he went to Jerusalem for fifteen days and during this time met Peter and James the Just, brother of Jesus, but did not come in contact with any other of the Apostles.²

It would, therefore, be not difficult to conceive that Paul could, and perhaps did, obtain information concerning the life and teachings of Jesus. He knew, by hearsay, of the life of Jesus. Paul, therefore, is a trustworthy witness as to the existence of Jesus, but nothing beyond this. If we bring together all the allusions and references from all of his writings, without examining their truth, we learn from him that Jesus was a Jew,³ that he was *made of the seed of David, according to the flesh*;⁴ that he was *born of a woman, born under the laws*;⁵ and that he had brothers,⁶ one of whom was James; that he preached only to Israel,⁷ and was an humble and obedient servant of God;⁸ that he chose twelve Apostles;⁹ that he was reviled¹⁰ and crucified¹¹ by the Jews because of their malice against him¹² and, finally, that he rose again on the third day *according to the Scriptures*,¹³ and showed himself to Peter and the twelve Apostles and others and to Paul himself;¹⁴ and that he now sits on the right hand of God¹⁵ awaiting the great day when he shall come again.

The incompleteness of this reconstructed life of Jesus which Paul gives us becomes all the more apparent when we contrast it with the full Christology contained in his Epistles. The conclusion is forced on us that Paul deliberately sacrificed Jesus to Christ. This becomes all the more conspicuous when we realize that he not only ignored the historical Jesus for the mythical Christ, but that he also maintained his apostolic independence of those who lived with and saw Jesus; and held himself aloof from the teachings of Jesus as contained in the Gospels.¹⁶ What Jesus may have said and done on earth became almost a matter of indifference to him. Brought up and influenced by the syncretistic mysteries of the Pagans, Paul conceived Christ as the

1. Acts, 9 : 2-5.

2. Gal., 1 : 17-19.

3. Gal., 3 : 16.

4. Rom., 1 : 3

5. Gal., 4 : 4.

6. 1 Cor., 9 : 5.

7. Rom., 15 : 8.

8. Phil., 2 : 8.

9. 1 Cor., 15 : 5.

10. Rom., 15 : 3.

11. 1 Cor., 15 : 3.

12. 1 Thess., 2 : 15.

13. 1 Cor., 15 : 4.

14. 1 Cor., 15 : 5-8.

15. Rom., 8 : 34.

16. Gal., 1 : 11-18.

saviour-god, to whom his followers had been united by a powerful rite — his redeeming sacrifice on the cross. Paul set up a creed, of which Jesus knew nothing. Dr. Arnold Meyer, Professor of Theology of Zurich University, while discussing the original efforts of Paul to reconcile Gnostic speculations and Rabbinical arguments, points out that, by gradually developing his doctrine of *Justification*, Paul has for ever shut out the simple faith of Jesus. The Christological and Eschatological system of Paul, he says, has blocked the approach of many simple souls, and of many nations, to the childlike piety of Jesus. Dr. Meyer puts a question to himself : Who is the founder of Christianity? and in unequivocal terms he furnishes the answer :

If by Christianity we understand faith in Christ as the heavenly Son of God, who did not belong to earthly humanity, but who lived in the Divine likeness and glory, who came down from Heaven to earth, who entered humanity and took upon himself a human form through a virgin, that he might make propitiation for men's sins by his own blood upon the Cross, who was then awakened from death and raised to the right hand of God, as the Lord of his own people, who believe in him, who hears their prayers, guards and leads them, who, moreover, dwells and works personally in each of them, who will come again with the clouds of Heaven to judge the world, who will cast down all the foes of God, and will bring his own people with him unto the home of heavenly light so that they may become like His glorified body — if this is Christianity, then such Christianity was founded by St. Paul and not by our Lord.¹

Dr. Meyer goes on to say that:

Paul, it is true, wrought a work of tremendous historical importance in that he raised Jesus from the position of a Jewish Messiah to that of the Divine Redeemer of the Gentiles and of the whole world.²

Dr. Johannes Weiss, of Heidelberg University, also remarked in similar strain, that to Paul, Jesus was not only the prophet but the object of religious veneration, and came to the conclusion:

Hence the faith in Christ as held by Paul was something new in comparison with the preachings of Jesus; it was a new type of religion.³

Wrede says that Paul was not the disciple and servant of Jesus, which he professed to be, but of another, the heavenly Christ. He adds:

The teaching of Jesus is directed entirely to the individual personally. Man is to submit his soul to God and to God's will wholly and without reserve . . . The central point for Paul is a divine and supernatural action. He who believes in these divine acts — the incarnation, death and resurrection of a divine being — can obtain salvation. The point which was everything to Paul was nothing to Jesus.⁴

1. Meyer, *Jesus or Paul*, 122.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Weiss, *Paul and Jews*, 130.

4. Wrede, *Palms*, 6.

But I cannot leave this discussion, like these three eminent scholars have done, by merely pointing out the difference between the teachings of Jesus and the creed which Paul introduced into the world. I must go deeper and probe the basis of his belief, the reasons for it and the extent to which Paul did create it out of his own imagination. Paul himself relied on a vision which he had when he was near Damascus. In his vision, his hallucination as some call it, Paul merely heard a voice saying unto him: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"¹ In this vision Paul was further asked not to kick against the pricks. The man who was with Paul and other bystanders saw nothing, heard nothing. So terrified was Paul that he could neither hear nor see anything for three days. To cure him Jesus had to appear to Ananias and to direct him to go to Paul :

For he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles and Kings and the children of Israel.²

It is most extraordinary that neither of these incidents is mentioned by Paul himself. If Paul was in fact the *chosen vessel* surely Jesus could have announced it to him at the time he appeared to him or he should have appeared again. But supernatural events, they say, happen in a manner beyond the understanding of man. This much is certain, that Paul never had any direct revelation from Jesus and such as he claims to have had was merely the result of his own imagination, because he did not see Jesus again even in his dreams. The audacity and shamelessness of Paul has no parallel in history. He resorted to falsehood, and being conscious of it, protested most vigorously against those who dared charge him with the lies he had told. In his Epistle to the Romans, he wrote:

For through my lie abounded unto his glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner?³

Such, then, is the foundation upon which Paul built his creed.

Paul's character can be judged from the following incidents. In Jerusalem he was attacked by the Jews. To save himself, and to win their sympathy, he pleaded that he was a Jew of Tarsus;⁴ but when he was taken in custody by the Chief Captain, who had him bound with thongs and ordered his examination by scourging, Paul, with a view to escape the punishment, did not hesitate to tell him a lie and pretend that he was a Roman.⁵ Later in the day, he addressed and declared to the crowds that he was a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee,⁶ but when produced before Festus he once again urged his Roman citizenship. The Governor had, therefore, to send him to Rome to stand his trial before Augustus.⁷ In Rome Paul was twice imprisoned for misdemeanour.

From the very beginning the other Apostles of Jesus were all afraid of Paul and "believed not that he was a disciple,"⁸ but they received him for a short while on the intervention of Barnabas⁹ — whose Gospel, it may be mentioned, Christians disown to this day.

But, leaving these considerations aside, if Paul did wrongly attribute to Jesus a

1. Acts, 9 : 3-7.

2. Acts, 9 : 15.

3. Rom. 3 : 7—Revised Version, 1244.

4. Acts, 22 : 3.

5. Acts, 22 : 25.

6. Acts, 23 : 6.

7. Acts, 25 : 10-12.

8. Acts, 9 : 26.

9. Acts, 9 : 27.

religion other than that which Jesus preached, we ought to find some Apostolic denunciation of the Pauline creed, or, at least, some indication that the Apostles disapproved of his ideas. If we wade through the Epistles for such information we shall not look in vain. Therein we will find a tripartite fight going on between James, brother of Jesus, Peter and Paul, in which Jude also takes a part. Of course, as fellow-workers in the same cause, they objected in the first instance to each other's point of view and did not mention names. Gradually, however, not only were names mentioned but the opposite view was styled as heretical. When, however, the Apostles failed to check by these methods the activities of Paul, they actually after fourteen years summoned him to a Council, held at Jerusalem, to explain his conduct and to account for his misdeeds. He attended with his supporters and defied them. They had no control over him, their appeals in the name of Jesus failed, and they were left with no alternative but to dissociate themselves from him. Thus came about the first dissolution of the integral faith and different sects of Christianity, each diametrically opposed to the other, saw the first light of the day.

Paul did not believe in the observation of the law¹ for he said that "if righteousness come by the law then Christ died in vain."² Paul pointed out that those who were of the *Works* of the law were under a curse.³ The propagation of these views had a three-fold object : first, to preach that a man is *justified* by faith alone, without the deeds of the Law;⁴ secondly, it was a gibe at James, brother of Jesus, who held the opposite view; and, thirdly, it won on Greek soil many licentious adherents to the Pauline creed, for they were assured of salvation without any good deeds. In fact to such, by way of encouragement, Paul had said:

Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.⁵

And Paul also told them :

A man is not *justified* by the works of the Law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ . . . for by the works of the law shall no flesh be *justified*.⁶

In the same Epistle he further encouraged his followers to stand fast to the liberty for which Christ had made them free, and he advised them to "be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."⁷ Paul boasted that he had neither written any Gospel, nor had he used any of those which had been written.⁸ Nay, to the contrary he boldly asserted:

I give my own judgment as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord.⁹

Paul, it is true, did claim inspiration in a roundabout way. He claimed that he had it from the Holy Spirit,¹⁰ but he also claimed that it had been given to many, nay, to most of the Apostles, though in different degrees.¹¹ But no one else claimed it. Paul, however, at places spoke of his own judgment and also of what he said *on authority*, which he

1. Rom., 2 : 14, 18.

2. Gal., 2 : 21.

3. Gal., 3 : 10.

4. Rom., 3 : 28.

5. 1 Cor., 15 : 32.

6. Gal., 2 : 16.

7. Gal., 5 : 1.

8. 1 Cor., 9 : 15.

9. 1 Cor., 7 : 25.

10. 1 Cor., 2 : 10-16;

1 Thes., 4 : 8.

11. 1 Cor., 12 : 4-12, 28-30.

predicated with the assertion : “The Lord says, not I.” He also distinguished his judgment by phrases like : “I, not the Lord” or “This I give by permission, not commandment.” It has, therefore, been construed that all his writings which are not thus qualified are inspired. But Paul naively pointed out that his *Gospel* was something different from “the preachings of Jesus Christ.”¹ He never stressed these preachings, but at times expressly, though falsely, declared himself to be “speaking by the word of the Lord” when he manifestly was giving out only his own ideas. To give but one example, Paul, while expressing his own belief regarding the approaching end of the world, falsely alleged that he was “speaking by the words of the Lord.”² We do not, therefore, know which portions of his Epistles are the result of a revelation from Jesus and which are his own inventions and blunders. How can we be certain that the very texts on which the Christians rest their dogmas, their faith and their hopes are not the human and uninspired portions? This is one of the reasons why early Christians rejected the Pauline Canon.

In these circumstances, and since the doctrines of Paul were against the teachings of Jesus, the other Apostles, as already mentioned, denounced Paul and his views. Thus James, brother of Jesus, the head of the Church at Jerusalem, was the first to challenge the views of Paul. We find in his Epistle :

Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a *doer of good works*, this man shall be blessed in his deed.³

James further pointed out:

For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.⁴

He raised the question: Whether faith alone, without deeds, could save a man?⁵ And himself gave the answer that :

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.⁶

Then we come across James’ polemics against Paul :

Thou believest that there is one God: thou doest well, the devils also believe and tremble. But wilt *thou know, O vain man*, that faith without works is dead.⁷

And condemned the Pauline creed of *Justification* :

Ye see then how that by works a man is *justified*, and not by faith only.⁸

And finally he said to Paul :

Ye rejoice in your boastings; all such rejoicing is evil.⁹

1. Rom., 16 : 25.

2. 1 Thes., 4 : 15–17.

3. Jas., 1 : 25.

4. Jas., 2 : 10.

5. Jas., 2 : 14.

6. Jas., 2 : 17.

7. Jas., 2 : 19–20.

8. Jas., 2 : 24.

9. Jas., 4 : 16.

I now turn to Peter. His character is well depicted in his denial of Jesus thrice in one night before the cock crowed. Likewise, here we find him adopting the line of least resistance. In his Epistle he advised his “beloved brother” Paul to be sober in habits and to “watch unto prayer” and be charitable. For such a meek attitude James had to dub Peter aptly as “double-minded.” But as Paul began to exceed all limits Peter had to style him, of course not by name, as a “false teacher,” who had introduced into the faith “damnable heresies,” and “pernicious ways.” But when the divergence of their views became too apparent Peter not only attacked his “dearly beloved brother Paul” but also warned his followers against him. Referring to the Epistles of Paul he said:

As also in all his Epistles speaking in them of these things; in which are some *hard to be understood* . . . Ye, therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also being *led away with error of the wicked* fall from your own steadfastness.¹

Jude was equally vehement in his denunciation of Paul. He said:

For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God unto lasciviousness . . . These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage. . . . These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the spirit.²

There is another incident which throws some light on the subject. The original name of Mark was John, and he is, as such, referred to in the Acts. Paul and Barnabas had taken him³ from Jerusalem to Antioch, to act as their minister and scribe. After passing through Cyprus, Mark suddenly left them⁴ because of his dislike of Paul’s inclination towards preaching to the Gentiles.⁵

In the opposite camp were John, the Evangelist, and Paul. John, who was always a step ahead of Paul, was the first to attack those, Corinthus in particular, who did not believe in the son-god theory. He wrote:

Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is anti-Christ that denieth the Father and Son.⁶

Referring to those who held the opposite view he said:

And this is that spirit of anti-Christ whereof you have heard that it should come and even now already is it in the world.⁷

Now let me turn to Paul in this connection. He, as one would expect, could not

1. 2 Pet., 3 : 16-17.

2. Jude, 4, 16, 19.

3. Acts, 12 : 25.

4. Acts, 13 : 13.

5. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 722.

6. I John, 2 : 22.

7. I John, 4 : 3.

stand this onslaught quietly. In the first instance he contented himself by a simple warning.

Let no man deceive you with vain words . . . Be not ye, therefore, partakers with them.¹

As a result of these divergent views divisions arose, and in Corinth a sect came into being whose followers rejected Paul.

He styled them as “thorn in the flesh,” “the messengers of Satan,” and wrote:

For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren . . . that there are contentions amongst you. . . . I thank God that I baptised none of you.²

To the Galatians he said:

I marvel that ye are soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto *another* Gospel.³

To the Romans he appealed:

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learnt; and avoid them. For they that are such, serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.⁴

In another place he questioned his disputants:

Am I not an Apostle? Am I not free? . . . Mine answer to them that do not examine me is this: Have we not power *to eat and to drink*? Have we not power to lead about a *sister*; a wife, as well as other Apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?⁵

I have already mentioned that, after fourteen years, when matters reached a climax James, as head of the Church at Jerusalem, summoned a Council. The proceedings of this meeting are detailed in the Acts and Paul’s version is to be found in his Epistle to the Galatians. Paul tells us that on this occasion he was accompanied by Barnabas and Titus. He was taken to James who was sitting in company with the Elders. James charged him with preaching to the Gentiles and for forsaking Moses, *i.e.*, the Law. They asked him to refrain in future from doing so. Paul says that their appeals were so forceful that even “Barnabas was carried away with their dissimulations.”⁶ But he goes on to say:

When Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.⁷

1. Ephes., 5 : 6-7.

2. 1 Cor., 1 : 11-14.

3. Gal., 1 : 6.

4. Rom., 16 : 17-18.

5. 1 Cor., 9 : 1-6.

6. Gal., 2 : 13.

7. Gal., 2 : 11.

Paul concluded his version of the meeting of the Council, by saying:

But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel, I said unto Peter before them all . . . Compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? . . . Knowing that a man is not *justified* by the works of the Law. . . . But if while we seek to be *justified* by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners. . . .¹

Paul then rebukes the Galatians:

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you that ye should not obey the truth?²

Thus Paul tried to impress the belief on others that his creed was more important than that of James or Peter. To Paul's mind the centre of interest was not the teacher, the worker of miracles, the companion of publicans and sinners, the opponent of Pharisees, but it was the crucified son of God raised from the dead — and none other.

Paul, therefore, is the least reliable for our knowledge of the real life of Jesus. Similarly, the remaining Epistles of James, Peter, John and Jude do not add anything of importance to our knowledge, except that Peter makes Jesus descend into hell to preach to the dead³ and the Transfiguration is recalled.⁴

The Acts

The authorship of the Acts of the Apostles has long been in question. Eusebius placed them among his third class of spurious literature. The authorship of the Acts is attributed to Luke, the companion of Paul, and although this assertion has been only recently confirmed by the Papal Biblical Commission of 1913, yet it is curious that we find him totally ignorant of the Epistles of Paul. He even contradicts them. The truth is that we do not know who wrote them, nor when they were written. The first edition might have been written by Luke, but the various mutilations, interpolations and dislocations, which it subsequently suffered at the hands of the unscrupulous early Fathers of the Church, have altered it to such an extent that it is impossible to pick out the original portions.

The *Codex Bezae* and certain other ancient authorities generally called the *Western Manuscripts* exhibit a text so different from that of the Canonical version that they may almost be said to constitute a different edition of the Acts.⁵

Loisy places the Acts in the second century of the Christian Era. Harnack dates them back to between 78 and 93 C.E. Whatever the date be, the Acts tell us little or nothing about Jesus. The author is totally ill-informed. He hardly mentions Jesus, an omission for which he excuses himself at the outset. However, the few references which he makes in the course of his narrative to Jesus are not without significance. He says that Jesus, the *Nazarene*, was a *man* approved of God among Jews to be a *man*

1. Gal., 2 : 14, 17.

2. Gal., 3 : 1.

3. 1 Pet., 3 : 19.

4. 2 Pet., 1 : 17.

5. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 815-816.

*chosen of God*¹ and that Jesus was born of the *seed* of David,² *i.e.*, the fruit of his loins according to the flesh.³ Later, he describes the punishment meted out to Jesus by his enemies. The main emphasis, however, is laid on the resurrection, and it is mentioned that Jesus thereafter did eat and drink⁴ and we are thus told that Jesus had a human existence both before and after the resurrection. It is, however, evident that the author, under Pauline influence, believed that the Messianic elevation of Jesus had been made manifest by his resurrection. Luke, however, dates it back to his baptism⁵ and even earlier still, before the birth of Jesus, in his account of the Annunciation.⁶

In the Acts the whole career of Jesus from his baptism to crucifixion is summarised in three verses.⁷ No spoken words of Jesus are recorded anywhere except in one verse.⁸ The Acts, therefore, do not give us any help in reconstructing the life of Jesus.

The Apocryphal Gospels, Acts and Epistles

There were many ancient "Lives of Jesus" which have been excluded from the New Testament. They have survived in fragments, and sometimes little is known of them except their title. But this much is certain, that most of them arose contemporaneously with the New Testament and some are admitted to be even older. Paul was the first to convey the information that even in his time some Gospels had already been written.⁹ The first Canonical Gospel, that of Mark, was, however, written after the death of Paul. Therefore, the Gospels to which Paul had referred must have been among those which had been rejected by the Church.

Of all the Apocryphal Gospels, the *Gospel according to the Hebrews* and the *Gospel of the Ebionites* are of particular importance and claim our special attention. They were, according to Harnack, written about 65 C.E. They are, therefore, not later than the Canonical Gospels; and can rank with them. Nay, in many respects, they are superior to them. They were written in Palestine, in Aramaic, for the benefit of Jewish Christians who were still alive to the spirit of Jesus and knew details of his life. These Gospels were rejected by the Church and consequently they retained their originality to a very large extent. It has sometimes been asserted that one is only another edition of the other. They, however, seem to have suffered the disadvantage of being in a language which Jesus spoke. They were, therefore, used in the first instance in congregations in Palestine and Syria only. Subsequent translations did not suit the growing needs of Christianity and they were rejected. They portray the earthly life of Jesus and speak of him as a *man*.

The other Apocryphal books also rehearse in their own way the deeds and words of Jesus. Unlike the Canonical Gospels, they do not betray a constant desire to interpret anew, to different groups of readers and to varying types of minds, the latest interests of the expanding Christianity, and rarely contain argumentative material which

1. Acts, 2 : 22.

2. Acts, 13 : 23.

3. Acts, 2 : 30.

4. Acts, 10 : 41.

5. Luke, 3 : 21-22.

6. Luke, 1 : 35.

7. Acts, 10 : 38-40.

8. Acts, 20 : 35.

9. 1 Cor., 9 : 14-15

was obviously inserted in the Canonical Gospels as a reply to the sceptics of the time. Further, lack of Canonical dignity does not prove their worthlessness, and these books must be judged by the character of their contents.

Tradition has handed down twenty-six Apocryphal Gospels, seven Acts and ten Epistles.¹ Some of these are admitted to be forgeries.² Some have been rejected by the Church as heretical and as the works of Satan : others have just been brushed aside as they did not suit the new tendencies of the Church. The uncanonical Gospels, however, were accepted by, and read in, various Churches. Of these, apart from the two already mentioned, we know the *Gospel of Barnabas*, the *Gospel of Peter* – the *Preachings of Peter*, as it is sometimes called – the *Gospels of the Egyptians*, etc.

I have already mentioned the *Gospel of the Ebionites*, whose leader was James the Just, brother of Jesus. The Ebionites believed Jesus to be a *man* born, in a normal manner, of Joseph and Mary. From these Gospels, as also from compilations like *Protovangelium Jacobi*, generally known as the Gospel Relating to the Birth and Infancy of Christ, *Evangelium de Nativitate de Maria* – The *Gospel of the Nativity of Mary*, The *Gospel of Mary*, The *History of Joseph the Carpenter*, etc., we gather some important material to check and compare the facts and the legends contained in the Canonical Gospels. The first-mentioned is sometimes called : The *Gospel of James*, or The *Book of James*. In it the birth, education and marriage of Mary and birth of Jesus are described in some detail.

The Apocryphal narratives were for a long period held as historical by the Church, and were explained equally with the Canonical Gospels. These Gospels “continued to be used, some in outlying communities in public worship, and in some ordinary church circles.”³ They are, therefore, entitled to share with the New Testament the benefit of natural explanation.

It is true that they also show traces of the Pauline creed and at places give way to imaginary and fantastic legends contained in the Canonical Gospels; but the additions and interpolations are so obvious that they can be easily distinguished and separated from the original texts. The early Fathers were too much concerned with putting the Canonical Gospels in order to suit their own views; they, therefore, were not very artistic in committing forgeries in the Apocryphal Gospels and for this reason they can be readily detected.

In reconstructing the life of Jesus from these sources, we have to be very careful, for we have to distinguish facts from the legends which prevailed among the Christians of those days; and also to pick out the original pieces. In drawing from

1. For their names and full particulars the reader is referred to Hastings' *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, and James' *Apocryphal New Testament*.

2. For example: The Acts of Andrew, the Acts of John, the Acts of Paul, the Acts of Peter and the Acts of Paul and Thesla.

3. Tucker, *The History of the Christians in the Light of Modern Knowledge*, 321.

these sources, we must be cautious and ignore Gnostic Gospels, such as the *Gospel of Phillip*, and the *Gospel of Eve*, of which, in any case, we have only a few scattered fragments.

The Agrapha, the name given in 1776 by Korner to the uncanonical sayings of Jesus, at the most give us occasional light on the details of the teachings of Jesus. They make no contribution to his biography. It is now almost universally admitted that they are not genuine.

I must also mention here the writings of early Christian Fathers, who wrote before the Canonical Gospels became the prevailing standard. They to some extent aid us in tracing the history of the Canon and the legendary life of Jesus. Justin Martyr composed his *Dialogus cum Trypho Judaeo* in about 135 C.E. In this we find a statement about "Jesus, the son of the Carpenter, making ox goads and ploughs."¹ The statements of Papias, the Bishop of Hierapolis, who wrote his *Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord* about 140 C.E., are also of some help. They survive only in fragmentary quotations of Origen and Eusebius.

The Canonical Gospels

These Gospels, "good news," were written in Greek and were in existence, in some form or another, in the second century of the Christian era: Mark about 65-70 C.E., Matthew about 85 C.E., Luke about 90-95 C.E., and John about 110 C.E.² Early Christians believed that the end of all things was at hand, and this belief, for a considerable time, prevented them from setting up any written standard of authority. So much so that Papias, writing in the middle of the second century, expressed his preference for the spiritual gifts of Jesus as superior to any written testimony. Justin Martyr also, about the same time, speaks only of the *Memories of the Apostles*, but nowhere does he refer to them as Gospels. Gradually, however, a lot of material was reduced to writing³ for the benefit of rich patrons, and not for humanity at large; and a good deal of spurious material was introduced. Eusebius, writing about 325 C.E., divided the New Testament into three classes: those acknowledged with authority, those whose authority was disputed and the spurious. He included the Acts and a few other books of the New Testament in the third class. In the East, opposition to the Revelations lingered even in the fourth century; while in the West the books whose authority was challenged included Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews. The subject was much discussed at many councils of the Church, and it was not till the Third Council of Carthage, at which Augustine was present, in 397 C.E., that the Canon of the New Testament was finally settled. The naive impudence with which the proceedings of this Council are described provokes a smile. The Church Bishops, gathered at this council, in spite of many prolonged and devotional prayers and concentrations, could not get the Divine blessing of a united decision. As

1. *Dial.*, 88.

2. These dates are taken from Peake's *Commentary on the Bible*, 681, 700, 724 and 744.

3. Luke, I : 1-4.

a last resort, at the suggestion of one of them, all the books were placed under a table and the Fathers sat round it, with closed eyes, invoking Divine guidance in the name of their Lord Jesus Christ. And when they had finished their prayers they, on opening their eyes, beheld on the table the four Canonical Gospels and other books now found in the New Testament. Someone in the room must have performed the miracle in the name of Jesus Christ; and so the Canon of the New Testament became settled.

The system of chapters of the New Testament, now in use, was invented by Cardinal Hugo de S. Caro in 1236 C.E. The Cardinal also divided each chapter into paragraphs marked by letters, but this was superseded by the Verse-System introduced by Robertus Stephenus in 1551 C.E.

This first redaction must have undergone many changes. There are three ancient manuscripts: the *Codex Sinaiticus*, otherwise known as the *Alpha*, found by Tischendorff on Mount Sinai in 1859, said to be of the fourth century; the *Codex Alexandrinus* known as (A) found by Cyril Luker, Patriarch of Constantinople, in 1621, which is traced to the fifth century, and the third, the *Codex Vaticanus*, otherwise known as (B), said to be of the fourth century. It need hardly be mentioned that they are incomplete and differ from each other inasmuch as some contain such portions of the New Testament as are missing in the others. The Manuscripts now known as *Codex Ephraemi Syri* (C) and *Codex Bezae* (D) merely complicate matters further, for they also differ in material particulars.

The *Latin Versions*, including the Vulgate, fall into two main groups, African and European. *Codex Babiensis*, *Codex Palatinus* and *Codex Floriacensis*, along with the *Catholic Epp* and *Speculum*, are conspicuous among the African group. The European group includes, among others, *Codex Vercellensis*, *Codex Veronansis*, *Codex Monacensis*, *Codex Amiatinus* and some other 8,000 MSS. The *Syriac Versions* are known chiefly through MSS – the *Curetonian*, the *Sinaitic*, the *Philoxenian* and the *Harklean*. The *Egyptian Versions* have *Bohairic* and *Sahidic* divisions. There are other numerous versions like Armenian, Gothic, Ethiopic, etc.

The New Testament in Greek was not printed till 1514 C.E. This was the work of redactors working under Cardinal Ximenes. Erasmus produced in 1516 a different edition, and the so-called revised text with verses was the work of Stephenus in 1551 C.E. It was printed in 1624 C.E. Then started a search for the ancient manuscripts and, apart from those already mentioned, two more manuscripts saw the light of day – that of Westcott and Host (1881) and that of Nestle (1901); and they caused all the more confusion.

The first English translation by Wycliff appeared in 1382 C.E. He based his translation on the Latin Vulgate. Various other versions also appeared. In 1604 C.E. a conference was called by James I at Hampton Court “to set in order *things amiss in the Church*,” and one of the things which had to be put right was the Bible. The Authorised Version thus appeared in 1616 C.E. The appearance of the various manuscripts rendered a revision necessary. The work was taken in hand at the suggestion of the Convocation of Canterbury and the Revised Version appeared in 1884. In it such

changes were introduced in the text as were required by the new sources of information that had come to light.

The Gospels are entitled “according to Matthew,” “according to Mark,” and so on. From the time of St. Augustine, some people have interpreted this “according to” as if the books were the work of unknown authors merely utilizing information handed down from and traced to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. This “according to” is now admitted as coming from some copyist or other. The clue, it has been suggested, is given by the second line of the *Canon of Muratori*, which runs: “The third book of the Gospel according to Luke.” Thus it is said that there was only one Gospel, though the traditions in the four parts differed *according to* alleged original sources. Tucker, relying on the Greek Papyri of Oxyrhynchus, says that the Gospels were written by so and so on behalf of so and so, as most of the alleged authors “did not know letters.”¹ He refers, by way of illustration, to the fact that all Epistles of Paul were written by others and Paul merely “set his hand”² to authenticate them; and that when Paul did not set his hand the name of the scribe was mentioned.³

No one can deny that the early Christians treated the Gospels alike with the Epistles and the Acts, that is, as mere narratives and expression of opinion of authors, and not at all as sacred. Nor even in the later centuries do we find any scrupulous regard for the word of God. Prof. Dummelow of Cambridge, in his *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, a work in the preparation of which forty-two Christian divines and scholars of fame assisted, while commenting on the authenticity of the text of the New Testament, says:

A copyist would sometimes put in not what was in the text, but what he thought ought to be in it. He would trust a fickle memory, or he would make the text accord with the views of the school to which he belonged. In addition to the versions and quotations from the Christian Fathers, nearly four thousand Greek MSS. of the New Testament were known to exist. As a result the variety of reading is considerable.⁴

I have already quoted Tucker. In another place he says:

Thus Gospels were produced which clearly reflected the conception of the practical needs of the community for which they were written. In them the traditional material was used, but there was no hesitation in altering it or making additions to it, or in leaving out what did not suit the writer’s purpose. An excellent example of such amended Gospel is found in the Gospel of Marcion, which apart from minor changes was the narrative of Luke, with everything omitted that revealed the true humanity of our Lord and his connection with the religion of the Old Testament.⁵

1. Tucker, *The History of the Christians in the Light of Modern Knowledge*, 252, 277.

2. 1 Cor., 16 : 21; Col., 4 : 18; 2 Thes., 3 : 17-18.

3. Rom., 16 : 22.

4. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 16.

5. Tucker, *The History of the Christians in the Light of Modern Knowledge*, 320.

I refrain from citing many other authorities to show how early Christians changed the original texts to suit their purpose. The object of some of the glaring but pious forgeries will be made clear when I deal with the subject-matter of this book.

The chief and also the most difficult question connected with the Synoptic Gospels is their relation to one another and to their original source. The prolonged investigation of modern critics, extending over more than a century, has not yet reached any final results. Mark is said to be the oldest of the Synoptists. It is also now settled that Matthew and Luke borrowed freely from Mark, and put forward their Gospels according to their beliefs. These conclusions are chiefly based on the fact that Eusebius has preserved to us the following words of Papias, which are the earliest testimony regarding Mark:

And the Presbyter said this: Mark, the interpreter of Peter, wrote down exactly, but not in order, *what he remembered* of the acts and sayings of the Lord, for he neither heard the Lord himself nor accompanied him.¹

Papias goes on to say:

Matthew collected the oracles in the *Hebrew* language and *each interpreted them as best he could.*²

Papias was quoting John, the Presbyter, who was certainly not referring to “the Gospel according to Matthew” which was written in Greek. So it has been construed that he must either be referring to “the Gospel according to the Hebrews” or something else.

Prof. Weiss agreed that Mark was the oldest of the Synoptic Gospels, but he refused to style Mark as “the original source,” and remarked : “It is not a source, but a basin into which other sources flow.”

Mark certainly contains some material which is not found in the other two Gospels. Besides, though Matthew and Luke contain all the essentials of Mark, yet they also contain, in common and otherwise, considerable fresh material not to be found in Mark. It must accordingly be concluded that if they did not copy one from the other, they must have borrowed from a common source. This source has been distinguished as the *Logia*, or Discourses or Sayings of Jesus, since its contents are more didactic than narrative. The *Logia* is usually referred to as Q from the word *Quella* – source. Another source is named the *Urmarcus*. It is now almost universally admitted that the Synoptic Gospels drew freely from these sources and in the words of Papias “each interpreted them as best he could.”

Dummelow after taking these facts into consideration, and dealing with the authorship of Matthew says:

It is evident that the direct authorship of this Gospel by the Apostle Matthew is impossible. If St. Matthew had been the author, he could have probably

1. Eusebius, *Ecc. Hist.*, 3 : 39, 15 - 16.

2. Eusebius, *Ecc. Hist.*, 3 : 39, 15 - 16.

given his own account of the transactions, and not have laboriously occupied himself with collecting and transcribing from other sources.¹

If Matthew, the evangelist, was the Apostle, he could not have recorded many of the events which he does, for he was not present. Such are the stories of the Magi, the Temptation, the Transfiguration, the prayer in Gethsemane, the denials of Peter, the dream of Pilate's wife, the conversation between Judas and the priests and that between Pilate and the priests and, finally, the talks at the trial and at Calvary.

Matthew alone could have claimed to have seen and heard Jesus, but he is not the author of the First Gospel. The other three Gospels really lose their importance because Mark was converted by Peter, and Luke, a native of Antioch, was a Gentile and was converted by Paul, and neither of them saw or heard Jesus. Of John no one knows who he was or from where he came. He has been, no doubt, confused with one of the disciples and there are passages in the Gospel bearing his name which lend support to this inference. But why should he have kept his identity a close secret and styled himself as one "whom Jesus loved"? Christian writers are compelled to say that the fourth Gospel was, "by whosoever written, composed in the end of the first century."

All the Synoptic Gospels have their doublets: Matthew, the Gospel according to the Hebrews; Mark, the Gospel of Peter and Luke, the Marcion edition mentioned by Justin Martyr; they all have their editorial additions which reveal mutilations, modifications and dislocations of the main traditions: a peculiar circumstance which is unexplainable save on the theory of two sources in each case giving in substance the same account in different forms.

Be that as it may, I have yet to explain the existence of so many Gospels and Epistles. I have already referred to the internal struggle, which started soon after the crucifixion, between James and Paul, and between Peter and Paul, a struggle which left its everlasting mark on Christianity. As a result of this struggle the Ebionites, under James, set themselves against the Samaritans and the Gentiles, the followers of Paul. Thus the Gospel to the Hebrews, which is attributed to Matthew, was written for the Jewish Christians. The Gospel of Luke was written for the followers of Paul and Mark for the followers of the "double-minded" Peter. When the Ebionites succumbed to the opposing and increasing influence of the Gentiles, the Gospel according to the Hebrews, with a good deal of modifications, alterations and additions, became the Gospel according to Matthew. Similarly, the Gospel of Peter became the Gospel according to Mark. Jesus the *Nazarene* was thus sacrificed for the glorified Christ; Jesus, the man, disappeared and gave place to Jesus, the son of God. Thus the first Christians, who thought it necessary to put the Gospel in writing, had to diminish the traditions in one direction and to enlarge in another. Their motives were not historical, but rather cultural and ethical. The necessity of extreme precautions for correctness of the texts was not felt. The copyists and writers, who had no scruples about altering them and fitting them to suit their own views, had a free hand.

1. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 620.

It would be extending the scope of this book if I were to point out the innumerable discrepancies of the four Gospels. I will content myself by mentioning two significant facts only. Whatever is attributed to John by the Synoptic Gospels is omitted by John himself in the Fourth Gospel. Secondly, although churches have been named and festivals kept in honour of the twelve Apostles, and although bishops and priests have all along professed to derive special authority from these first ministers of the Church, yet an effort has to be made, by the Christians themselves, to reconcile and harmonize the original lists, containing the names of the Apostles as given in the Gospels.¹ John, however, strikes an entirely discordant note by making the first nucleus of these Apostles as having been furnished by the followers of John the Baptist.²

It is legitimate, therefore, to question the trustworthiness of the letter of the text of the Gospels. We do not possess the originals, not even the text of the Canon; we know them only as copies of copies. The accuracy of the manuscripts is doubtful, and the carelessness, the ignorance, the conceit and the deceit of many a copyist worked havoc with the texts. We must not overlook the mischief done by the intentional "correction" of the texts made by those who deliberately, under this pretext, modified them in one direction or the other to suit and advance their religious beliefs. The redaction of the most important episodes of the Gospels, the Passion for example, was especially influenced by cultural conditions. As soon as Jesus became Christ, an object of worship, a cultural legend regarding his virgin birth and resurrection became necessary, and the Gospels show a steady progress towards this end. Besides, every attempt was made to establish the fulfilment of all the prophecies of the Old Testament in the person of Jesus. The Gospels were rewritten to serve the purpose of instructing controversial apologetics and organised worship and, strictly speaking, it is to these matters that they owe their birth. The development of Christology raised problems concerning the relations of Jesus to God and to the cosmos. They had also to meet and counteract the vigorous Jewish revival resulting in calumnies heaped against Jesus and his mother: thus were set forth, with a complete absence of restraint or good taste, the edifying legends of popular beliefs.

It is evident that the attempt to adopt the Gospel tradition to the liturgical requirement has most effectively contributed to the introduction of the mythical and the suppression of the historical elements. What is surprising is not that the Synoptics contain so little of the actual life and authentic teachings of Jesus, but that they appear still to preserve some fragments of it. Perhaps this was due to the rivalry, already indicated, of the three Apostles and their followers. And to this must also be attributed the fact that we have three Gospels instead of one blended Gospel like that of John, which really is a religio-philosophical book and which likewise is of little help in reconstructing the life of Jesus. The object of John was to interpret Jesus as Logos³ the "*Word of God*" in its extreme philonic sense. The value of the Gospels is more theological than testimonial. Referring to this aspect Wernle says:

1. Cf. Matt., 10 : 2-4; Mark, 3 : 16-19 and Luke, 6 : 14-16; Acts, 1 : 13.

2. John, 1 : 35.

3. The origin of *Logos* is attributed by Justin Martyr to mythus.

The fourth Gospel derived its importance, lasting long beyond the time of his birth, from its having bridged over the chasm between Jesus and Paul, and from its having carried the Pauline Gospel back into the life and teachings of Jesus. It is only through this Gospel that Paulinism attained its absolute dominion in the theology of the Church.¹

And he goes on to say:

The significance of the fourth Gospel consists in the fact that it refers the teachings of Paul back to Jesus Himself. This constitutes its value and its worthlessness, its force and its fatality.²

The more thoroughly we study the historicity of the Gospels the less certain we are about their authenticity; but in spite of this we cannot cast wholesale doubt upon them. If we study the Gospels with full knowledge of the mythical and dogmatic atmosphere in which they were written, we can learn what in the Gospels to accept and what to reject; what is early and what is late; what they attribute, under influence of the Pauline creed, to Jesus, and what they have unconsciously preserved of the real Jesus. Only after such a process of selection and elimination can we come to recognise the historical Jesus, the *son of man*, the Prophet of God, who was born, lived and died like any other man.

This, then, is the history and worth of the New Testament which "containeth the Infallible Word of God, nay, is the word of God."³ The claim that it was revealed and, therefore, infallible or was inspired has no foundation or justification. Rev. Professor J. W. Donaldson, after discussing the various arguments in support of this claim, comes to the conclusion:

We see, there, by a mere statement of the reasoning used in support, that the hypothesis of an infallible literature is as baseless as the fabric of a dream...⁴
The question of inspiration of the New Testament is of dogmatic, not of historical import.⁵

The very idea of God having inspired four different men to write different and irreconcilable records of the same events, or rather of many different men having undertaken to write different records, of whom God inspired *four only* to write, let me suppose, correctly, leaving the others to their own unaided resources and giving us no test by which to distinguish the inspired from the uninspired, certainly appears to be unbecoming of God and anything but natural. Where was the necessity, one might ask, for God to have inspired four different men to *differ* and cause confusion? In view of the notorious differences only one of them can be correct and perhaps inspired. But which one? Further, as William Greg has pointed out in his *The Creed of Christendom*:

The Gospels nowhere affirm or even intimate their own inspiration, a claim to

1. Wernle, *The Beginning of Christianity*, Vol. II, 262.

2. *Ibid.*, 276.

3. Revised Version, 15.

4. Donaldson, *The Christian Orthodoxy*, 156.

5. *Ibid.*, 165.

credence which, had they possessed it, they assuredly would not have failed to put forward. Nor do the Apostolic writings bear any such testimony to them.

I must point out that the New Testament presents the paradox of a literature born of a protest against the tyranny of a Canon yet ultimately canonizing itself. Jesus set himself to free religion from the deadening influence of the scribes. Little did he know that his followers in name would create a worse system whereby a new set of scribes would attribute to him discourses and acts which he never dreamt of saying or doing.

I have so far endeavoured to discuss Christian sources for the biography of Jesus. I have examined the New Testament and rejected its authority as an authentic or a contemporary record. I have enquired into the origin and history of the Acts and the Epistles and shown that they hardly contain any element of truth. I have referred to those early biographical compilations which can alone be regarded as worthy of some attention; and have pointed out that they also cannot be accepted in their entirety. I have ventured to indicate that genuine passages should be picked out and separated from the innumerable forgeries and that facts should be distinguished from legend and fiction. It would perhaps be safe to accept all such passages, found in the New Testament and other early Christian literature, as go against the popular Christian dogmatic beliefs. If we follow this and the other rules of caution with sagacity, perseverance and impartiality, we shall be able to arrive at a fair approximation of the real facts. Thus the ground work of the career of Jesus will be laid with some confidence and the leading features of his life will become discernible, though many problems will still remain unsolved and many paradoxes will vainly excite curiosity and baffle explanation.

Before dealing with Islamic sources, I would like to quote a few verses from the Holy Quran which disclose the real worth of the Bible. It is very significant that what modern researches have only recently established was in fact disclosed by the Holy Quran about fourteen hundred years ago. The Holy Quran has repeatedly exposed the corruption of the Biblical texts. There are numerous such references but I will quote only a few of them.

Addressing Muslims and speaking of Jews, the Holy Quran says:

Do you then hope that they would believe in you, and a party from among them indeed used to hear the Word of Allah, *then altered it after they had understood it*, and they know (this)¹

Referring again to Jews, the Holy Quran says in another place:

This is because they say: The fire shall not touch us but for a few days; and what they have *forged* deceives them in the matter of their religion.²

Speaking of Jews and Christians alike, the Holy Quran says:

And most surely there is a party of them *which lie about the Book, that you may consider it to be (a part) of the Book while it is not (a part) of the Book,*

1. The Holy Quran, 2 : 75.

2. *Ibid.*, 3 : 24.

*and they say it is from Allah, while it is not from Allah; and they tell a lie against Allah whilst they know.*¹

And again:

But on account of their breaking the Covenant, We cursed them and made their hearts hard; *they altered the words from their places and they neglected a portion of what they were reminded of*; and you shall always discover treachery in them excepting a few of them; so pardon them and turn away; surely Allah loves those who do good to others.

And with those who say we are Christians, We made a Covenant, *but they neglected a portion of what they were reminded of*; therefore, We excited among them enmity and hatred to the day of resurrection; and Allah will inform them of what they did.

*O Followers of the Book! Indeed Our Apostle has come to you, making clear to you much of what you have concealed of the Book, and passing over much: indeed there has come to you light and a clear book from Allah.*²

And finally:

Woe, then to those *who write the Book with their own hands and then say: This is from Allah*, so that they may take for it a small price; therefore, woe to them *for what their hands have written*, and woe to them for what they earn.³

1. The Holy Qur-'an., 3 : 78.

2. *Ibid.*, 5 : 13-15.

3. *Ibid.*, 2 : 79.

CHAPTER 2

ISLAMIC SOURCES

There are two main Islamic sources: the Holy Quran and the *Hadith*. Before dealing with these two sources, I ought to mention that they are peculiar to themselves: they are of a systematic character, and have an authority far superior to that of the sources of any other religion. Their authenticity and historicity is now admitted universally. "With the appearance of Muhammad," says Professor Nicholson, "the almost impenetrable veil thrown over the preceding age is suddenly lifted and we find ourselves on the solid ground of historical tradition."¹ Bosworth-Smith says:

In Mohammedanism everything is different; here, instead of the shadowy and the mysterious we have history. We know as much of Mohammed as we do even of Luther and Milton. The mythical, the legendary, the supernatural is almost wanting in the original Arab authorities. . . . Nobody here is the dupe of himself or of others; there is the full light of day upon all that that light can ever reach at all. . . . We know everything of the external history of Mohammed . . . while for his internal history, after his mission had been proclaimed we have a book absolutely unique in its origin, in its preservation . . . on the substantial authenticity of which no one has ever been able to cast a serious doubt.²

And yet it must be pointed out that these two sources are not works of history in so far as they do not relate events chronologically or in their entirety. They mention only certain singular events in the life of various Prophets of God with the purpose of presenting them in their true light and in their natural order; and thus affirm or contradict, or sometime modify, prevailing ideas about these Prophets and thereby clear their character against gross calumnies heaped against them. For instance, if we read the Gospels and the Talmuds together we gather that Jesus

1. was born of immaculate conception, or of an illegal union;
2. was disrespectful to his mother;
3. died on the cross, which according to Jews was an accursed death;
4. resurrected from the dead and ascended bodily up to heaven;
5. was the son of God, an incarnation of God.

Islamic sources deal with all these questions and, exposing the falsity of these calumnies, clear the character of Jesus and his mother, Mary, of all these charges; but they do not deal with their lives in entirety or give all the facts in their minutest detail.

These two sources deal repeatedly with various aspects of the life and actions of the Prophets merely to enable us to understand the basic truth they preached, to appreciate the purity of their characters and to differentiate the genuine portions from the spurious of the Books revealed to them.

1. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, 141.

2. Bosworth-Smith, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*, 14-15.

Again, these two sources are not story books. They do not relate past events merely for the pleasure of those who read or hear them. They describe the condition of the people to whom the various Prophets were sent; how these people conducted, or rather misconducted, themselves; how after having received guidance they went astray and rejected the Prophets, maltreating and persecuting them. These narratives are meant to serve as a solemn warning to us, and for this purpose the language used adapts itself to the exigencies of everyday life, with a view to bringing it, in its private and public bearings, in harmony with the fundamental principles of Islam. They usually end with certain prophetic utterances, most of which were fulfilled during the life-time of the Holy Prophet.

The Holy Quran

The Holy Quran is the foundation on which the entire superstructure of Islam rests. It would not be incorrect to say that this Book is the only Islamic source, as, the *Hadith* is only an explanation of this Book.

The Holy Quran claims, and the Muslims believe, that it consists exclusively of Divine Revelation which the Holy Prophet Muhammad (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) received direct from Almighty God piecemeal during his prophetic career of three-and-twenty years; so that the last portion was not revealed till near the time of his death. It consists of 114 *Suras* (Chapters) out of which 86 are *Makki*, *i.e.*, revealed at Makka and 28 are *Madani*, *i.e.*, revealed at Madina. It contains 6,237 *Ayas* (signs : verses), to which if the 113 *Bismillas* are added the number becomes 6,350. For purposes of recitation it has been divided into 7 *Manzils* (portions or stages), 30 equal *Juzs* (also called *Paras*-or parts) sub-divided into four equal parts; and 558 *Rukus* (Sections). These divisions, with the exception of the *Suras*, have nothing to do with the subject-matter of the Holy Quran. It contains 86,430 words, 349,470 letters,¹ out of which 124,331 are letter-vowels and the rest are consonants; it also contains 52,243 *Fathas* (sound vowel *a*), 39,582 *Kasras* (sound vowel *e* or *i*) and 8,804 *Zammas* (sound vowel *o* or *u*). It has 105,684 *Nuqqat* (dots), 1,771 *Maddat* (prolonged pronunciation), 1,250 *Tashdeeds* (indications of double sound) and 240 *Alif mamdudas* (silent *alif*).

The Book names itself as *Quran*²—that which is or should be read. It is the most widely read book in the world. It is read daily in mosques and Muslim houses throughout the world. It is repeated in daily prayers. During the month of *Ramazan* it is recited from the beginning to the end in *Taravih* prayers and is also read and explained in its entirety during these days. On the night between the 26th and 27th of this month it is recited completely by various *Imams* in almost every mosque and this reading is styled as *Shabina*, *i.e.* in one night. Similarly, on diverse occasions, various persons,

1. *Alif*, 48,876 ; *Ba*, 11,442, *Ta*, 10,199 ; *Sa*, 1,276 ; *Jeem*, 3,273 ; *Ha*, 3,973 ; *Kha*, 2,446 ; *Dal*, 5,642 ; *Zal*, 4,677 ; *Ra*, 11,793 ; *Za*, 1,590 ; *Seen*, 5,891 ; *Sheen*, 2,253 ; *Suad*, 2,013 ; *Zuad*, 1,607 ; *Tue*, 1,277 ; *Zue*, 842 ; *Ain*, 9,220 ; *Ghain*, 2,208, *Fa*, 8,499 ; *Kaf*, 6,813 ; *Qaf*, 9,502 ; *Lam*, 33,432 ; *Meem*, 26,560 ; *Noon*, 45,190 ; *Wao*, 25,536 ; *He*, 19,070 ; *La*, 4,720 ; *Ya*, 45,919.

2. The Holy Quran, 2 : 185; 10 : 37, 61 ; 17 : 106 ; etc.

not less than ten, read or recite from memory the whole of the Book, each reading or reciting separately certain parts, in an hour or so. This is called *Khatam-i-Quran*.

In the Holy Quran, the Book is mentioned by various other names. They describe its character, its significance, its peculiar features and its aims and objects. I will mention but a few of them: *Al-Kitab*¹ (the Complete Book); *Al-Furqan*² (the Distinction between truth and falsehood); *Al-Tanzil*³ (the Revelation); *Al-Hukm*⁴ (the Judgment); *Habl-Ullah*⁵ (The Covenant of Allah); *Ar-Rahma*⁶ (The Mercy); *Ar-Ruh*⁷ (The Spirit); *Al-Bayan*⁸ (The Explanation); *An-Nur*⁹ (The Light); *Al-Haq*¹⁰ (The Truth); *Al-Burhan*¹¹ (The Argument); *Al-Maw'iza*¹² (The Admonition); *Al-Hikma*¹³ (The Wisdom). Besides these the Holy Quran is also mentioned by several other names, and there are also various qualifying words applied to it, for instance: it is called *Majid*¹⁴ (The Glorious); *Mubeen*¹⁵ (One making things manifest); *Fasl*¹⁶ (Decision); *Mutahhara*¹⁷ (Purified); *Mutashabih*¹⁸ (Conformable in all its various parts).

The Book gives the name of its Author in the very first verse of the second *sura*, which is really the beginning of the Book—for the first *sura* (*Al-Fatiha*—the opening chapter) is really a short introduction to it—in these words: *Alif, Lam, Meem*,¹⁹ standing for *Ana Allah A'lam* (I am Allah: the Best Knower). The first three verses of the next Chapter throw a further light on the matter. They read:

I am Allah, the Best Knower: Allah, there is no god but He, the Ever-living, the Self-subsisting, by Whom all subsist. *He has revealed to you the book with truth*, verifying that which is before it, and He revealed the Torah and the Evangel aforetime, a guidance for the people, and He sent this distinction. Surely they who disbelieve in the Communications of Allah—they shall have a severe chastisement, and Allah is Mighty, the Lord of retribution.²⁰

The Book was revealed to Muhammad, who “believed in what has been revealed” to him.²¹ It was revealed in Arabic so that the Holy Prophet should be the first to understand it perfectly.²² It was revealed in portions.

And it is a Quran, which We have made distinct so that you may read it to the people by slow degrees: and We have revealed it, revealing in portions.²³

The Holy Quran is a compendium of Divine messages brought by the Holy Spirit (Gabriel) and delivered in words to the Holy Prophet to be proclaimed to mankind. It was not the Holy Prophet who spoke under the influence of the Holy Spirit: he merely repeated the words conveyed to him. Says the Holy Quran:

1. The Holy Qur-'an, 2 : 2.

2. *Ibid.*, 25 : 1.

3. *Ibid.*, 26 : 192.

4. *Ibid.*, 13 : 37.

5. *Ibid.*, 3 : 103.

6. *Ibid.*, 17 : 82.

7. *Ibid.*, 42 : 52.

8. *Ibid.*, 3 : 138.

9. *Ibid.*, 7 : 157.

10. *Ibid.*, 17 : 81.

11. *Ibid.*, 4 : 174.

12. *Ibid.*, 10 : 57.

13. *Ibid.*, 17 : 39.

14. *Ibid.*, 85 : 21.

15. *Ibid.*, 12 : 1.

16. *Ibid.*, 86 : 13.

17. *Ibid.*, 80 : 14.

18. *Ibid.*, 39 : 23.

19. *Ibid.*, 2 : 1.

20. *Ibid.*, 3 : 1-4.

21. *Ibid.*, 47 : 2.

22. *Ibid.*, 42 : 7.

23. *Ibid.*, 17 : 106; 76 : 23.

The Spirit has brought it down from your Lord with the truth.¹

Again:

And most surely this is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds. The Faithful Spirit has come down with it upon your heart, that you may be of the warners in plain Arabic language.²

Purity of Text

The Holy Quran was revealed to the Holy Prophet under the most trying circumstances. From a solitary recluse in the cave of Hira, after passing through a variety of circumstances, he became the sole monarch and legislator of the whole of Arabia. The life of no other individual human being affords so much variation. Yet throughout the entire revelation the Holy Quran keeps one and the same strain. The spirit of revelation to the solitary, persecuted and tormented preacher of Makka does not differ in any particular from the spirit of the revelation to the sole temporal and spiritual overlord of Arabia. There are no discrepancies even in the details of the narrative, and this is specially true of the numerous prophecies uttered at a time when he was an absolutely helpless man. Had the Book not proceeded from the Omniscient Being, it would certainly not have been free from numerous discrepancies.

Muslims believe the Holy Quran, every dot, every vowel, every syllable, every word, every sentence, every chapter—in short, the entire Book—to be of Divine creation. The Holy Prophet was an *Ummi*, unlettered, and could neither read nor write; he had to be so in keeping with the Divine dispensation: for the tablet of his heart, like a camera, had to be absolutely free of all worldly light to get a perfect impression of the Revelation.

The Holy Quran was revealed in the Arabic language,³ in the dialect of the Quraish. The absolute perfection of the language of the Book is one of its outstanding features. I do not make this assertion simply because it is an impregnable belief with Muslims. Greyer and Noldeke point out that even the idolatrous poets of Arabia, who were known for their literary skill, could not compete with it. To these idolaters, and through them to the whole world, a challenge had been thrown out:

And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant, *then produce a chapter like it*, and call on your helpers besides Allah if you are truthful. But if you do (it) not; *and never shall you do (it)*—then be on your guard against the fire, of which men and stones are the fuel, it is prepared for the unbelievers.⁴

Again:

1. The Holy Quran, 16 : 102.

2. *Ibid.*, 26 : 195.

3. *Ibid.*, 43 : 3.

4. *Ibid.*, 2 : 23-24.

Or do they say: He has forged it, Say: Then bring ten forged chapters like this and call upon whom you can besides Allah, if you are truthful.¹

And again:

Say: If men and jinn should combine together to bring the like of this Quran, *they cannot bring the like of it*, though some of them be aiders of the others.²

The Holy Quran, as the word of God, needs no champion, no advocate and certainly not an apologist. It speaks for itself. It puts forward its claims, gives reasons and arguments in support of them and throws a challenge for all times—a challenge which till to-day has remained unaccepted. On the contrary, even European scholars have been forced to admit its claims. I will quote but a few of them and will begin with the most bigoted Christian translator of the Holy Quran, George Sale, who was out to expose the Holy Quran as a “manifest forgery.” In his *Preliminary Discourse* he says:

The style of the Koran is generally beautiful and fluent.....and in many places, especially where the majesty and attributes of God are described, sublime and magnificent.³

Palmer, another translator of the Holy Quran, says:

The best of Arab writers have never succeeded in producing anything equal in merit to the Quran itself.⁴ . . . The language of the Quran is universally acknowledged to be the most perfect form of Arabic speech . . . The language is noble and forcible . . . To Muhammad’s hearers it must have been startling from the manner in which it brought great truths home to them in the language of their everyday life . . . Muhammad speaks in a living voice, and his vivid word-painting brings at once before the mind the scene he describes.⁵

Goethe has said:

The Koran is a work with whose dullness the reader is at first disgusted, afterward attracted and astounded by its charms, and finally irresistibly ravished by its many beauties . . . In the end it enforces our reverence. Its style, in accordance with its contents and aims, is stern, grand and terrible—ever and anon truly sublime . . . This book will go on exercising through all ages most potent influence.

John Davenport says:

From a literary point of view, the Koran is the most poetical work of the East . . . It is universally allowed to be written with the utmost purity and elegance of language in the dialect of the tribe of Koreish, the most noble and polite of all the Arabs . . . It is confessedly the standard of the Arabian language, and abounds with splendid imagery and the boldest metaphor . . . is generally vigorous and sublime.

1. *Ibid.*, 11 : 13.

2. Holy Qur’an, 17 : 88.

3. Sale, *Preliminary Discourse*, 48.

4. Palmer, *Introduction*, 55.

5. *Ibid.*, 76-77.

It was to the Koran, so considered as a permanent miracle, that Muhammad appealed as the chief confirmation of his mission; publicly challenging the most eloquent man in Arabia, then abounding with persons whose sole study and ambition was to excel in eloquence of style and composition, to produce even a single chapter that might compete therewith.¹

Steingass says:

We may well say the Quran is one of the grandest books ever written . . . sublime and chaste, where the supreme truth of God's Unity is to be proclaimed . . . its merits as a literary production should, perhaps, not be measured by some preconsidered maxims of subjective and aesthetic taste, but by the effects which it produced on Muhammad's contemporaries and fellow-countrymen. If it spoke so powerfully and convincingly to the hearts of his hearers as to weld hitherto centrifugal and antagonistic elements into one compact and well-organized body, animated by ideas far beyond those which had until now ruled the Arabian mind, then its eloquence was perfect, simply because it created a civilized nation out of savage tribes, and shot a fresh woof into the old warp of history . . . But Muhammad made a still greater and more decisive step towards creating a literature for his people. In those *Suras* in which he regulated the private and public life of the Muslims, he originated a prose which has remained the standard of classical purity ever since.²

Dr. Hartwig Hirschfield says:

The Quran is unapproachable as regards convincing power, eloquence, and even composition . . . and to it was also indirectly due the marvelous development of all branches of science in the Moslem world.³

I will quote but one other Christian scholar, Bosworth-Smith, who when writing about the Book says:

Illiterate himself, scarcely able to read or write, he was yet the author of a book which is a poem, a code of law, a Book of Common Prayer and a Bible in one . . . It was the one miracle claimed by Muhammad—his “standing miracle” he called it; *and a miracle indeed it is.*⁴

Thus, the Holy Quran is unique, marvellous and unprecedented in the whole history of the written world. It transformed a dialect spoken in a very limited area of a forgotten corner of the world—steeped in spiritual torpor, sunk in superstition, cruelty and vice, whose people lay lifeless in a debased state and dreaded of things unseen—into a language and tongue of vast countries and mighty empires. The Book thus re-established the claims of the Arabic language to be the *Mother of Languages.*⁵

1. Davenport, *Mohammad and the Koran*, 48-49.

2. Translation : Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*, 527-530.

3. Hirschfield, *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qur-'an*, 8-9.

4. Bosworth-Smith, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*, 290 (Italics are mine.)

5. *Al-Haj Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, Umm-ulsina* (The Mother of Languages), 23.

The Holy Prophet claimed the Holy Quran to be a sign, a miracle of God. A miracle indeed it was, is and shall ever be. It is unique in every respect. Its outstanding distinction, however, is that it has maintained its pristine purity for the last fourteen hundred years. While discussing this question, Muir says:

There is probably in the world no other work which has remained twelve centuries with so pure a text.¹

No other religious book in the world has made or can make such a claim. If all copies of the Vedas, the Zenda-Vesta, the Buddhist Pitakas, the Bible and other Scriptures were to be burnt, they can never be re-written from cover to cover. Any such undertaking would be a hopeless task. But if the Holy Quran were to suffer the same fate, not once but a million times, it would be re-written without the least change of a single dot, vowel or sentence. For there are hundreds of thousands of Muslims who know the Holy Quran by heart from one end to the other. In the Holy Quran we read:

Surely We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its guardian.²

Most surely it is an honoured Quran, in a Book that is protected.³

Nay, it is a glorious Quran, in a guarded tablet.⁴

And the words of your Lord have been accomplished truly and justly, there is *none who can change* His words, and He is Hearing, the Knowing⁵

And recite what has been revealed to you of the Book of your Lord, there is none who *can alter His words*⁶

Thus God had proclaimed in the Holy Quran that it should always remain free from corruption and that God would protect it and be its Guardian. These verses, and there are many others like these in the Holy Quran, contain a most wonderful prophecy, whose fulfillment is, and shall always continue to be, a standing testimony to the Divine origin of the Holy Quran and to the truth of the mission of the Holy Prophet.

It has often been alleged by Christian apologists that the Holy Quran was a product of the creative mind of the Holy Prophet. I will deal with this aspect at the close of this discussion; as I must first describe the manner in which and when the Book was written and collected, the arrangement of its chapters and verses, the so-called theory of abrogation and the rules of Quranic interpretation.

The Holy Quran was written and committed to memory in the Life-time of the Holy Prophet

There is both internal and external evidence that the Holy Quran was meant, from the very beginning, to be reduced to writing. The very first revelation opening with the

1. Muir, *Life of Mohammad*, 23.

2. The Holy Qur-'an, 15 : 9.

3. *Ibid.*, 56 : 77-78.

4. *Ibid.*, 85 : 21-22.

5. *Ibid.*, 6 : 115.

6. *Ibid.*, 18 : 27.

word *Read*¹ indicated that the revelation was to be read by Muslims from written pages. Similarly its name, Quran, *that which is read*, points to the same significance. The Book calls itself repeatedly *Al-Kitab*²—the Book which is complete in itself. This name was applied to the Holy Quran in some of the earliest Makkan revelations. To *read* from a *book* without any writing would be an impossibility.

The Holy Quran is styled as the written *pages*³ and also as the *pure pages*.⁴

In one of the earliest Makkan revelations we read:

Most surely it is an honoured Quran, *in a Book that is protected. None shall touch it save the purified ones.*⁵

The italicized words prove that the Holy Quran had been reduced to writing, otherwise the question of *touching it* could not have arisen. Rodwell, while commenting on this verse, says:

This passage implies the existence of copies of portions at least of the Koran in common use.

This verse of the Holy Quran was quoted by the sister of Hazrat Umar when he saw her reading the twentieth chapter (*Ta Ha*) of the Holy Quran and wanted to get hold of it. He was made to wash himself, before he was allowed to read it. He, after reading it, at once became a Muslim. This conversion took place in the fifth year of the mission of the Holy Prophet. It is obvious, therefore, that even at that very early period at least twenty chapters were written.

Again we read in a Makkan revelation:

Or do they say: He has forged it. Say: Then bring ten forged *chapters* like it and call upon whom you can besides Allah, if you are truthful.⁶

And in a chapter revealed at Madina:

And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a *chapter* like it, and call on your helpers beside Allah, if you are truthful.⁷

The mention of *chapters* in these two verses presupposes the existence of the Holy Quran in writing in chapters.

Hazrat Usman, the third Caliph, one of the earliest converts to Islam, explaining the practice of the Holy Prophet as to the writing of the revelations, reports:

It was customary with the Messenger of God (may peace and the blessings of God be upon him) that when portions of different chapters were revealed to him, and when any verse was revealed, he called one of those persons who

1. The Holy Qur-'an, 96 : 1.

2. *Ibid.*, 2 : 2.

3. *Ibid.*, 80 : 12-16.

4. *Ibid.*, 98 : 2.

5. *Ibid.*, 56 : 77-79.

6. *Ibid.*, 11 : 13.

7. *Ibid.*, 2 : 23.

used to write the Holy Quran and said to him: Write these verses in the chapter where such and such verse occurs.¹

Bukhari records:

When the verse *la yastawi-l-qa'iduna* was revealed, the Messenger of God (may peace and blessings of God be upon him) said: Bring Zaid to me, and let him bring the tablet and the inkstand. Then he said to him (Zaid): Write *la yastawi*²

The direction of the Holy Prophet to his Companions not to write anything from him except the Holy Quran³ establishes that the Holy Quran was being written and the Holy Prophet wished to avoid confusion between his Sayings and the Word of God. Bukhari records the following report of the Companions of the Holy Prophet:

We were forbidden to travel to the enemy land with the Quran.⁴

This report shows that the written copies of the whole Quran existed in such large numbers that it was found necessary to issue an injunction against their being carried to enemy country.

It has wrongly been assumed that the Holy Quran was written on palm-leaves, skins or shoulder blades of sheep at the instance of the Holy Prophet. The copies dictated by the Holy Prophet to his amanuensis were on writing material. Some of the Companions used to take down their copies on palm-leaves etc. Speaking of these copies Muir says:

There is good reason for believing that many fragmentary copies embracing amongst them the whole Koran, or nearly the whole, were during his lifetime made by the Prophet's followers.⁵

There are two incidents connected with the death of the Holy Prophet which conclusively prove that the Holy Quran was a compact whole at that time. The first is the following Saying of the Holy Prophet reported by Malik bin Anas:

Verily I leave with you two things, if you hold fast by them, ye will never be misguided—The *Book* of Allah and my *sunna*.⁶

To the same effect was the address he made during his last visit to the mosque. I will quote only the relevant portion. He said:

I have not made lawful aught except that which God hath made lawful; nor have I prohibited aught but that which God *in His Book* hath prohibited.⁷

The second incident also refers to the death of the Holy Prophet. When the news of his death spread over Madina, Hazrat Umar would not believe the mournful truth. "The

1. *Bukhari*, 33 : 15. See also *Abu Daud*, 2 : 123.

2. *Bukhari*, 66 : 4.

3. *Fath al Bari*, 9 : 10.

4. *Bukhari*, 29 : 113.

5. Muir, *Life of Mohammad*, 19.

6. *Bukhari*, 61 : 170.

7. *Ibid.*, 61 : 170.

Messenger of God is not dead,” he declared in a loud and passionate voice. Just then Hazrat Abu Bakr appeared and after reciting the relevant verses of the Holy Quran said:

Let him then know whosoever worships Muhammad, that Muhammad is dead: but whosoever worships Allah, let him know that the Lord lives and dies not.¹

I have mentioned this incident so as to make Hazrat Umar’s address to the people of Madina on the following day intelligible. He said:

O ye people that which I spoke to you yesterday was not correct. Verily I find that it is not borne out by *the Book* which the Lord hath revealed . . . And truly *the Word*, the same Word which directed your Prophet, *is with us still*. Take it, therefore, for your guide and ye shall never go astray.²

It is thus abundantly clear that the whole of the Holy Quran had been reduced to writing during the life-time of the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

But apart from reducing the revelation to writing, the Holy Prophet knew himself the whole of the Book by heart. It was revealed in portions,³ so that it might be easy to remember⁴ and to make its learning perfect it had to be listened to in silence.⁵ It was made to “enter upon the hearts”⁶ of those who heard it and was revealed to the heart of the Holy Prophet.⁷ The recital of a portion of it formed an essential part of the daily prayer, public and private. It was also recited in the midnight prayers.⁸ The Holy Quran was accordingly committed to memory more or less by every Companion of the Holy Prophet and the extent to which it could be recited was one of the chief distinctions among early Muslims.

The Holy Prophet is reported to have said that “the best man among you is he who has learned the Quran and teaches it.”⁹ Accordingly any one who could recite the Holy Quran better than others had the right of becoming the *Imam*, leader of prayer.¹⁰ Thus we hear of Amr Ibn Salma, a boy of thirteen, leading congregational prayers for his tribe.¹¹ The Arabs had long been used to committing tribal events and long poems to memory. This faculty was applied, with all the ardour of an awakened spirit, to the Holy Quran. Even Muir has to admit that: “several of his followers could, during the Prophet’s life-time, repeat with scrupulous accuracy the whole of the Quran”.

Collection of the Holy Quran

It is true that when the Holy Prophet died the Holy Quran had not been made into one compact volume. The possibility of a fresh revelation could not be excluded, and, therefore, the making of a complete volume was an impossibility. But this could be done immediately after his death. As a result of the expedition against the impostor

1. *Durr-i-Mansur*, 4 : 318.

2. *Ibid.*

3. The Holy Quran, 76 : 23.

4. *Ibid.*, 54 : 32.

5. *Ibid.*, 7 : 204.

6. *Ibid.*, 26 : 194,200

7. *Ibid.*, 2 : 97 ; 26 : 193-194.

8. *Ibid.*, 73 : 20.

9. *Bukhari*, 56 : 159

10. *Ibid.*, *Tirmizi*, 3 : 61.

11. *Mishkat-al-Masabih*, 4 : 26.

Musailama a battle was fought at Yamamah in which many of the best reciters of the Holy Quran were killed. Hazrat Umar approached the Caliph Hazrat Abu Bakr and, expressing his apprehensions, asked him to give immediate orders for the collection of the Holy Quran. "How can I do a thing" replied Hazrat Abu Bakr, "which the Messenger of God (may peace and the blessings of God be upon him) has not done?"¹

After some discussion Hazrat Abu Bakr was convinced and he sent for Zaid, the scribe of the Holy Prophet, and commissioned him to act accordingly. Zaid compiled into one volume all the manuscripts written under the directions of the Holy Prophet himself and the arrangement followed was the same, as that of the oral recitation, as was followed in the time of the Holy Prophet. This standard written copy was entrusted to the care of Hazrat Hafsa, wife of the Holy Prophet and daughter of Hazrat Umar.

By the time Hazrat Usman became Caliph, Islam had spread far beyond the limits of Arabia and non-Arabs began to recite the Holy Quran differently. Bukhari records:

Anas son of Malik relates that Huzaifa came to Usman. He had been fighting with the people of Syria in the conquest of Armenia and with the people of Iraq in Azarbaijan, and was alarmed at their variation in the modes of reading (the Holy Quran). He said to Usman: "O Commander of the Faithful! stop the people before they differ in the Holy Book as the Jews and the Christians differ in their scriptures." So Usman sent word to Hafsa, asking her to send him the (copy of the) Quran in her possession, so that he might make other copies of it and then send the original back to her. Thereupon Hafsa sent the copy to Usman and he ordered Zaid ibn Sabit and Abdullah ibn Zubair and Said ibn al-'As and Abdul Rahman ibn Haris ibn Hisham, and they made copies from the original copy. Usman also said to the three men who belonged to the Quraish: "When you differ with Zaid in anything concerning the Quran, then write it in the language of the Quraish, for it is in their language that it was revealed." They obeyed their instructions and when they had made the required number of copies from the original copy, Usman returned the original to Hafsa, and sent to every quarter one of the copies thus made and ordered all other copies or leaves on which the Quran was written to be burned.²

The real question is: Did the copy of Hazrat Usman differ in any way from that of Zaid prepared during the Caliphate of Hazrat Abu Bakr, and in its turn did it differ from the Book as left by the Holy Prophet? I will quote a Muslim authority as well as two Christian writers. Maulvi Muhammad Ali answers this question in the negative and says:

Usman, then, made no alteration in the Quran as it was collected by Abu Bakr immediately after the death of the Holy Prophet. He employed the same scribe who was employed before him by Abu Bakr and in his life-time by the Holy Prophet himself . . . The bitterest foes of Usman, those who cut off his head while he was reading the Quran and who had the whole power in their hand,

1. *Bukhari*, 65 : 9 : 20.

2. *Bukhari*, 66 : 3.

never charged him with having tampered with the Quran.¹

The collection of Abu Bakr was a faithful reproduction of the revelation as reduced to writing in the presence of the Holy Prophet; and agreed, every whit, in text as well as in arrangement with the Holy Quran as preserved in the memory of the Companions.²

Sir William Muir answers the same question in the following terms:

It is sufficient for us to know that in Othman's revision recourse was had to the *original* exemplar of the first compilation, and that there is otherwise every security, internal and external, that we possess the text which Muhammad himself gave forth and used.³

The conclusion which we may now with confidence draw is that the editions of Zeid and Othman were not only faithful, but both of them, so far as material went, complete.⁴

At the end of his discussion Muir quotes and agrees with the verdict of Von Hammer:

That we hold the Koran to be surely the word of Mohamet, as the Mohametans hold it to be the word of God.

Bosworth-Smith expresses the same view in the following words:

In the Koran we have, beyond all reasonable doubt, the exact words of Mohammad without subtraction and without addition.⁵

Arrangement of Chapters and Verses

The Holy Quran as it was left by the Holy Prophet, and as it is to-day, was not arranged in chronological order. Christian critics of Islam have always been at pains to allege that the chapters of the Holy Quran were put together without any regard to their subject-matter, and that the entire text is in a confused state. Sale in his *Preliminary Discourse* gives a peculiar reason:

After the revealed passages had been from the Prophet's mouth taken down in writing by his scribes, they were published to his followers, several of whom took copies for their private use, but the far greater number got them by heart. The originals when returned were put promiscuously into a chest, observing no order.⁶

But says Muir:

1. M. Muhammad Ali, *Preface to the Translation of the Holy Quran*, 64.

2. M. Muhammad Ali, *Preface to the translation of the Holy Quran*, 65.

3. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 27.

4. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 28.

5. Bosworth-Smith, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*, 18.

6. Sale, *The Preliminary Discourse to the Koran*, 51.

The statement made by Sale, that the fragmentary revelations were cast promiscuously into a chest, is not borne out by any good authority that I have met with.¹

This chest of Sale is, therefore, a creation of his own imagination. A cheat and a hypocrite always leaves traces which expose him; and a liar, it is said, has no memory. Sale contradicts himself, on the same page, when he admits that "Mohammed left the chapters complete as we now have them."

A discussion of the arrangement of the verses and chapters of the Holy Quran is a subject by itself, and is really beyond the scope of this book. I cannot do better than to refer the reader to the *Preface to the Translation of the Holy Quran* by Maulvi Muhammad Ali, which is a most elaborate and scholarly exposition on the arrangement and collection of the Holy Quran. In it Maulvi Muhammad Ali explains how the chapters and verses were arranged under the directions of the Holy Prophet, and proves conclusively that the arrangement is based on the subject-matter. In his introductory notes to each chapter, in the abstract of every section of each chapter and in the copious footnotes, he has made it clear that the chapters like the verses, have a connection with each other on the basis of the subject-matter.

It is true that the Holy Quran was revealed in portions; yet it would be a mistake to suppose that it remained in that fragmentary form for any length of time. There is both internal and external evidence to show that the present arrangement of the chapters and verses of the Holy Quran was effected by the Holy Prophet himself under the guidance of Divine revelation. The outstanding challenge of the Holy Prophet to his opponents to produce ten chapters,² or even one chapter,³ like those in the Holy Quran presupposes that chapters were available in some order for the purpose of comparison. Again we read in the Holy Quran:

Surely, on Us (devolves) the collection of it, and the reciting of it. Therefore, when We have recited it, follow its recitation.⁴

And again:

And those who disbelieve say: Why has not the Quran been revealed to him all at once: Thus, that We may establish your heart by it, and We have arranged it well in arranging (it).⁵

The arrangement of the Holy Quran was thus a part of the Divine scheme. I have already quoted a passage from Hazrat Usman, the Third Caliph, to show how this was done by the Holy Prophet himself, who used to indicate the place where a chapter or a verse had to be inserted.

The following *hadith* establishes beyond any doubt that the Book was properly arranged during the life-time of the Holy Prophet. He once said:

1. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 15, 16 (footnote).

2. The Holy Quran, 11 : 13.

3. *Ibid.*, 2 : 23; 10 : 38, etc.

4. *Ibid.*, 75 : 17-18.

5. *Ibid.*, 25 : 32.

Whoever reads the last two verses of *Sura Baqarah* on any night, they are sufficient for him.¹

Again, on another occasion the Holy Prophet told his followers to recite “the first ten verses” of the chapter called *Al-Kahf* (The Cave) at the appearance of the Antichrist.² Further, we have it on the authority of Bukhari that Ibn Mas‘ud, a Companion of the Holy Prophet, recited in a certain prayer forty verses of the chapter *Al-Anfal* ending with such and such words. These words in fact occur at the end of the fortieth verse of that chapter. We are also told that the Holy Prophet used to recite the last ten verses of the chapter *Al-i-‘Imrān* in his *tahajjud* (midnight) prayers.³ In many other reports we find reference to verses by numbers and chapters by names. Such references would have been meaningless if no arrangement had existed during the life-time of the Holy Prophet. Incidentally, this *hadith* also shows that the present arrangement is the same because the verses and chapters referred to appear exactly in the same place and order.

The Holy Prophet gave directions that the Book should not be recited in less than seven days,⁴ that is one *manzil* should only be read in a day. Anas reports:

I was in the *Saqif* embassy at the time of conversion to Islam of *Bani Saqif* . . . The Holy Prophet said to us: “My *manzil* (portion) of the Holy Quran has come to me unexpectedly, so I do not intend to go out until I finish it.” Thereupon we questioned the Companions of the Holy Prophet (may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him) as to how they divided the Quran into *manzils*. They said: “We observe the following *manzils*; three chapters, and five chapters, and seven chapters, and nine chapters, and eleven chapters, and thirteen chapters, and all the remaining chapters beginning with *Qāf*, which are termed the *Mufassal*.”⁵

This report establishes not only the existence of chapters but their division into seven *manzils*, which is observed to this day throughout the Muslim world. The first six *manzils* comprise forty-eight chapters and the last *manzil* sixty-six small chapters beginning with *Sura Qāf*. I should mention that *Sura Qāf* is really the fiftieth chapter. Anas did not include the first chapter, the *Fatiha*, the opening seven verses. This report clearly establishes that the chapters, like the verses, were arranged by the Holy Prophet himself during his life-time and they did not differ from the present arrangement.

The Holy Quran was recited during the time of the Holy Prophet both in public prayers and otherwise. This would have been an impossibility had there been no arrangement of the Book. We know that in the life-time of the Holy Prophet, as indeed is the practice even to-day, the slightest mistake, made by the *Imam* leading the prayers, in the recitation of the Holy Quran, used to be corrected by those who fol-

1. *Tirmizi*, Vol. II, 112. See also *Bukhari*, 64 : 12.

2. *Abu Daud*, 36 : 13.

3. *Bukhari*, 66 : 3 : 19.

3. *Fath al-Bari*, Vol. 9 : 39

4. *Fath al-Bari*, 9 : 83.

lowed him in prayers. Had there been no order or arrangement of the chapters and verses, this practice could never have come into existence.

The objection that the Holy Quran was not completed till the death of the Holy Prophet is disposed of by a reference to the report of Anas already quoted. He spoke of the conversion of *Bani Saqif*, which did not take place till the ninth year of *Hijra*, in which year the chapter called the *Immunity*, admittedly the last in chronological order, was revealed. Hence at that time almost the entire Quran had been revealed and the division of *manzils* and chapters on the authority of the Holy Prophet supports the view that the present arrangement did exist at that time.

Muir, a bigoted critic of Islam, after mentioning the fact that Ibn Masud had learned seventy *Suras*, from the Prophet's own lips, and that the Holy Prophet on his death-bed had recited seventy *Suras*, among which were the seven long ones,¹ had to admit:

Still the fact remains, that the fragments themselves were strictly and exclusively Mohammad's own composition and were learned or recorded under his instructions; and this fact stamps the Koran, not merely as formed out of the Prophet's own *words* and *sentences*, but to a large extent, *as his in relation to the context* also.²

Theory of Abrogation

There are two verses in the Holy Quran which are generally deemed by Christian critics to be the basis of this theory. The first of these two verses is:

And when We change one communication for (another) communication, and Allah knows best what He reveals, they say you are only a forger.³

Now the theory of abrogation has been applied only to such verses as lay down the Islamic Law, which were revealed exclusively at Madina. But the chapter containing this verse was revealed at Makka. It stands to reason, therefore, that the Law which had yet to be introduced could not be abrogated by a previous revelation; nor could a verse earlier in time refer to any such future abrogation.

If we consider the context, it becomes apparent that this verse is dealing with the Holy Quran in its entirety and with the allegation of the opponents of the Holy Prophet: that he had forged the Holy Quran himself. The Book refutes it by asserting that because the communications received by earlier Prophets were, in fact, abrogated and another (the Holy Quran) was substituted in their place, non-believers alleged it to be a forgery. The next four verses make the position abundantly clear. The Holy Prophet is made to say:

The Holy Spirit has revealed it from your Lord with the truth, that it may establish those who believe, and as a guidance and good news for those who submit.⁴

1. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 18.

2. *Ibid.*, 19. (Italics are mine).

3. The Holy Quran, 16 : 101.

4. *Ibid.*, 16 : 102.

Only they forge the lie who do not believe in Allah's communications, and these are the liars.¹

The opponents of Islam did not style the Holy Prophet as a forger because certain verses had been abrogated, but because they alleged that someone else was teaching him² and in spite of this he was representing it to be from God—a work of his own creation was being put forward as a Divine revelation. The Holy Quran controverts these allegations and points out that it is they who are liars, because God has abrogated the older communications, the Mosaic Law.

The second verse which is alleged to support this theory makes the matter still more clear. It reads:

Whatever communications We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring one better than it or *like it*. Do you not know that Allah has power over all things.³

Here again, we must read the verse in the light of the context (the previous two sections: specially verses 90-91) and in particular the preceding verse:

Those who disbelieve from among the followers of the Book do not like, nor do the polytheists, that any good should be sent down (revealed) to you from your Lord, and Allah chooses especially whom He pleases for His mercy and Allah is the Lord of Mighty Grace.⁴

The Holy Quran is dealing here with the contention of the Jews that they could not accept the Holy Prophet or the Holy Quran because it had not been revealed to an Israelite and that they could not accept a new code which would replace their Law. In verse 105 they are told that Allah chooses whom He pleases—an Israelite or a non-Israelite; and in the verse in question they are informed that Allah has abrogated the Mosaic Law and replaced it with a better communication. The succeeding verse⁵ then, by way of illustration, explains that in accordance with the laws of Nature the old order must give way to the new: thereby implying that the Mosaic Law which was given to a particular people for a particular object and for a particular time has been abrogated and replaced by a new and universal law. The old law, having been partly lost and forgotten, was being replaced by “one better than it or like it” and whatever portion of it remained was now abrogated. To construe the verse as abrogating the Quranic law is to do violence to its plain language. The words “or cause to be forgotten” cannot possibly refer to the Holy Quran at all because, as I have already mentioned, every verse as soon as it was revealed was reduced to writing and, therefore, could not be forgotten. Further, why should a verse be abrogated if one *like it* had to be revealed again? Besides, the Holy Quran itself asserts that it shall not be forgotten.⁶ On the other hand, it is a notorious fact that a good deal of the Torah and the Gospels had been completely lost and forgotten. These were replaced by better verses or verses like them; and such portions as were in existence were abrogated and replaced by the Holy Quran.

1. The Holy Quran, 16 : 105.

2. *Ibid.*, 16 : 103.

3. *Ibid.*, 2 : 106.

4. *Ibid.*, 2 : 105.

5. *Ibid.*, 2 : 107.

6. *Ibid.*, 87 : 6.

It is worth noting that the only person who could really say that a particular verse of the Holy Quran had been abrogated was the Holy Prophet himself. He never said that any verse or any portion of the Holy Quran had become abrogated. On the other hand he, along with his Companions, continued to recite in prayers the whole of the Holy Quran as it exists today. It is clear, therefore, that he did not consider any verse of the Holy Quran as ever having been abrogated.

The theory of abrogation of certain verses of the Holy Quran is so exploded that I will not carry the matter any further.¹

Rules of Quranic Interpretation

A "Statute," says Maxwell in his well-known book on *The Interpretation of Statutes*, "is the will of the Legislature, and the fundamental rule of interpretation, to which all others are subordinate, is that a statute is to be expounded according to the intent of the Legislature. If the words of the statute are in themselves precise and unambiguous no more is necessary than to expound these words in their natural and ordinary sense." If we consider the case-law of the British and American Courts, we can deduce *inter alia* the following further rules of interpretation:

1. The words of a statute, when there is a doubt about their meaning, are to be understood in the sense in which they best harmonize with the subject of the enactment.

2. The language of a statute must be given its plain literal construction. It must not be strained to make it apply to a case to which it does not legitimately, by its terms, apply.

3. The true meaning of a passage in a statute is to be found not merely in the words of that passage but in conformity with the other parts of the statute. Every clause of the statute should be construed with reference to the context and the other clauses of the statute, so as, so far as possible, to make a consistent enactment of the whole statute. It must be read as a whole in order to ascertain the true meanings of its several clauses, and the words of each clause should be so interpreted as to bring them into harmony with the other provisions.

4. The words and phrases of a particular nature should be read with, and subject to, the words and phrases of a general import and interpreted accordingly.

5. A statute should be so interpreted as not to be inconsistent with the comity of nations or with established natural laws. To avoid a breach of this rule even a narrow construction, if necessary, must be put on it.

6. A statute should be presumed to void absurdity, excess in exercise of power, alteration of previous existing laws, inconsistency, repugnancy, unreasonableness or unnaturalness.

"These legal presumptions," said Lord Bacon in his *Advancement of Learning*, "are beacons to be avoided—rather than as authorities to be followed." Sir William

1. For further study of the subject, the reader is referred to Maulvi Muhammad Ali's *Religion of Islam*, 35-44.

Blackstone, in his *Laws of England*, laid down that a statute contrary to natural laws, equity or reason, or repugnant or impossible to perform, must be deemed to be void; and there is no legal sanction for the supposition that every unjust and absurd consequence was within the contemplation of the law.

These rules of interpretation, based as they are on principles of common sense, equity and justice, must be deemed to be of universal application. We do not find any inconsistency in the laws of nature. God made them according to a measure.¹ The Holy Quran drawing specific attention to the regularity and uniformity of the laws working in nature, says:

. . . You see no incongruity in the creation of the Beneficent God, then look again, can you see any disorder? Then turn back the eye again and again; your sight shall come back to you confused while it will get fatigued . . . Does He not know Who created? And He is the Knower of the subtleties, the Aware.²

These verses point to the existence of the Supreme Being as witnessed in the regularity and uniformity of the laws of nature, or in other words the absence of any inconsistency in them, and the succeeding verse calls special attention to the spiritual laws contained in the Book, which also work with uniformity.

The laws of nature, nay creation itself, it has been said, are the *acts* of God: and divinely revealed books are the *words* of God. There cannot, therefore, be any inconsistency between the two, or in either of them, and if any interpretation produces such a result it must be rejected.

I will presently deal with the rules of Quranic interpretation which have been laid down by Muslim divines; but the claims of the Holy Quran and the special rules of interpretation which it gives itself must be considered first.

The Holy Quran claims to be a collection of the best teachings³ and a complete guide⁴ from God, a Book which verifies the previous true revelations⁵ and replaces them.⁶ It explains everything⁷ and is right directing.⁸ It settles all differences⁹ and was revealed so that all disputes might be judged and settled according to the directions contained in it.¹⁰ It further claims that, being a Divine revelation, it contains rules of guidance for humanity. It supports them with intelligent arguments¹¹ and needs no champion for its cause, for it meets all objections raised against it with clear proofs and convincing arguments.¹² The Book says:

Again, on Us (devolves) the explaining of it.¹³

It is a distinguishing feature of the Holy Quran that it explains the wisdom of its teachings by means of arguments. It does not only state the basic doctrines and articles of faith, but it also demonstrates their truth by reasons. "This is a book," says the

1. The Holy Quran, 55 : 7.

2. *Ibid.*, 67 : 3, 4, 14.

3. *Ibid.*, 39 : 27.

4. *Ibid.*, 10 : 37.

5. *Ibid.*, 2 : 89, 101, etc.

6. *Ibid.*, 16 : 101.

7. *Ibid.*, 16 : 89.

8. *Ibid.*, 18 : 2.

9. *Ibid.*, 16 : 64.

10. *Ibid.*, 5 : 49.

11. *Ibid.*, 2 : 185.

12. *Ibid.*, 25 : 33.

13. *Ibid.*, 75 : 19.

Holy Quran, “whose verses are established with wisdom and set forth with clearness.” The Holy Quran also claims that its verses are conformable to others in its various parts,¹ and that there is no inconsistency or discrepancy to be found in it.² These claims, unique as they are—and no religious Book has ever put forward similar claims—establish more than anything else the Divine origin of the Book.

The Holy Quran further says that it contains, *inter alia*, verses which are decisive,³ and goes on to give its rule of interpretation in the following terms:

He it is Who has revealed the Book to you; some of its verses are decisive, *they are the basis of the Book*, and others are allegorical; then as for those in whose heart there is perversity, they follow the part of it which is allegorical seeking to mislead, and seeking to give it their own interpretation; *but none knows its interpretation except Allah*; and those who are firmly rooted in knowledge say: We believe in it, it is all from our Lord; and none do mind except those having understanding.⁴

It is significant that this verse occurs at the beginning of the third chapter of the Holy Quran, which deals with the birth and death of Jesus. It is due to an intentional and dishonest misinterpretation of the allegorical verses that Christian missionaries try to find support from the Holy Quran for their dogmatic beliefs. But the Holy Quran, some fourteen hundred years ago, pointed out that they only follow the allegorical part of it simply to mislead others. To believe and follow them regardless of the decisive verses, according to the Holy Quran, is a perversity which Muslims should avoid.

The Holy Quran lays down certain fundamental principles of Islam and they are contained in the decisive verses. They form the basis of the Book. These principles are unchangeable and are stated in unambiguous terms. The allegorical verses must be interpreted in the light of the decisive verses, and no attempt should be made on the strength of these allegorical verses to set up a principle in conflict with the decisive verses. As the Book decides all matters, the explanation of the words and verses of the Holy Quran should therefore be sought from the Holy Quran itself. Thus the particular should follow the general, and the interpretation of the allegorical verses should be strictly in consonance with the decisive verses. These rules of interpretation are indicated by the words: *it is all from Allah and none knows the interpretation except Allah*. In other words, that interpretation would be the correct one, and should alone be accepted which renders the allegorical verses conformable to the other parts of the Holy Quran. Keeping these principles in mind Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad has explained the following rules⁵ of Quranic interpretation:

1. A verse should be so interpreted as to be conformable with the other parts of the

1. The Holy Quran, 39 : 23.

2. *Ibid.*, 4 : 82.

3. *Ibid.*, 3 : 7.

4. *Ibid.*, 3 : 7.

5. *Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, Barakat-ud-Du'a*, 15-17.

Book. Inconsistency, repugnancy, unreasonableness and unnaturalness should be avoided; and particularly all allegorical verses should be so interpreted as to become conformable with, and subject to, the decisive verses.

2. God revealed His will to the Holy Prophet and made him understand it. His interpretation of any verse through his Sayings or *Sunna* (conduct) must be accepted.

3. The interpretation of the Companions of the Holy Prophet must also be accepted.

4. The interpretation of *Mujaddids* and *Aulia Allah* (saints) should also be accepted.

5. If the Holy Quran is read with pure and pious mind, it will explain its true meaning itself. If its teachings are acted upon, it will make the meaning clearer still.

6. To understand the spiritual laws and facts stated in the Holy Quran, recourse should be had to the laws of nature.

7. Arabic Lexicon should be taken into consideration, but if a word is used in one sense in one part of the Holy Quran the same import must be attributed to it in the same context.

Divine Origin of the Holy Quran

It is one of the favourite charges brought against Islam by Christian writers that it is less interesting than other religions because its very basis, the Holy Quran, is less original than the Scriptures of other religions. They try to account for various passages in the Book as originating from the Bible and other sources: in other words, they say that the Holy Quran was not a Divinely revealed Book, but was filled up with fabulous matters current among the Jews and Christians of the Seventh Century and thus the wild legends and garbled stories of earlier Scriptures were put forth as portions of Divine revelation. The Christian apologists try to explain everything; but the only elements they leave out or do not account for in their analysis of Islam are the Will of God and the character of the Holy Prophet. In their rather conjectural works they not only cut out the All-Pervading and All-Knowing Guide, but they also omit the very animating and inspiring soul whose personal character is a guarantee for the truth of his mission.

If all religions of the past originated with God, they must have contained, in the first instance, nothing but the truth. Again, if in course of time their Scriptures lost most of their originality, as the Old and New Testaments, for example, admittedly have, they must nevertheless have retained some particles of truth in them. Is a religion, therefore, less true because it recognises itself in other garbs? Is the Book of that religion less original because it refers to or mentions all those particles of truth in the older Scriptures, which it claims to expand or supplant? Jesus himself asserted that he had come to fulfil, and not destroy, the Law of Moses. Would the Christian apologists admit that, on this ground, the religion he introduced into the world was false? It is strange, to say the least, that the avowed affinity of Christianity to Judaism has not protected Islam from the particular assault of Christian apologists. Do not the present-

day Old and New Testaments contain in them an iota of Divine Truth? If Jews and Christians are willing to answer this in the negative, they are entitled to challenge the Divine origin of the Holy Quran, otherwise not.

The Holy Quran claims that it verifies what has been revealed in the past;¹ but, being the last revealed Book, it has distinguished the genuine from the spurious portions of the older Scriptures.² The Holy Quran speaks of itself as the “pure pages wherein are all the *right* Books”;³ and as bringing out what was concealed by Jews and Christians in their books;⁴ and finally, as the last Book, it replaced them⁵ because of the innumerable interpolations in them. Likewise, the Holy Prophet never claimed to be the *only* Prophet of God. Indeed, we are told that every nation of the world had prophets sent to them.⁶ Says the Holy Quran:

Surely We have revealed to you as We revealed to Noah, and the prophets after him, and We revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and We gave David a scripture. And (We sent) apostles We have mentioned to you before and apostles We have not mentioned to you; and to Moses Allah addressed His word, speaking (to him). We sent apostles as the givers of good news and as warners, so that people should not have a *plea* against Allah after the coming of apostles, and Allah is Mighty, Wise.⁷

The charge of want of Divine origin or originality has been levelled against the Holy Quran, simply because the Bible does not lay any claims to be of Divine Inspiration and Christians have to admit human element in every part of it. The immense variety of its readings, the discrepant versions, the dishonest translations, the absurd dogmas and the conflicting doctrines—all these tax the faith of a Christian when he is faced with the claims of the Holy Quran, its uniformity, its universality and toleration; and he is left with no alternative but to attack the character of the Holy Prophet as “an impostor” and the Holy Quran as the creation of this “master mind” and thus “a forgery.”

But the Holy Quran and the Holy Prophet present a unique aspect: we can trace both of them historically; step by step and day by day. This peculiarity, which constitutes their strength, furnishes a complete answer to the charge of Christians. We know the conduct of the Holy Prophet from his childhood to his death from facts in history, and we can proceed to judgment whether such a man could possibly be “an impostor” and whether he could falsely represent “a creation of his mind” as the Book of God. I will first deal with certain aspects of his life, which conclusively prove the contrary and then support it with a discussion of the internal evidence from the Holy Quran.

The life of the Holy Prophet before the Call bears testimony to his character. He possessed a modesty of deportment and purity of manners rare among the people of

1. The Holy Quran, 46 : 12, 30.

2. *Ibid.*, 2 : 185.

3. *Ibid.*, 98 : 2-3.

4. *Ibid.*, 5 : 48.

5. *Ibid.*, 16 : 101.

6. 10 : 47; 16 : 36 ; 35 : 24.

7. *Ibid.*, 4 : 163-165.

his time. Endowed with a refined mind and delicate taste, reserved and meditative, he lived a quiet pious life. The vulgar sports of the young never attracted him and his fair character, honourable bearing and honesty of purpose, won for him the approbation of his fellow citizens, and he received, by common consent, at the age of twenty, the title of *Al-Amin*, the Trustworthy. It is because of his stainless and noble character that it could be said:

Say: Indeed, I have lived a life-time among you before it: do you not then understand?¹

When the Holy Prophet received the Divine revelation to preach openly,² and in particular to his relations,³ he appealed to the same facts. Climbing one day, on Mt. Safa, he summoned every tribe of Quraish by name till all the tribes had assembled there. "Have you", asked the Holy Prophet, "ever heard me tell a lie?" They replied with one voice in the negative and pointed out that he was *Al-Amin*. "Would you believe me," then enquired the Holy Prophet, "if I tell you that a great enemy lies in the yonder valley, behind the mountains, in wait to attack you?" The reply was: "Yes, certainly; for we have never found you telling a lie." "Then," said the Holy Prophet, "know that I am a warner unto you of an appalling doom, unless you amend your ways." At this, as was to be expected, they first mocked at him, then became furious and left him.⁴

The life of the Holy Prophet, from the moment of his Call to the time of his death, bears testimony to his sincerity of purpose. I will only mention a few incidents of his life. Let me begin with his first Call. It was his custom to withdraw into the desert every year during the month of Ramazan, for meditation and prayer. In the mount of Hira (see illustration, page 90) he often remained whole nights, plunged in the profoundest thought, deep in communion with the Unseen yet All-Pervading Power. In the still hours of the night, in the depth of his solitude, he heard the Call: *Read*. He simply and truthfully replied: "I cannot read." Then came the first revelation:

Read in the name of thy Lord, who created.⁵

What were his feelings on this occasion? Not those of a man who wished to be a prophet, not those of an impostor, certainly! He had not as yet realized his mission. A severe conflict wrung his heart. Trembling, with the words which had been spoken to him engraved on his heart, he went home to his wife Hazrat Khadijah and cried: "Cover me with cloth! Cover me with cloth!" and he told her what had happened and said: "I am afraid for my life." She covered him as directed and replied:

God is my protection, O Abul Qasim, He will surely not let such a thing befall thee, for thou speakest the truth, keepest faith and ledest a good life. Thou art kind to thy relations and friends, and dost not return evil for evil. What hath happened to thee? Hast thou seen anything?⁶

1. The Holy Quran, 10 : 16.

2. *Ibid.*, 5 : 67 ; 74 : 2.

3. The Holy Quran, 26 : 214.

4. *Sirat Ibn Hisham*, 148-9 ; See *Bukhari*, 65 : 36 : 2.

5. The Holy Quran, 96 : 1.

6. *Bukhari*, 1 : 3 ; *Muslim*, 2 : 88.

Hazrat Khadijah urged him to be glad instead of sorrowful, for she at once believed with all her heart that he had been chosen to be the Prophet of her people.

During a period of some six months, called *Fatrah*, the Holy Prophet did not receive any revelation. This period pressed heavily on his mind for he longed for the heavenly voice to speak again. At last it came and burdened him with a responsibility the extent and consequence of which he did not then know. He was commanded:

O you who are wrapped up! Arise and warn.¹

The Holy Prophet then became alive to the mission entrusted to him, and answered the Call. He lost all thoughts of himself, and his life henceforth was devoted entirely to the cause of humanity.

During the first three years of his mission he opened his mind only to those who were somewhat attached to him. Then he gathered his tribe and delivered the message. He met with scant success, but the denunciation of their idols lashed them into fury. At first they boycotted him. Then they insulted and outraged him—they even, to mention only one incident, heaped dirt on his head. His daughter, Hazrat Fatimah, wiped it off and, as she did so, wept. The Holy Prophet seeing it comforted her and said: “My daughter, weep not: for verily the Lord will be thy father’s helper.”

The Holy Prophet continued to preach with an unswerving purpose and a small band of followers gathered round him. Amidst frightful persecutions he held to the path of reproof and reform. The Quraish, at last realizing to some extent the hopelessness of their task, held a council. They called in a body on the Holy Prophet and Utba, their leader, addressed him thus:

O son of my brother! Thou art distinguished by thy qualities and thy descent. Now thou hast sown division among our people and cast dissension in our families; thou denoucest our gods and goddesses; thou dost tax our ancestors with impiety. We have a proposition to make thee. If thou wishest to acquire riches by this affair, we will collect a fortune larger than is possessed by any of us; if thou desirest honour and dignity, we shall make thee our chief and shall not do a thing without thee. If thou desirest dominion and power, we shall make thee king and thou shalt rule over us. If thou desirest a woman, name her and we will bring her to thee; point to her and she shall be in thine arms.²

What a wonderful opportunity for a hypocrite or an impostor! He could have been the overlord of Arabia; and after establishing himself, he could have forced his views on them. But the Holy Prophet was neither a hypocrite nor an impostor. He stuck to the straight path; and in reply he recited the first eight verses of the forty-first chapter of the Holy Quran which run thus:

The Praised, the Blessed God. This is a revelation from the Beneficent and Most

1. The Holy Quran, 74 : 1-2. The reference is to the cloak with which the Holy Prophet had covered himself after the Call.

2. *Sirat Ibn Hisham*, 92.

Merciful God. A book the verses whereof are distinctly explained, an Arabic Quran, for a people who understand; a herald of good news and a warner, but most of them turn aside and so they hear not. And they say: Our hearts are veiled from that to what you call us, and there is a deafness in our ears and a veil hangs between us and thee; so act thou as thou shalt think best; we shall act according to our own opinions. Say: Verily I am only a man like unto you. It is revealed to me that your God is One God; therefore follow the right way to Him and ask pardon of Him for what is past, and woe to those who worship many gods (and to those), who give not alms, and believe not in the life to come. (But as for those) who believe and work righteousness, they shall receive an everlasting reward.¹

When the Holy Prophet had finished this recitation, he said to Utba: "Thou hast heard, now take the course which seemest best to thee."²

The Quraish expelled the Holy Prophet from the Ka'ba, and went in a body to his uncle, Abu Talib, and addressed him thus:

We respect thine age and thy rank but our respect for thee has bounds; and verily, we can have no further patience with thy nephew's abuse of our gods; therefore, do thou either prevent him from so doing, or thyself take part with him, so that we may settle the matter by fight, until one of the two parties is exterminated.³

Abu Talib sent for the Holy Prophet and appealed to him to renounce the task he had undertaken. Imagine the feelings of Muhammad. On the one hand were the Makkans his most cruel persecutors ever ready to kill him if they could. There is his uncle, old and weary, unable to protect him any longer, appealing to him to give up his work; and there is the Almighty God commanding him to preach His Word fearlessly. A very hard moment of trial, indeed. Finally, the Holy Prophet replied:

O my uncle! if they place the sun on my right hand, and the moon on my left to force me to renounce my work, verily I will not desist an iota therefrom till Allah make manifest His cause, or I perish in the attempt.⁴

Abu Talib died in 619 C.E., and his death became the signal for the Quraish to redouble their persecution. Reduced to the last extremities for want of provisions and water the Holy Prophet had to leave Makka. Accompanied by Zaid, his freedman, he proceeded to Taif and invited the people of that city to follow him. They hooted him through the streets, and pelted him with stones, and at last compelled him to leave the city pursued by a relentless rabble. Blood flowed from both of his legs; and Zaid, endeavouring to shield him, was wounded in the head. The mob did not desist until they had chased him for some miles. Wounded and bleeding, footsore and weary, he betook himself to prayer. Raising his hands towards heaven, and with tears streaming from his eyes, he uttered the following touching supplication:

1. The Holy Quran, 41 : 1-8.

2. *Sirat Ibn Hisham*, 92.

3. *Ibid.*, 96.

4. *Ibid.*, 96.

O Lord! Guide my people on the right path. They do not know me; make them understand, and do not forsake them. Perchance some of them will see the light and pay heed to Thy Word . . . O Thou Most Merciful God! I seek refuge in the light of Thy countenance, by which all darkness is dispersed and peace cometh here and hereafter. Solve my difficulties as it pleaseth Thee; for there is no power, no help, but in Thee.¹

Dealing with this incident of Taif, Sir William Muir says:

There is something lofty and heroic in this journey of Mohammad to At-Ta'if, a solitary man, despised and rejected by his own people, going boldly forth in the name of God . . . and summoning an idolatrous city to repent and support his mission. *It sheds a strong light on the intensity of his belief in the divine origin of his calling*²

The Holy Prophet returned to Makka, but as time rolled on, life there became impossible for him and his followers. He advised his Companions to go to Abyssinia, and they did; but he himself with a few of the followers remained at his post. Later on, he and his followers were invited by two tribes of Madina, the Khazraj and the Aus, to go to their city. In similar circumstances any other man would have made any sacrifice to get their shelter, would have agreed to any terms to procure their protection. But not so with the Holy Prophet. Before accepting their offer he took from them a pledge—called the Pledge of the Akaba—in the following terms:

We will not worship any but the One God. We will not steal, neither will we commit adultery, nor kill our children; we will not slander in anywise, nor will we disobey the Prophet in anything that is right.³

It is noteworthy that the members of these two tribes were not asked by the Holy Prophet to defend or protect him or his followers.

The study of Muhammad in history is a subject in itself and it is really beyond the scope of this book. I can here only discuss the question of his sincerity. The Christian critics of Islam have debated at great length regarding this question. They are compelled to admit indisputable facts relating to his life. But to question his sincerity in face of these admissions is really paradoxical. Could anyone have done what the Holy Prophet did without the most profound faith in the reality of goodness of his cause? There is not a single trait in his character which Christian calumny can couple with imposture: on the other hand there is overwhelming evidence to prove that the Holy Prophet himself believed in what he preached to be the Truth. Even Muir has to admit that:

The first conception by Mohammad of a revelation from heaven . . . leaves on the mind no doubt of his sincerity and earnest searching after truth at this period of his life.⁴

1. *Sirat Ibn Hisham*, 147.

2. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 112, 113. (Italics are mine).

3. *Sirat Ibn Hisham*, 151.

4. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 53.

Gibbon in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* says that no Prophet ever passed through so severe an ordeal as did Muhammad, since he first presented himself as the Prophet of God to those who were conversant with him—those who knew him best: his wife, his freed slaves, his cousins and his earliest friends.

Muir, while agreeing with Sprenger that “the faith of Abu Bakr is the greatest guarantee of the sincerity of Mohammad in the beginning of his career, and indeed . . . throughout his life,” goes on to say:

It is strongly corroborative of Mohammad’s sincerity that the earliest converts to Islam were not only of upright character, but his own bosom friends and people of his own household; who, intimately connected with his life, could not fail otherwise to have detected those discrepancies which ever more or less exist between the professions of the hypocritical deceiver abroad and his actions at home.¹

George Elliot has said:

No man whether prophet, statesman or popular preacher, ever yet kept a prolonged hold without being in some measure degraded thereby. His teaching or his life must be accommodated to the average wants of his hearer, and not to his own insight. But, after all, we should regard the life of every great man as a drama, in which there must be important inward modifications accompanying the outward changes.²

I agree to differ, to some extent, with this dictum of George Elliot, inasmuch as I consider that it cannot be applicable to the Prophets of God. In their teachings and in their lives there must be a rigid consistency. I would rather agree with Bosworth-Smith when he asserts that we have a right to demand in a great man—a Prophet of God certainly—that the intensity of the central truth he has to deliver should become not less but more intense; that the flame of his zeal should burn so clear as to throw into the shade other object which shine with a less brilliant light, that the essence should continue to be pure.

To honest Christian students of the life of the Holy Prophet, it has always remained an object of wonder that, under different circumstances, he did not differ at all with himself. I quote here, with only such slight alterations as adapt them to my subject, the words of Bosworth-Smith: In the shepherd of the desert, in the Syrian trader, in the solitary of Mount Hira, in the reformer, in the minority of one, in the acknowledged conqueror of Makka, in the virtual overlord of Arabia, in the superior of the Persian Chosroes and the Greek Heraclius, we can trace the same substantial unity, the same noble personality. History knows of no other man whose external conditions changed so much, and who himself did not change to meet them, in whose life the accidents changed so rapidly but the essence remained unalloyed.

Power, it is said, puts a man to his test. It brings new temptations and also entails new failures. But no man stood this test so successfully as did the Holy Prophet. When he unex-

1. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 55.

2. Elliot, *Romola*, Vol. 2, 5 : 5.

pectedly entered Makka in triumph the three hundred and sixty idols vanished before him. He was now a victorious overlord of Arabia. There was now nothing left in Arabia to thwart his pleasures. If ever he had worn a mask at all, he would now at all events have torn it off. If lower aims had gradually sapped his higher ideals, or if his moderation had been directed, as Muir alleges by his selfish interests, he would now have exposed his real self. Now was the time to gratify his ambition, to satiate his lust, to glut his revenge. Was there anything of the kind? No. The Holy Prophet in his treatment of the unbelieving city remained marvelously true to his programme. He was neither pitiless nor tyrannical, nor cruel through excess of zeal. He forgave the inhabitants of Makka, he forgave his most cruel persecutors, he even forgave Hinda, the wife of Abu Sufian, who had devoured the raw flesh of his uncle, Hazrat Hamza, on the field of Uhud. He forgave them all except Abdullah ibn Abi Sarh, because he had tried to falsify and tamper with a portion of the Holy Quran.

The Holy Prophet had become the head of the state as well as of the religion he had introduced into the world; but he never assumed the pretensions nor the legions of a ruler. He did not have a standing army, nor a palace. He never made himself a potentate. He despised the pomp of royalty. He was enjoined never to stretch his eyes towards the classes who had worldly splendour,¹ and he consequently never desired for wealth. His wives were ordained not to cherish any desire for worldly things,² and he, along with them, avoided the path of ambition and avarice. He, with them, submitted himself to the menial offices of the family. He swept the floor, kindled the fire, milked the ewes, mended with his own hands his garments and even clouted his shoes. Often no fire could be lighted in his house for scantiness of means. The simplicity of his private life was in keeping with his public life.

He was the overlord of Arabia. Was it not possible for him to gratify his every wish, to surround himself with pomp and luxury, to heap up riches? The people were prepared to worship him. On the day his little son Ibrahim died there happened to be an eclipse of the sun. What an opportunity, I repeat, for a hypocrite or an impostor! The people were saying: "It is because of the death of Ibrahim that the sun is in mourning." The Holy Prophet rebuked them for their foolishness and said:

The sun and the moon are two signs of the signs of God. They are not eclipsed on account of life or death of anyone.³

He reminded his followers that he was merely a messenger and servant of God, bent only on obedience to his Master's commands. He repeated:

Verily I am only a man like unto you. Praise God Who guided me and raised me in His service.⁴

Hagiology is not history; but the contemporaries of the Holy Prophet, his enemies who rejected his mission and persecuted him, and unbiased and honest modern writers of Islam, with one voice extol his piety, his justice, his veracity, his clemency and

1. The Holy Quran, 15 : 88 ; 20 : 131.

2. *Ibid.*, 33 : 28-35.

3. *Abu Daud*, 2 : 116.

4. The Holy Quran, 41 : 6.

his humility. Even a bigoted Christian critic of Islam, whom I have quoted more than once, had to admit that “Muhammad . . . practised all these moral virtues.”

The Holy Prophet never claimed to be anything more than a deputy of God on earth. He denied all knowledge of the future, except such as God had revealed to him.¹ He did not pretend to be super-human.² Indeed, he could not even save those he loved.³ To his daughter and to his aunt he said:

O Fatima, my daughter, and thou Safiya, my aunt: Work ye out that which shall gain acceptance with the Lord; for verily I have no power with Him to save you in any manner.

Hazrat Aisha, his wife, once asked him: “O Messenger of God! do none enter Paradise but through God’s mercy?” “None, none, none,” he replied, “neither shall I enter Paradise unless God covers me with His mercy.”⁴ He was made to proclaim, time and again, that he was himself bound by and followed the law for the introduction of which he was instrumental:

And this is a book We have revealed, blessed; therefore follow it and guard (against evil) that mercy may be shown to you.⁵

Again:

Say : Surely my prayer and my sacrifice and my life and my death are (all) for Allah, the Lord of the worlds. No associate has He, and this I am commanded, and I am the first of those who submit.⁶

And again:

I follow naught, but what is revealed to me.⁷

And what a change had the few years of the ministry of the Holy Prophet witnessed? I will let Muir answer this question:

A band of several hundred persons had rejected idolatry, adopted the worship of God, and surrendered themselves implicitly to the guidance of what they believed a revelation from Him; praying to the Almighty with frequency and fervour, looking for pardon through His mercy and striving to follow after good works, almsgiving, purity and justice. They now lived under a sense of the omnipotent power of God, and of His providential care over the minutest of their concerns. In all the gifts of nature, in every relation of life, at each turn of their affairs, individual or public, they saw His hand. And, above all, the new existence in which they exulted was regarded as the mark of His special grace: while the unbelief of their blinded fellow citizens was the hardening stamp of reprobation. Mohammad was the minister of life to them, the source under God

1. The Holy Quran, 72 : 25-27.

2. *Ibid.*, 7 : 187-188.

3. *Ibid.*, 28 : 56.

4. *Mishkat-ul-Masabih*, I, Book 4 : 280.

5. The Holy Quran, 6 : 155.

6. *Ibid.*, 6 : 162-163.

7. *Ibid.*, 10 : 15.

of their new-born hopes and to him they yielded an implicit submission.¹

Through his character and self-surrender the Holy Prophet had succeeded in transforming a moral desert into a garden. Harmony and love were breathed into the hearts of those who had before been engrossed in the most inhuman practices of semi-barbarism. The mission of the Holy Prophet was accomplished in his life-time. Well did he, in his farewell pilgrimage, say:

O ye people! Listen to my words, for I know not whether another year will be vouchsafed to me after this year to find myself amongst you. Your lives and properties are sacred and inviolable, amongst one another till ye appear before the Lord, as this day and month is sacred for all, and remember ye shall have to appear before your Lord, Who shall demand from you an account of your actions O Lord! I have delivered my message, and have accomplished my work.²

I had set out to narrate only a few events from the life of the Holy Prophet. I have, I think, said more than is sufficient to establish that the Holy Prophet, from the moment of his Call to the time of his death, believed in his mission to be Divine. No other man in the whole history of the world, however mighty his enthusiasm for a cause, has ever served that cause more single-heartedly than did the Holy Prophet. In his hours of triumph, as in those of adversity, he did his duty without a taint of personal motive. To question his sincerity is to deny his work—God’s work, I should say—which endures until the present moment.

I will now proceed to examine the very basis of this false accusation. Sir William Muir, while discussing the question whether the Holy Quran was a creation of the mind of the Holy Prophet, grounded his charge on certain conjectural statements. Referring to the journeys of the Holy Prophet to Syria, he says:

Though the direct route from Mecca to Basra would run a great way east of the Mediterranean, it *seems possible* that *either now or* in former journeys, Muhammad *may have seen* the Mediterranean Sea. *Perhaps*, the caravan visited Gaza, the favourite *entreport* of the Mecca merchants. His references in the Koran to ships gliding majestically on the waters, like “mountain” points to a larger class of vessels than he was likely to see on the Red Sea. The vivid picture of sea storms are among the finest sketches in the Koran, and *evidently* drawn from nature: the waves and tempest *may have* been witnessed from the Arabian shore, but the “mountain ships” more likely from the Syrian.³

This passage needs no comment. The italicized words show the flimsy ground on which Muir bases his conjectures. When every detail of the life of the Holy Prophet is known why should he, or anyone else, surmise at all as to facts? His object obviously was to mislead his readers.

1. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 162.

2. *Muslim*, 15 : 391-395.

3. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 22 footnote
(Italics are mine).

There is another aspect. The Holy Quran makes reference to Moses in the following terms:

And a *witness* from among the Children of Israel has borne witness of one *like him*.¹

Of course, the reference is to Moses because the Lord had promised him and thus foretold through him that:

I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren *like unto thee*.²

But to support his theory Muir says:

Whether this “Witness,” and the other Jewish supporters of Muhammad, were among his professed followers, slaves perhaps, at Mecca *we can but conjecture*. Whoever his Jewish friends *may have been*, it is evident that he had a knowledge of the outlines of Jewish history and tradition. These, distorted by rabbinical fables and embellished or travestied by the Prophet’s fancy, supplied the material for the Scriptural stories which at this period form a chief portion of the Koran.³

To begin with, Muir puts a deliberately wrong and false interpretation of the word *witness* and then he, admittedly relying on *conjecture* only, comes to an erroneous conclusion, and palms it off as a fact in history. Further on he says:

To acquire so minute a knowledge of a considerable portion of Jewish scriptures and legend, to assimilate these to his former materials, and to work them up into elaborate and rhythmical Suras, was a work that no doubt required much time and patience For this end many a midnight hour *must have* been stolen from sleep. Such employment is *probably* referred to in passages like the following:⁴

Muir then quotes the first eight verses of the 73rd chapter. He deceitfully omits the words *to pray* from the text and dishonestly construes the text to suit his purpose. The verses are:

O you who have wrapped up yourself! *Rise to pray* in the night except a little, half of it or lessen it a little, or add to it. And recite the Quran well-arranged. Surely We will make to light upon you a weighty word. Surely the rising by night is the firmest way to devotion and the best corrective of speech. Surely, you have in the day-time a long occupation. And remember the name of your Lord and devote yourself to Him with (exclusive) devotion.⁵

The seventy-third chapter is called *Al-Muzzammil*, and the Holy Prophet is addressed in the same terms. It means one who is wrapped up or one *who has prepared himself for prayer*.⁶ The revelation of this chapter belongs to the early Makkan

1. The Holy Quran, 46 : 10.

2. Deut., 18 : 18.

3. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 99.

4. *Ibid.*, 102.

5. The Holy Quran, 73 : 1-8.

6. *Ibid.*, 73 : 1.

period and commentators generally consider it to be one of the very early revelations. It is beyond comprehension how these verses could ever honestly form the basis for the conjectures of Muir, or could mean that the Holy Prophet spent many mid-nights for the composition of the Holy Quran.

It is obvious that Muir was alive to the fact that he was dishonestly accusing the Holy Prophet of “the high blasphemy of forging the name of God.” Well may he confess:

The confidence in his inspiration is sometimes expressed with imprecations which one cannot read without a shudder.¹

In fact, the verses quoted by Muir and which precede these remarks must have sent a cold shiver down his spine, for therein a challenge is thrown out to unbelievers in the following terms:

Say unto the unbelievers; Work ye in your place. Wait in expectation. We too in expectancy are waiting.²

And

Say: Each of us awaiteth the issue; wait therefore. Hereafter ye shall surely know who they are that have chosen the straight path; and who hath been guided aright.³

Christian critics of Islam rely upon the following verses of the Holy Quran as evidence of the fact that the Holy Prophet borrowed his teachings from some followers of other faiths:

Those who disbelieve say: This is nothing but clear enchantment.⁴

Nay! say they: Medleys of dream, nay! he has forged it; nay! he is a poet; so let him bring to us a sign as the former (prophets) were sent (with).⁵

And those who disbelieve say: This is nothing but a lie which he has forged, and other people have helped him at it, so indeed they have done injustice and (uttered) a falsehood. And they say the stories of the ancient—he has got them written so these are read out to him morning and evening.⁶

And certainly We know that they say: Only a mortal teaches him. The tongue of him whom they hint is barbarous and this is clear Arabic tongue.⁷

All these verses are of Makkan origin, and convey that the Makkan idolaters, like modern Christian critics, were puzzled as to what they could liken the Holy Quran. They first of all called it a *Sihir*, a skillful eloquence and therefore an enchantment, because notwithstanding their opposition to it, it had an attraction for them. But then it also contained

1. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 127.

2. The Holy Quran, 11 : 122. I have given in this and the next verse Muir's translation as given on p. 126.

3. *Ibid.*, 20 : 135.

4. *Ibid.*, 11 : 7.

5. *Ibid.*, 21 : 5.

6. *Ibid.*, 25 : 4-5.

7. *Ibid.*, 16 : 103

prophetic utterances which could not be explained away by mere eloquence; so they describe it as *medley of dreams*. When, however, they came across descriptions of things unseen, they attributed them to the imagination of the Holy Prophet and out of spite described him as a madman¹ or alternately as a *poet*.² Soon they discovered that there was a set purpose behind it all inasmuch as it proclaimed the ultimate triumph of the Holy Prophet and his followers and the annihilation of their opponents; they then styled it an intentional forgery and asked for a proof in support of it. To support their charge, they alleged that someone else was teaching him. The Holy Prophet used to proclaim his mission openly. They knew him intimately and watched his movements closely; and yet they could not advance their case beyond vague platitudes and mere conjectures. They, like the Christian critics of Islam, found it “impossible to penetrate the mystery in which this subject is involved.” And why? Rodwell gives an explanation, if an explanation it be, that it was in “secrecy” that the Holy Prophet “received his instructions.” To admit that there were “no secrets about his life,” and to allege, in the same breath, that it was done in “secrecy” is to confess that there is no evidence in support of the allegation.

These verses, however, form the basis of the charge, and I must, therefore, examine them more carefully. The mere mention of these allegations in these verses, has been taken as establishing their truth. But this proves nothing, because the Holy Quran, as the context shows, refutes these allegations. If we analyze these verses, we find that the Makkan idolaters did not know who the man was, but they knew that he was not one of them, neither an idolater nor an Arab. The denunciation of their idols by the Holy Prophet could not but lead them to this conclusion. The reference to “the stories of the ancients: indicates that they took this man to be a Jew or a Christian of non-Arab origin. That is why they styled his tongue as “barbarous.” The word used is *Ajami* which signifies a non-Arab in general and a Persian in particular. Again, as already stated, all these verses are of Makkan origin, and it is, therefore, reasonable to suppose that such a man should have been associated with the Holy Prophet both at Makka and at Madina, or in other words, throughout his prophetic career. The issue is thus narrowed down; and we have to scrutinize in this light, and in keeping with the historical facts, the various names suggested by various writers on Islam; and this I propose to do now.

Waraqa was a resident of Makka. He was an Arab, and was acquainted with the Jewish scriptures. He had forsaken idolatry, but was neither a Jew nor a Christian. He had never come in contact with the Holy Prophet; but when he learnt, through his cousin Hazrat Khadijah, of the Call at the Cave of Hira, he at once declared his faith in the Holy Prophet as the Prophet of God. He, however, died soon after. Speaking of Waraqa, Muir says:

To the family group (of converts to Islam) it is hardly necessary to add Waraqa, the aged cousin of Khadijah, because he had already died before Muhammad had entered upon his public career.³

1. *Ibid.*, 68 : 2, See also 23 : 70.

2. *Ibid.*, 36 : 69.

3. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 56.

Mary the Copt, it is alleged, supplied to the Holy Prophet the details, as given in the Holy Quran, about Jesus and Mary. She, it is asserted, knew of the Christian dogmas from the Apocryphal Books then known in Egypt and subsequently narrated them to the Holy Prophet. To begin with, there is no foundation for the belief that Mary the Copt was well-versed, or even acquainted, with this branch of religious literature. But even if this be conceded, the question of the Holy Prophet being tutored by her is too ludicrous to be considered seriously. Those who contend otherwise merely exhibit their utter ignorance of Islamic history. The chapter of the Holy Quran called *Maryam* (Mary) contains the first revelation about Jesus, his mother and the Christian dogmas. This chapter was revealed in the fifth year of the Mission. It is on record that Ja'far, the leader of the first batch of Muslim emigrants to Abyssinia, recited the relevant portion of this chapter before Negus,¹ the Christian King of Abyssinia, when a deputation of the Quraish urged him to expel the Muslim refugees from his country. It is evident, therefore, that these portions were revealed seven years before the *Hijra*;² and Mary the Copt was sent by Maqauqus of Egypt to the Holy Prophet at Madina in the seventh year of the *Hijra*, *i.e.*, fourteen years after the revelation of this chapter. The allegation is, therefore, either based on gross ignorance of Islamic history or due to a willful perversion of truth.

Suhaib, son of Sinan, is suggested by Muir as the person from whom "it is *probable* that Mohammad gained *some* acquaintance with Christianity."³ I quote Muir himself to depict the character of Suhaib:

His home was at Mosul or some neighbouring village in Mesopotamia. A Grecian band having made a raid into Mesopotamia, carried him off while yet a boy to Syria, perhaps to Constantinople. Bought afterwards by a party of Bedawin he was sold at Mecca to the Chief, Ibn Jud'an, who gave him freedom and protection By traffic he acquired considerable wealth at Mecca, but having embraced Islam, being left by the death of his former master without a patron; he suffered much at the hands of the unbelieving Koraish At the general emigration to Medina the people of Mecca endeavoured to prevent Soheib's departure; but he bargained to relinquish his whole property that they might let him go.⁴

And for what did Suhaib suffer persecutions and part with his property? Not that he might continue to be the sponsor of a forgery. Is it conceivable that a man who willingly suffers and forgoes his all to follow a homeless refugee would blaspheme the name of God and be a party to a fraud on humanity? The character of Suhaib and his eventful life are in themselves guarantees against his being guilty of any such charge.

Salman, the Persian, is suggested by Dean Prideaux⁵ and he bases his conjectures on the word *Ajami*. But both Muir and Sale differ with him. Salman was of a good family of Ispahan; and, in his younger years, left the religion of his country. He went

1. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 92.

2. *Ibid.*, 371.

3. *Ibid.*, 66 (Italics are mine).

4. *Ibid.*, 66-67.

5. Prideaux, *Life of Mohammad*, 31.

to Syria, where he was advised by a monk of Amuria to go to Arabia, where a Prophet was expected to appear at that time, who would re-establish the Religion of Abraham. Salman performed the journey and met the Holy Prophet at Kobā, a suburb little more than two miles to the south of Madina, where the Holy Prophet had halted for a few days in his flight to Madina. The first real mention of Salman in Islamic history occurs in connection with the entrenchment of Madina.¹ Thus it is obvious that he was never with the Holy Prophet at Makka before the Flight and could not, therefore, have been the person referred to in the Holy Quran.

Qais or Kos, the Bishop of Najran, to whom the Holy Prophet is supposed to have talked while on his first journey to Syria, is also mentioned. This journey was undertaken by the Holy Prophet at the age of twelve. It is sheer nonsense to suggest that a boy at this age could learn anything about religion and recollect and repeat at the age of forty what was narrated to him about thirty years before.

Sergius or Boheira, a Nestorian monk, is generally supposed by most of Christian writers on Islam to have been the man with whom the Holy Prophet, at his tender age, had held a conference at Bosra, a city of Syria Damascena.² How much any monk could have taught in a few days to one still so young who could not talk any language but his own, is a question which Christians have failed to consider and much less answer. Sale rejects the suggestion and says:

I find not the least intimation, that he (Sergius) ever quitted his monastery to go into Arabia (as is supposed by the Christians) and his acquaintance with Mohammad was too early to favour the surmise of his assisting him in the Koran, which was composed long after.³

Thomas Carlyle found it impossible to support this Christian charge.⁴ Muir rejects it as puerile.⁵ Davenport believes the allegations *qua* Salman and Sergius as being based on utterly baseless conjectures and says:

The statement that Muhammad composed the Koran by the aid of a Christian Monk and Abdul Salman, a Persian Jew, refutes itself, for it is not to be credited that the excellence of the Arabian language should be derived from two foreigners of whom the one was a Syrian and the other a Persian.⁶

The names of Yasir, Jabar, Khobeib, Habib, Aish or Ya'ish, 'Addas and Zaid have also been suggested. All these were slaves who had been freed. They were among the early converts of Islam and as such the brunt of the wrath of the Quraish had fallen upon them, because they were weak and poor and had no patron or protector. They, however, in spite of the most cruel persecutions and the most trying torments did not recant. They could have apostatized and thus avoided torment, but they preferred to

1. *Sirat Ibn Hisham*, 136.

2. Prideaux, *Life of Mohammad*, 35. See also Marraci, *de Alcor*, 37.

3. Sale, *Translation of the Koran*, 204.

4. Carlyle, *Hero and Hero-Worship*, 71.

5. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 21.

6. Davenport, *Mohammad and the Koran*, 50.

face death rather than renounce their faith, even in words. They died in the cause because they believed in the Holy Quran as the word of God, which said:

And think not (of) those who are killed in Allah's way as dead, nay! they are alive (and) are provided sustenance from their Lord.¹

The spirit these slave-converts displayed is unique in history. Yasir was put to death along with his wife and son in a most inhuman manner. Jabar was also killed at Makka in similar circumstances.² In the same way Khobeib, who had been perfidiously sold to the Quraish, had been put to death by them by mutilation and cutting off his flesh piecemeal. He was asked, in the middle of his tortures, whether he would not wish Muhammad to be in his place and he sitting in security at home. He replied:

I would not wish deliverance and to be with my family and children on condition that the Messenger of God suffer the pain even of a thorn.³

Take the case of Zaid. He was still a child when, traveling with his family, he was waylaid by a band of Arab marauders, and carried away and sold into slavery. For years his father searched for him. At last a party of his tribe recognized him at Makka. By then Zaid had become a convert to Islam. His father came to Makka and wanted to take him back. The choice was left with Zaid, for he was by then a freedman. He refused to go and preferred to remain with his brethren-in-faith and to suffer their fate.

Is it conceivable, I ask once again, that these men who were the least gainers from a worldly point of view, would have willingly suffered for a cause which, if they had been assisting the Holy Prophet in the preparation of the Holy Quran, they must have known to be false, or for a Book which to their knowledge was a forgery? The sincerity, the firmness and the resolution of these convert slaves, their readiness to suffer any loss, their willingness to undergo any hardship, are everlasting monuments of their living faith in the Word of God and the Divine Mission of the Holy Prophet. It is preposterous to suggest that they had individually or collectively taught, or even indicated to, the Holy Prophet what he should have put in the Book. They could never have remained loyal to the faith, particularly when the Holy Quran was proclaiming:

This is (of) the announcements relating to the Unseen (which) We reveal to you.⁴

These are announcements relating to the Unseen which We reveal to you. You did not know them—(neither) you nor your people—before this (knew of them).⁵

And it is not the word of a poet, little is it that you believed, nor the word of a soothsayer, little is it that you mind. It is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds.⁶

1. The Holy Quran, 2 : 154.

2. *Sirat Ibn Hisham*, p. 260.

3. *Ibid.*, 648.

4. The Holy Quran, 12 : 102.

5. *Ibid.*, 11 : 49.

6. *Ibid.*, 69 : 41-43.

Or do they say: He has forged it. Nay! they do not believe. Then let them bring an announcement like it if they are truthful.¹

Here was a direct challenge. Could not those who had tutored the Holy Prophet say so or accept this challenge? If the Holy Prophet had in fact received secret instructions from some one he could not have so boldly and so repeatedly made these declarations, or proclaim that every verse of the Holy Quran was a direct revelation from God and that he had no human instructors. No, the truth is that he had none, and his followers, one and all, believed the Holy Quran to be the Word of God. Sir William Muir, speaking of the faith of the early Muslims and of the Mosque at Madina, says:

Here the Prophet and his Companions spent most of their time, here the daily service, with its oft-recurring prayers, was first publicly established: *and here the great congregation assembled listening with reverence and awe to messages from heaven.*²

Speaking of the return journey from Hudaibiyya, Muir goes on to say:

At the close of the first March, the pilgrims might be seen hurrying across the plains, urging their camels from all directions, and crowding round the Prophet. "Inspiration had descended on him," passed from mouth to mouth throughout the camp. Standing upright upon his camel Muhammad recited the Sura entitled: The Victory.³

The Truce of Hudaibiyya, some of the Companions of the Holy Prophet had thought, was not honourable for the Muslims. The conditions agreed upon were decidedly disadvantageous to them. Even Hazrat Umar had some misgivings about them, and said so openly. But this chapter declared:

Surely, We have given to you a clear victory.⁴

No sooner was the chapter recited by the Holy Prophet than the whole camp with one voice thanked God for His Mercy: their doubts were at once dispelled for the Word of God made the position clear. Such was the faith of the Companions of the Holy Prophet. And subsequently history testifies to the truth of this Divine announcement.

Before dealing with the internal evidence I should like to mention that although most of the references to Jewish and Christian Scriptures appear in the Makkan verses, yet it is an indisputable fact that there were neither any Jews nor any converts to the Jewish religion at Makka. The only ground on which it has been alleged that the Holy Prophet, while at Makka, must have found some means of communication with Jews or Christians, or at least with some person acquainted with Jewish lore and Christian fables, is that between the fifth and the tenth year of the Mission the Quranic revelation began "to abound with narratives taken, often at great length, from their scriptures and

1. *Ibid.*, 52 : 33-34.

2. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 177.

3. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 360.

4. The Holy Quran, 48 : 1.

legends.”¹ But this is begging the whole question. In fact it is an indirect admission that there is no evidence at all and that the allegation is based merely on conjectures and wild speculations. It has further been alleged that at Madina the Holy Prophet came a good deal in contact with Christian heretics and borrowed freely from the Gnostics. But, for the Holy Prophet to have confused Christianity with Gnosticism, the latter must have prevailed in Arabia far more universally than we have reason to believe from history. In fact there is no justification for believing that the doctrines of this sect were taught or professed in Arabia. It is certain, on the other hand, that Basilideans, Valentinians and other Gnostic sects had completely died out by the end of the fifth century of the Christian era. Even Muir had to admit:

Gnosticism had disappeared from Egypt before the sixth century, and there is no reason for supposing that it had at any time gained a footing in Arabia. Besides, there is no affinity between the supernaturalism of the Gnostics and Docetae and the rationalism of the Koran.²

Muir, therefore, himself demolishes the very foundation on which the charge is based. Some Christian writers on Islam have tried to trace the various references in the Holy Quran to the Christian dogmas to be found in the Apocryphal Gospels. They allege that these Gospels were within easy reach of the Holy Prophet. Others imagine that he had acquired his knowledge from Christian traditions then prevalent in Arabia. I again quote Sir William Muir. He says:

But though some few of its (the Holy Quran’s) details do coincide with these spurious (Apocryphal) writings, its statements in no wise correspond There is no ground for believing that either at Mecca or Medina there existed anything of the kind from which could have been framed a narrative agreeing with the Gospels both genuine and apocryphal.³

But in spite of their conjectures, Christian writers on Islam have hopelessly failed to explain away or account for a very patent and outstanding feature of the Holy Quran. The Gospels portray Jesus to be the son of God, who died on the Cross. The Holy Quran declares him to be a mere man, a Prophet of God, but still an ordinary man. The Holy Quran discredits the Jewish and Christian versions by asserting that Jesus did not suffer the death of an accursed one—he did not die on the Cross. Could the Jews and Christians of his, or any other age, have ever dreamt of these teachings or instructed the Holy Prophet in these matters? No doubt the Holy Quran repeats some incidents of Jewish history and also refers to certain Christian dogmas; but it always, at the crucial places, differs with the narratives as contained in the Old and New Testaments.

I now proceed to consider the internal evidence. If we study the Holy Quran with a view to finding its Author the conclusion of its Divine origin is irresistibly forced on

1. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 96.

2. *Ibid.*, 154.

3. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 155.

us. It opens with the formula: *In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful*; and its Author is mentioned at the very outset as: *I am Allah, the Best Knower*.¹ Again, the *Qul* (Say) verses, with which the Holy Quran abounds, clearly point out that the Book is proceeding direct from the Almighty. These verses also indicate that the Holy Prophet was made to realize, what Moses and Isaiah also believed, that he was the mere mouthpiece of God.

I have already referred to the perfection of the language of the Book, and have also mentioned the challenge it contains to non-Muslims, to wit, that they cannot, even if they all unite, produce even a single chapter like it.² There is one significant fact which proves that the language used in the Book was not that of the Holy Prophet himself. The language of his most inspired sayings appear to be flat when compared with the language of the Holy Quran; the human element is apparent in the one, while the Divine Majesty and grandeur is obvious in the other; the inherent light of the former is eclipsed by the brilliance of the latter. They both disclose their authors: the servant and the Master, the helpless mortal and the All-Powerful Ever-Living Creator. Let me compare the prayer of the Holy Prophet at Taif with the Qur-anic verses revealed at the same time:

Oh my Lord! to Thee do I complain of the feebleness of my strength, of my lack of resourcefulness and of my insignificance in the eyes of the people. Thou art Most Merciful of all the merciful. Thou art the Lord of the weak. To whom art Thou entrusting me? To an unsympathetic enemy, who would sullenly frown at me; or to a friend, whom Thou hast given control over my affairs? I do not care for anything except that I may have Thy protection. I seek for refuge in the light of Thy countenance. It is Thine to chase away the darkness, and to give peace both for this world and the next; let not Thy wrath light upon me, nor Thine anger. There is no strength, no power, except in Thee.³

And when the servant of Allah (Muhammad) stood up in prayer to Him, they crowded on him almost stifling (him). Say: I pray unto Allah only, and ascribe unto Him no partner. Say: I control not hurt nor benefit for you. Say: Verily, none can protect me from Allah, nor can I find any refuge besides Him. (Mine is) but the conveyance of the truth from Allah, and the message; and whoso disobeyeth Allah and His message, verily his is fire of hell, wherein such dwell for ever, till (the day) they shall behold that which they are promised; (they may) doubt but then they will know (for certain) who is weaker in allies and less in multitude. Say: I know not whether that which you are promised is nigh, or if my Lord hath set a distant time for it. He is the Knower of the Unseen, and He revealeth unto none of His secrets, save unto every messenger whom He hath chosen, and then He maketh a guard to go before him and a guard behind him, that He may know that they have indeed conveyed the message of the Lord. He surrounds all their doings and keepeth count of all things.⁴

1. The Holy Quran, 2 : 1.

2. The Holy Quran, 2 : 23-24 ; 10 : 38; 11 : 13.

3. *Sirat Ibn Hisham*, 1 : 147.

4. The Holy Quran, 72 : 19-28 (Translation by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthal).

Could a man give vent to these feelings of utter hopelessness and weakness and also simultaneously express the most unbounded confidence in his ultimate triumph and predict so forcibly the destruction of his opponents? A solitary man, left to himself without a friend, without a helper, rejected at home, goes for shelter to a neighbouring place. He is cruelly treated and turned out. Could he have dreamt of such events? Could these words proceed from one but the All-Powerful, All-Pervading Divine Source? The message must be delivered, the non-believers shall be punished and their number shall be reduced, for Allah encompasses all. These two passages clearly show that two different voices, one human and the other Divine, were speaking at one and the same time.

The Bible lays down a criterion whereby we can judge the Divine origin of a message delivered by a Prophet. It says:

But the Prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that Prophet shall die.

And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a Prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken but the Prophet hath spoken it presumptuously, thou shalt not be afraid of him.¹

Thus even if a prophet has delivered innumerable true revelations, but if he falsely ascribes to God a single word which He has not spoken, such a prophet shall be destroyed, and his work shall perish. Similar words occur in another place in the Bible:

Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the prophets that prophesy in My name, and I sent them not, yet they say, sword and famine shall not be in this land: By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed.²

The Bible also tells us that the Lord is against those to whom He has not spoken and yet they prophesy falsely in His name. Such prophets and their people, says the Lord, shall never profit nor prosper.³ By way of Illustration the Prophet Jeremiah cites the fate of Hananiah, his contemporary, who was killed within one year of his having tried to mislead people by attributing to God prophecies which He had never commanded him to make.⁴ The same fate, we are told, befell Theudas and his followers.⁵ Jesus also compared a false prophet to a corrupt tree which is hewn down,⁶ and he also reminded his people:

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.⁷

1. Deut., 18 : 20-22.

2. Jer., 14 : 15.

3. Jer., 23 : 30-32

4. Jer., 28 : 15-17.

5. Acts, 5 : 36.

6. Matt., 7 : 15-19.

7. Matt., 7 : 20.

Let us test the Holy Quran, the Holy Prophet and his work by these Biblical criteria, for the Holy Prophet claimed that every word of the Book was revealed to him direct from God. Was the Holy Prophet killed? Did his work perish? Was he or the companions consumed by sword and famine? And lastly, was the Holy Quran destroyed or forgotten? For about a quarter of a century the Holy Prophet kept on proclaiming the Holy Quran to be a revelation of God, and his Companions believed it to be such, and yet far from being destroyed, he and they prospered. Every day brought him new converts, every month brought him new success, every year brought him new glory. And he did not die until he was able to say:

O Lord! I have delivered my message, and have accomplished my work.¹

The Holy Prophet and his Companions were successful to a degree which is unique in the annals of history. Surely, the God of Moses and Jeremiah was the same God as that of Muhammad. He had not changed, nor had He become helpless or powerless. Nor could He have forgotten His promises and assurances to Moses and Jeremiah. Indeed, He had not, for He did lead His true Prophet Muhammad to victory and did destroy those who opposed him. Had the Holy Prophet been a false prophet, he would not have been spared. He would have suffered a worse fate than that of Hananiah; for says the Holy Quran:

And if he (Muhammad) had fabricated against Us some of his sayings, We should certainly have seized him by the right arm, then We would certainly have cut the artery of his neck. And not one of you could have withheld Us from him.²

And this did not come to pass because, as stated in the immediately preceding verse, the Holy Quran was

The Revelation from the Lord of the worlds.³

It is obvious, therefore, that whereas God is against false prophets and punishes them, He showers His blessings on His true prophets and destroys those who oppose them. This is the criterion put forth by the Lord God of Moses, Jeremiah, Jesus and Muhammad, by which the falsehood of an impostor is exposed and the truth of His righteous and true prophets is established. The Holy Quran repeatedly draws attention to this testimony. I quote but a few verses:

Say: Call on your associates, then make struggle (to prevail) against me and give me no respite. Surely, my guardian is Allah, Who revealed the Book, and He befriends the good (only).⁴

And Allah will protect you from the people.⁵

Allah has written down: I will most certainly prevail, I and My apostles; surely,

1. *Muslim*, 15 : 394-5.

2. The Holy Quran, 69 : 44-47.

3. *Ibid.*, 69 : 43.

4. *Ibid.*, 7 : 195-196.

5. *Ibid.*, 5 : 67.

Allah is Strong, Mighty.¹

And when Allah guides (one), there is none that can lead him astray. Is not Allah Mighty, the Lord of retribution?²

Most surely We help Our apostles, and those who believe, in this world's life and on the Day when the witnesses shall stand up.³

Have We not . . . exalted for you your eminence.⁴

The Holy Quran teems with verses, of Makkan origin, in which assurances were repeatedly given to the Holy Prophet of his ultimate triumph and of the glorious eminence to which in fact he was raised.

The Biblical verses already referred to give another criterion: whatever a true prophet shall say, in the name of the Lord, must happen.⁵ I will apply this test also to the Holy Quran. There are innumerable prophecies in the Book. They were all literally fulfilled. I will mention only four of them.

The Holy Quran claimed that Allah will Himself guard and protect the Book against corruption and interpolation;⁶ and that "there is none who can change or alter His word."⁷ It further claims that its verses shall never be forgotten.⁸ I have already dealt with these unique prophecies,⁹ and explained how they have been fulfilled. The Holy Quran has retained its pristine purity and is to-day the same as the Holy Prophet left it.

The second prophecy I wish to discuss reads:

And those who disbelieved said to their apostles: We will most certainly drive you forth from our land, or else you shall come back to our religion. So their Lord revealed to them: *Most surely We will destroy the unjust. And most surely We will settle you in the land after them.*¹⁰

In another place we are told:

Most surely He Who has made the Quran binding on you will bring you back to the destination.¹¹

These verses are of Makkan origin and prophesy the final triumph of the Holy Prophet and the utter defeat and overthrow of his enemies who had threatened to, in fact did, drive him out of Makka. These verses refer to these events and foretell his ultimate victorious return, as the ruler of the land, after his opponents' power had been crushed. Thus the migration of the Holy Prophet from Makka and his re-entry into the city as a conqueror and ruler was prophesied in the clearest possible terms, and this prophecy was also literally fulfilled.

1. The Holy Quran, 58 : 21.

2. *Ibid.*, 39 : 37.

3. *Ibid.*, 40 : 51.

4. *Ibid.*, 94 : 1-4.

5. Deut., 18 : 20-22.

6. The Holy Quran, 15 : 9 ;
56 : 77-78 ; 85 : 21-22 ; etc.

7. *Ibid.*, 6 : 115 ; 18 : 27

8. *Ibid.*, 87 : 6.

9. *Supra*, pp. 24-29.

10. The Holy Quran,
14 : 13-14.

11. *Ibid.*, 28 : 85.

The third prophecy is:

I am Allah, the Best Knower. The Romans are defeated in a near land; and they after being vanquished shall overcome within ten years. Allah's is the command before and after, *and on that day the believers shall rejoice with the help of Allah!* He helps whom He pleases, and He is Mighty and Merciful.¹

These verses contain a double prophecy: the victory of the Romans, after their defeat, at a time when the Muslims themselves would be rejoicing.

The people of the Roman Empire called themselves Romans, and to them the term *Greek*, which was synonymous with heathen, was a term of reproach.² Therefore, the term *Romans* has been used instead of *Greek*.

The struggle between the Persians and the Roman Empire began in 602 C.E., when Chosroes II of Persia waged war against Rome to avenge the death of Maurice, murdered by Phocas. The Persians ravaged Syria, and overran and plundered Asia Minor. In 608 C.E. they advanced to Chalcedon. In 614 C.E. Jerusalem and Damascus were sacked by General Shahbaraz, and the Holy Cross was carried away in triumph to Persia. Soon after Egypt was conquered. The Romans could offer but little resistance, as they were torn by internal dissensions and were also pressed by Avars and Slavs. The Persians advanced upon the Bosphorus and pitched their camp within sight of Constantinople. When the news of their conquest reached Makka, the Quraish idolaters were jubilant, as their sympathies were with the fire-worshipping Persians. It was then, in 615 C.E., that these verses were revealed and proclaimed the ultimate victory of the Romans within ten years. In 621 C.E. Heraclius was roused from his slumber and, after three years of arduous conflict, rolled back the invaders and totally discomfited the Persians. In 624 C.E. he advanced into northern Media, where he destroyed the great temple of Goudzak.³

In the same year, 624 C.E., a small band of Muslims, three hundred and thirteen in number, routed a force of about one thousand Quraish warriors at Badr. The Muslims were rejoicing at this victory when the news of the victory of the Romans reached them. Both Muslims and Romans continued to meet with success; and the final triumph of both over their respective enemies again coincided. The Quraish were crushed by the conquest of Makka in 630 C.E. and in the same year the Persian Empire, from the apparent greatness to which it had reached some years earlier, sank into hopeless anarchy. And thus this prophecy was fully justified by subsequent events.

The fourth prophecy deals with the finality of the mission of the Holy Prophet. He proclaimed: "There will be no prophet after me," and this was in keeping with the Quranic announcement:

Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah and the *Seal* of the Prophets.⁴

1. The Holy Quran, 30 : 1-5.

2. Butler, *Arab Conquest of Egypt*, 144f.

3. *Ency. Britannica*, Art. *Chosroes II*.

4. The Holy Quran, 33 : 40.

The Holy Quran alone claims to be a guide for the whole of humanity.¹ Whereas every other prophet was sent to one people, for the reformation and unification of one nation, the Holy Prophet came to unite all nations and to destroy limitations of colour and creed. Again, there would have been no necessity for the revelation of the Holy Quran if the previous scriptures had been intact; and had this Book suffered the same fate, there would of necessity have come to this earth another prophet with a new code of law. The *finality of* revelation saw its perfection too, and through the *Seal*, the *Last*, of the prophets the Beneficent God perfected the religion and completed His favours:

This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favour on you and chosen for you Islam as a religion.²

And history bears witness that *no* prophet has come after the Holy Prophet.

There is another piece of internal evidence which satisfactorily proves the Divine origin of the Holy Quran. One would expect, if the Book were a forgery, to find the author justifying such of his acts as his contemporaries may have called in question. On the contrary, we find in the Holy Quran incidents referred to, which, had it not been a revealed Book, would never have been inserted by the author. I will mention but a few of them:

On one occasion the Holy Prophet was engaged in deep conversation with the chief Al-Walid. Just then Abdullah Ibn um Maktum, a blind man, chanced to pass. He asked the Holy Prophet to teach him a portion of the Holy Quran. The Holy Prophet, displeased at this interruption, frowned and turned away from him. Then the chapter entitled: *He Frowned*, was revealed in the following terms:

He frowned and turned his back, because there came to him a blind man. And what would make you know that he would purify himself, or become reminded so that the reminder shall profit him? As for him who considers himself free from need (of you), to him do you address yourself. And no blame is on you if he would not purify himself. And as to him who comes to you striving hard, and he fears. From him will you divert yourself.³

Is it conceivable that a forger would blaspheme the name of God, and at the same time perpetuate an incident which would expose him for ever to the crushing retort of his enemies?

I give another instance. 'Abd Allah ibn Ubayy was the chief of the Madina hypocrites. On his death-bed he had asked the Holy Prophet to send him his shirt, so that he might be buried in it, and to conduct his funeral prayers. The Holy Prophet complied with both these requests. Then came the Divine revelation:

And never offer prayer for any one of them who dies, and do not stand by his grave, surely they disbelieve in Allah and His Apostle and they shall die in transgression.⁴

1. The Holy Qur-'an, 7 : 157.

2. *Ibid.*, 5 : 3.

3. *Ibid.*, 80 : 1-10.

4. *Ibid.*, 9 : 84.

The Divine revelation thus pointed out that this action of the Holy Prophet, though magnanimous in itself, was wrong. It directed that unbelievers should not be treated as Muslims.

We read in the Holy Quran:

Say: I do not say to you I have with me the treasures of Allah, nor do I know the unseen, nor do I say to you that I am an angel: I do not follow aught save that which is revealed to me. Say: Are the blind and the seeing one alike? Do you not then reflect?¹

In another place, it is said:

I am only a mortal like unto you.²

Again:

Say: I do not control any benefit or harm for my own soul except as Allah pleases; and had I known the unseen I would have had much of good and no evil would have touched me. I am nothing but a warner and the giver of good news to a people who believe.³

And again:

Men ask you about the Hour! Say: The knowledge of it is only with Allah.⁴

Would any forger or impostor who aspired to be a leader or guide of his people ever have put such admissions in a book of his own creation? There is no affectation, no personal consideration. The Book represents him to be but a man, devoid of supernatural powers without worldly wealth, without knowledge of the future; nothing more than a mortal, neither a wonder-worker nor a fortune-teller. For all the good he did, for all the prophecies he uttered, he claimed no credit for himself. It was all from the Almighty Allah, Who selected him to be His messenger, a *plain* warner.

Had Muhammad been the author of the Book he could never have had the implicit faith he had in its Divine origin. The Holy Prophet and his Companions were commanded:

Continue then in the right way as you are commanded, *as also he who has turned (to Allah) with you*, and be not inordinate (O men!), surely He sees what you do.⁵

This verse appears in the chapter called *Hud*. This and some other *sister* chapters⁴ are sometimes called the *Terrific Suras*. It is recorded that, while Hazrat Abu Bakr and Hazrat Umar sat in the Mosque at Madina, the Holy Prophet entered the Mosque and was looking at his beard. Hazrat Abu Bakr observing some grey hair said: "O Messenger of God, for thee I would sacrifice my father and mother, *white* hair are has-

1. The Holy Quran, 6 : 50.

2. *Ibid.*, 41 : 6.

3. *Ibid.*, 7 : 188.

4. *Ibid.*, 33 : 63.

5. *Ibid.*, 11 : 112.

6. *Ibid.*, Chapters 56 and 101.

tening upon thee.” “Yes”, replied the Holy Prophet, “*Hud* and its *Sisters* have hastened my *white* hair.” And why? Apart from the command to follow the Holy Quran himself, the Holy Prophet had also been directed to see that his followers did the same. The Holy Prophet knew that when Moses’ followers did not follow him, that great law-giver had to confess:

My Lord! surely I have no control (upon any) but my own self and my brother; therefore make a separation between us and the nation of transgressors.¹

Jesus had asked his followers to watch with him for a short time while he prayed,² and they had gone to sleep³ and forsaken him.⁴

The Holy Prophet was conscious of these events of the past and this injunction taxed his mind. He believed that this injunction was Divine and feared lest his followers be found wanting and become inordinate.

Can anyone, in the light of these facts, honestly assert that the Holy Prophet did not himself believe in the Holy Quran as the Word of God, and knew the Book to be of his own creation?

I will now close this rather lengthy discussion and summarize the points which establish the Divine origin of the Holy Quran:

1. Its text has maintained its pristine purity and has remained free from all human interpolations.
2. It stands without a rival, being the only revealed Book in a *living* language.
3. The language is pure, and it always observes a tone of reverence when speaking of, or referring to, the Almighty God, to Whom it never attributes human frailties and passions.
4. Its language is chaste. The impure, immoral and indecent ideas and expressions, narratives and blemishes which unfortunately are of too frequent occurrence in other Scriptures, are conspicuous by their absence in the Holy Quran. So exempt is it from these undeniable defects that it needs not the slightest expurgation and can be read from cover to cover without causing a blush to suffuse the cheek of modesty itself.
5. All its prophecies have been fulfilled.
6. There are no discrepancies in the Book, even in the details of the narrative. Its verses are conformable throughout.
7. It affirms by repeating certain portions, and replaces the older Scriptures.
8. It contains rules of guidance for humanity and supports its assertions by arguments.
9. It is the fundamental code, not only of theology, but of civil and criminal jurisprudence, and its laws regulate the actions and the property of mankind. It is a

1. The Holy Quran, 5 : 25.

2. Matt., 26 : 38.

3. Matt., 26 : 40.

4. Matt., 26 : 56.

general code, a religious, social, commercial, military, judicial, civil and criminal code. It regulates everything from the ceremonies of religion to the actions of daily life; from the health of the body to the salvation of the soul; from the rights of the individual to the privileges of the community and humanity at large; from the interests of man to that of society; from crime to morality; in short from life in this world to that of the next.

10. It contains a political system on the foundation of which the throne itself is erected; and from which every law of the state is derived; and by its authority every question of life and property is finally decided.

11. It produces an unprecedented change in the outlook of those who believe in it and act up to it. To them it brings new hope and sustenance of life.

12. It establishes the unity of God and the messengership of the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

13. It is the *last* revealed Book, and is the *final* Word of God. The religion it proclaims is the *summum bonum* of the Will of God.

14. It declares the innocence of Jesus and Mary from the charges and calumnies leveled against them by Jews and Christians alike; and affirms the *humanity* of Jesus.

The Hadith

The life and the actions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad have to be judged by the standard of the Holy Quran. In his religious views, in his public career and in his domestic life, he followed faithfully, both in their letter and spirit, the teachings of the Holy Quran. In the Holy Quran the Holy Prophet is made to say:

I follow naught but what is revealed to me.¹

True to this revelation, he translated every one of its precepts into practice. His character was so true a mirror of the Holy Quran that his Companions (*As-hab*) used to interpret the Holy Quran in the light of his actions. Hazrat Ayisha was, on more occasions than one, questioned as to how the Messenger of God acted under certain circumstances. In reply she always used to read the relevant verses of the Holy Quran and say that his action was no other than in keeping with the Holy Quran itself.

These actions or practices of the Holy Prophet are called *Sunna*, *mode of life*, or *way of acting*, and they are held in great reverence, next to the Holy Quran, throughout the Muslim world. The *Sunna* are described along with the *Hadith* (plural *Ahādith*) the *doings* or *sayings* of the Holy Prophet. The *Hadith* also contain his answers to the questions put to him by his Companions and opponents. They also record his approval or disapproval of incidents which took place in his life-time. All these are collectively called the *Hadith*, which form the second Islamic Source.

1. The Holy Quran, 10 : 15.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad is a historical character. He passed through various vicissitudes of life. Orphaned in childhood, he became the head of the State at Madina. His private and public life is known in the minutest detail. All his Sayings and practices have been recorded, and nothing escaped the careful and vigilant notice of his Companions. It has been asserted that it is impossible to know everything of any man, however great, but it is not so with the Holy Prophet. There were various reasons for this, but I will mention only two:

The Holy Prophet was sent as a “mercy to all Nations,”¹ and was, therefore, a guide to mankind as a whole. He was the best model of virtue for humanity. In the words of the Holy Quran:

Certainly you have in the Apostle of Allah, an excellent exemplar²

The Holy Prophet did not give sentimental and impracticable precepts, but rather laid down practical rules of guidance for men and illustrated them by his own example. By his example as a kind, loving and affectionate husband and father, he guided men in their every-day duties; by making laws for the guidance of his followers, he demonstrated how legislators should act; by deciding disputes, he became a model for judges; by fighting personally in battles, he taught soldiers to lay down their lives in the cause of truth, justice and freedom; by leading armies, he served as a guide for a General leading his armies in the field of battle; by being the head of a state he set an example for kings to rule benevolently; by punishing tyrants for wrong inflicted on innocent and weak persons, by facing patiently the worst persecutions for years and then fighting and overcoming them, by forgiving the vanquished, his persecutors and enemies in particular, by overlooking the faults of those attached to him, he proved himself to be *an excellent exemplar*. Indeed, it is the distinguishing feature of his life that he not only taught rules of guidance in every walk of life, but also gave, by his own example, a practical illustration of all those rules. The Holy Quran, therefore, enjoins Muslims to obey Allah and His Apostle³ and to keep back from what he forbids⁴ and to follow his example as the Holy Prophet did never deviate from the right path.⁵

The Holy Quran says that “Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets;”⁶ and the Holy Prophet said: “There will be no prophet after me.” The Holy Prophet is the Seal, the last of the Prophets, because the object of prophethood, the manifestation of the Divine Will for the guidance of humanity, was finally accomplished in the Holy Quran. That is why we find in the Holy Quran:

This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favour on you and chosen for you Islam as your religion.⁷

1. The Holy Quran, 21 : 107.

2. *Ibid.*, 33 : 21.

3. *Ibid.*, 3 : 32, 132; 4 : 13, 59, 69, 80; 5 : 92 ;

8 : 1, 20 ; 64 : 12.

4. *Ibid.*, 59 : 7.

5. *Ibid.*, 53 : 2.

6. *Ibid.*, 33 : 40.

7. *Ibid.*, 5 : 3.

This verse was the last to be revealed to the Holy Prophet, and nothing came after it, he having died eighty-one days after its revelation. It was necessary, therefore, that the living example of the Holy Prophet, in the light of the Holy Quran should have been recorded for all time to come.

The second reason was the love his Companions had for the Holy Prophet. History does not know of any man who had companions like those of the Holy Prophet from the beginning of his career to his death. The conduct of his Companions is a parallel of its own. They sacrificed their property, homes, lives, everything for him. They took "*the Pledge of the Tree*," whereby they solemnly took oath to defend him even to the death. Can any reformer or Prophet claim among his disciples men like the four Caliphs, men like Bilal the celebrated *Muazzin*, and Yasir and his wife Samiya and Ammar their son? Yasir was captured by the idolaters of Makka. His legs and arms were tied to four different camels, who were made to run in four different directions. Yet he stood loyal to his God and His Apostle. Bilal was made to lie, for days together, on the burning and blistering sands of the desert, but in spite of these tortures, he kept on shouting: "*There is one God, There is one God.*" Hazrat Ali, the fourth Caliph, risked his life for the safety of the Holy Prophet and actually occupied the bed of the Holy Prophet to receive the blows with which the enemies intended to kill the Holy Prophet. Hazrat Abu Bakr, the *Truthful*, the first Caliph, carried the Holy Prophet in a bundle on his head, and left a house which was actually surrounded at that time by the idolaters of Makka, who had conspired and come to murder the Holy Prophet; and when challenged, he told them that he was carrying Muhammad. They laughed at his assertion but he carried his beloved Prophet out of danger. Hazrat Talha received, in the battle of Uhud, no less than twenty-one wounds in order to prevent injury being inflicted on the person of the Messenger of God. Such love and devotion can never be found in history. In their love for the Holy Prophet, they followed him like a shadow. In assemblies they would rush to get a place near him. They attached great importance to even his most insignificant acts. The Holy Prophet, for example, used a particular ring, they did the same; he discarded it, so did they. The Holy Prophet once said his prayers without discarding his shoes, his Companions also followed his example. Is it any wonder that they followed his *Sunna* so rigidly and preserved his *Hadith* so carefully?

A Prophet, it has been said, and repeated by Jesus, is not without honour save in his own country and among his own relations. Voltaire said: "No man is a hero to his valet." It only shows that small minds cannot understand or appreciate a great mind. The ordinary lot of a great man, or even a Prophet, was, in the case of the Holy Prophet, reversed; he was not without honour save among those who did not know him. We find that his Divine Mission was accepted not only by his countrymen but also by his own family. In fact, his wife Hazrat Khadija was the first to believe and honour him. Regarding his private life we have the *Hadith* recorded on the authority of his wives, Hazrat Ayesha in particular, and his daughter Hazrat Fatima, and his servant Anas, who served him for many years. They, one and all, not only accepted him

as the Messenger of God, but also preserved his *Hadith* accurately for the generations to come. Thus, when in public, his Companions; when in his house, his relatives; when alone, his servant—all bear authentic testimony to what he said or did, and nothing was left which was not reported, repeated and recorded in minutest detail. Can history tell us of any Prophet, or any other man, how he ate, drank, slept and prayed; how he laughed and whether his teeth were then visible; what features he had; how many grey hair he had; how he combed his hair; how he dressed and what he wore; how he sat and walked; what he liked and what he disliked; and what his countenance was on different occasions?

It is true that during the life-time of the Holy Prophet the *Hadith* were not written collectively in any book, but there is unimpeachable evidence that they were being committed to memory by most of the Companions, and reduced to writing by some of them. Even Muir admits this fact.¹ I may mention that Hazrat Ali kept record of some Sayings. Anas Ibn Malik reports that Hazrat Abu Bakr wrote down for him the laws regarding *Zakāt*. Abdullah bin Umar and Abdullah bin Abbas were two other Companions who were especially engaged in the preservation and transmitting of the *Hadith*, so was Abdullah bin Amr. He reports:

I used to write everything that I heard from the Messenger of God intending to commit to memory. I spoke about it to the Holy Prophet, who said: Write down for I only speak the truth.

It is also true that most of the Companions did not write down the *Hadith* because the Holy Prophet had on one occasion taken exception to this being done.

Thus Abu Huraira reports:

The Messenger of God came to us while we were writing the *Hadith*, and asked: What is this that you are writing? We said: *Hadith*, what we hear of thee. He said: What! a book other than the Book of Allah?

This disapproval was meant really to avoid confusion between the Divine Revelation and his Sayings. The Holy Prophet never forbade the writing of the *Hadith*. On the contrary, he always gave directions that his *Sunna* should be followed and widely proclaimed.

Malik bin Anas reports that the Holy Prophet during his Farewell address said:

I leave with you two things. If you hold fast by them, you will never be misguided—the Book of Allah and my *Sunna*.

Tirmizi records two Sayings:

May Allah grant freshness to the man who hears my Sayings, keeps and preserves them in memory and acts according to them.²

1. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 34.

2. *Muslim*, 15 : 396.

May Allah be pleased with the man, who hearing a thing from me broadcasts it just as he had heard it.¹

Bukhari records that “let him who is present, deliver it to him who is absent” were the concluding words of many of the utterances of the Holy Prophet.² He further records that when a deputation of the tribe of Abdul Qais appeared before the Holy Prophet he explained to them the injunctions regarding Prayers, Fasting, Zakat, etc., and enjoined them to explain the same to the other members of their tribe who were not present. Whenever a tribe embraced Islam, the Holy Prophet always sent one or more of his Companions to teach them the Holy Quran and to make them aware of his *Sunna*. We are told that on such occasions “they carried written instructions with them.” Very often the Holy Prophet himself had facts recorded. The pardon granted to Suraqa bin Malak was in writing, the *Truce of Hudaibiyya* was written by Hazrat Ali; and letters were sent by the Holy Prophet to the Chosroes of Persia, to Heraclius of Constantinople, to the Negus of Abyssinia, to Maqauqus of Egypt, and to other Kings and Rulers of adjoining countries, inviting them to accept Islam.

Bukhari records that in the year of the conquest of Makka, the Holy Prophet delivered a Friday Sermon. A Yamanite prayed that a copy of the *Khutba* be given to him. The Holy Prophet ordered accordingly, and this was done. This incident shows that the Companions had wonderful memories and, secondly, that the Sayings were being recorded.

I have already mentioned that the Holy Quran contains some “allegorical” verses. The Holy Prophet used to explain them, and time and again he directed that his Sayings should be repeated and reported to those who were not present. Many a time he used to repeat his Sayings till everyone understood him perfectly. Bukhari records that if Hazrat Ayesha could not follow any Saying of the Holy Prophet, she used to request him to repeat it again and again.

As a safeguard against wrong or false reports of the *Hadith*, the Holy Prophet said:

Be careful of (narrating) my Traditions, except what you know. Whoso imputes falsehood to me intentionally, let him know that his abode is Fire.³

And again:

Whoso narrates from me a *Hadith*, knowing that it is false, he is then of the liars.⁴

From these two Sayings it has been inferred by some Christian writers that false traditions were being attributed to the Holy Prophet during his life-time. This assertion has no foundation and, in spite of repeated challenges by Muslims, no one has yet been able to produce or prove a single *Hadith* which may even be alleged to have been falsely reported, repeated or recorded in the life-time of the Holy Prophet. No, the object of these Sayings was to restrain Muslims from following the wrong ways of

1. *Tirmizi*, 14 : 218.

2. *Bukhari*, 6 : 39.

3. *Ibn-i-Majah*, I : 4.

4. *Ibid.*, I : 4.

Christians and Jews who had attributed sayings to Jesus and other Prophets which he or they had never said. These two Sayings of the Holy Prophet should be read in the light of the following Saying:

There *will* be narrators reporting *Hadith* from me, so judge by the Quran, if a report agrees with the Quran, accept it; otherwise reject it.

I have already stated that during the life-time of the Holy Prophet the *Hadith*, apart from stray records, were not recorded collectively in any book. For diverse reasons: for example, the death of the Holy Prophet and most of his Companions, and the spread of Islam to other countries, a necessity was felt that all *Hadith* should be reduced to writing. There was yet another reason. After the death of the Holy Prophet, disputes which came for decision before the Caliphs had to be decided in the light of the Holy Quran and the *Hadith*. This served a double purpose: firstly, trustworthiness of a Tradition was tested and established, and secondly its knowledge was transmitted to many others. It was for these reasons that Caliph Umar Bin Abdul-Aziz, who flourished in the end of the first century of the Hijra, directed Abu Bakr bin Hazm, the Governor of Madina, and the Governors of other provinces, to have the *Sunna* and *Hadith* collected and reduced to writing, and to teach them in gatherings. This was the time when *the Tabi'in*, Successors to the Companions of the Holy Prophet, were still alive. But the real reason which necessitated the issue of this order was that it was considered imperative that the knowledge of the *Hadith* should be preserved and spread; and, to quote this Caliph himself: "I fear the loss of the knowledge and the death of them that possess it;" and not, as some Christians allege, that false traditions were being introduced. Up to this time no such question had arisen.

In these circumstances, and before the close of the first century of the Hijra, Muslim scholars had devoted their lives to the collection of the *Hadith*. They travelled from city to city, from village to village, from tribe to tribe, over the whole Muslim world, and sought out by personal enquiry from among the few surviving Companions and their Successors, every Tradition and reduced it to writing. The task thus begun continued to be vigorously prosecuted and saw its perfection before the middle of the third century.

The first three compilations of the *Hadith* were prepared by Imam Abdul Malak ibn Abdul Aziz bin Jurajj, Rabi ibn Suhaib and Said ibn Abi Aruba, all of whom died about the middle of the second century. Then came Imam Malik ibn Anas who wrote his famous *Mu'atta*. These and other books were written at different places — in Makka, Madina, Cairo, Yaman, Kufa, Basra, Wasil, Khorasan, etc. But in all of them the Traditions preached and preserved in those places only were mostly recorded. Then followed the *Musnad* of Imam Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Hanbal (164 A.H.—241 A.H.)

I now take up the question of perverted or forged traditions. In the course of political strife and rivalry between the Alids and the Abbasids on the one hand and the

Umayyads on the other, some forged traditions were introduced with a view to win over neutral Muslims to the rival parties. Thus sayings were attributed to the Holy Prophet which were meant to disgrace the names of the forefathers of the Umayyads or exalt the progenitors of the Alids or Abbasids and vice versa. The Abbasids were installed or, rather, they supplanted the Alids in the Caliphate in the 132nd year of the Hijra, and with the subsequent growth of their political power certain unscrupulous Abbasid Caliphs had traditions forged to suit their needs of the day. This brought about a general upheaval among the traditionists who, therefore, made extensive researches and prepared compilations of all authentic Traditions. Thus Imam Muhammad bin Ismail, otherwise known as Bukhari (194 A.H. to 256 A.H.), his disciple Muslim (204 A.H.—261 A.H.), Abu Daud (203 A.H.—275 A.H.), Ibn Majah (209 A.H.—275 A.H.), Tirmizi (209 A.H.—279 A.H.), and Al Nisai (214 A.H.—303 A.H.) made separately the compilations bearing their respective names. Collectively they are known as the *Sihah Sitta*, the Six Sound Books. The first two are the most authentic, for Bukhari and Muslim travelled all over Muslim countries collecting, checking and verifying the various Traditions. These two traditionists, in particular, were known for their piety and independence of character; and they did not spare even the Caliphs, the Governors, or other high officials. They were persecuted and had to leave their homes for their independence of views. In spite of these persecutions, they would not and did not give up their labour of love. They made every effort to collect only the authentic Traditions. Speaking of *Sahih Bukhari* the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* says:

Bukhari undertook a research into the then *Hadith* with the painstaking accuracy of a modern writer.¹

I have already explained how some traditions were forged by or under the order of some of the Abbasid Caliphs. This happened about the middle of the second century. It was really to counteract these mischievous but stupid acts that Bukhari and others had to prepare their compilations.

These compilations are accepted by Muslims, and are recognized invariably by all European writers as authentic. Sprenger while discussing the Traditions says that “although the nearest view of the Prophet which can be obtained is at a distance of one hundred years, and although this long vista is formed of a medium exclusively Mohammedan, yet it can be shown to have been achromatic.” Even a bigoted Christian like Sir William Muir had to admit:

There is no reason to doubt that the collectors were sincere in doing that which they professed to do. It may well be admitted that they sought out in good faith from all the traditions actually correct, inquired carefully into the authorities on which they rested, and recorded them with scrupulous accuracy . . . There is no reason to suppose that they at all tampered with the Traditions themselves.²

1. *Ency. of Islam* : Art, *Hadis*, 191.

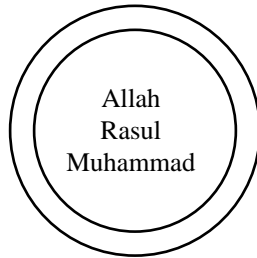
2. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 43-44.

The precautions adopted by these collectors were unique and extraordinary. Among the rules followed by them in collecting the Traditions were:

1. A Tradition opposed to known facts was rejected.
2. A Tradition which was contrary to the teachings of the Holy Quran, or the teachings of the Holy Prophet, was rejected.
3. A Tradition against reason or known principles of law was rejected.
4. A Tradition which ought to have been known generally and acted upon and yet was unknown and not acted upon was discarded.
5. The Tradition must record some Saying or action of the Holy Prophet.
6. Traditions with a non-Arabic style were rejected.
7. Each of the narrators must have been:
 - (a) at the time he heard the Tradition, of an age at which he was capable of understanding it;
 - (b) a person known for his piety, virtue, honesty and learning;
 - (c) a person known to have possessed a good memory.
8. Each of the narrators must never have told a lie, committed a crime, or made any mistake or blunder.
9. There must be a complete chain of the names of the narrators (*isnad*) from the last to the Holy Prophet.

Thus by following these rules they established three categories: (1) *Sahih* (sound), those which were absolutely faultless and authentic and in whose *isnad* (chain of narrators) there was no *illa* (flaw); (2) *Hasan* (good or approved) were those which were not absolutely faultless or in which the *isnad* were not complete; and (3) *Za'if*, which were weak in authenticity. In Bukhari and Muslim only *Sahih* Traditions were recorded. The number of Traditions from which selection was made, or even those selected, was large. But it must be remembered that the same Traditions had been reported by different sets of narrators and that numerous Traditions were recorded under four or five or more different heads according to their contents. The precautions taken by the Holy Prophet, his Companions and Successors and finally by the Compilers of the *Sihah Sitta* are, in themselves, a guarantee of the correctness of their texts and origin. But if any proof is necessary it can be found in the letters of the Holy Prophet which he had sent to the various Kings of adjoining countries and to which I have already referred. These letters were written after the *Truce of Hudaibiyya* in the 6th year of the Hijra, and they have been quoted *verbatim* in Bukhari and other books of *Hadith*. These Traditions state that Hatib Ibn Abi Balta'ah took and presented this letter to Maqauqus of Egypt and also personally explained to him the mission of the

Holy Prophet. The Maqauqus took the letter and after some discussion, which need not be repeated here, placed it in a casket which was sealed and made over to the State Treasurer for safe custody. In 1858 some French travellers unearthed the original letter from a tomb attached to a convent in Upper Egypt. Its authenticity and genuineness have been admitted by Dr. Badger and many other famous archaeologists. It was subsequently removed to Ottoman custody to Constantinople. Its *facsimile* was published in *The Islamic Review*.¹ On comparison it was found to be word for word the same as recorded in the *Hadith*. One thing more, there are five different *Hadith* on record which state that a special seal of the Holy Prophet was made for sealing these letters, and that it read: *Muhammad Rasul Allah*, Muhammad, the Messenger of God—inscribed in three lines thus:²



And the seal on the recovered letter is exactly the same. If we bear in mind that the discovery was not made till 1858 and that the Traditions were recorded at the latest in the beginning of the third century of Hijra, a difference of over 800 years, the authenticity of the Traditions becomes established without a shadow of doubt. Similarly, the letter written to Munzar, the ruler of Yaman, has also been preserved. It is in the possession of the head of the Ayyubi family, the family of Sultan Salah-ud-Din Ayyubi, the Great Saladin, of the Crusades' fame. The late Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din went specially to Damascus in September 1924 to compare this letter with the *facsimile* of the letter addressed to Maqauqus.³ He found the two letters to be in the same handwriting and their contents, with the exception of the name of the addressee and the details of his subjects, to be the same. The letter to Heraclius is also, apart from the *Hadith*, known to history, but unfortunately, it was lost during the Crusades. Sir William Muir while referring to these letters and the replies received, as mentioned in the Traditions, styled them as apocryphal.⁴ But he published his *Life of Mohammad* in 1861 and he must have been ignorant of the discovery of 1858. This clearly shows that he was out to condemn everything Islamic without justification.

In this connection, I may also refer to two other Sayings of the Holy Prophet. He is reported to have said that Muslims would be defeated at the hands of Turks and would be turned out bag and baggage, and that Constantinople would be reconquered

1. *The Islamic Review*, Vol. 5, No. 1.

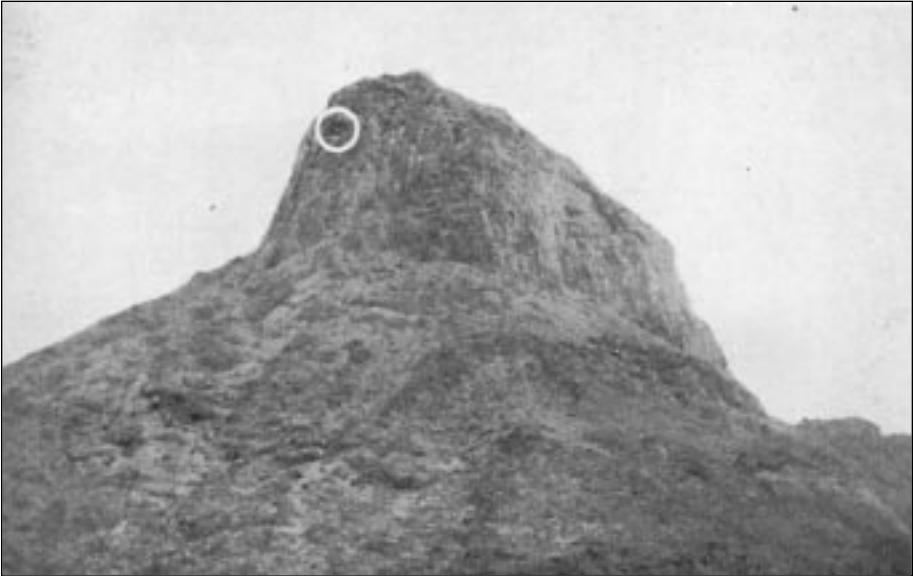
2. To be read upwards.

3. *The Islamic Review*, Vol. 5, 52.

4. Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 396.

by Muslims. These Traditions, I would like to point out again, were written at the latest in the beginning of the third century of the Hijra. At that time the Turks were nowhere in prominence; and Constantinople was in the possession of a Christian King. Yet, Chengez Khan did defeat the Muslims; and, in 1453 C.E., *i.e.*, about five hundred years after the Traditions had been recorded, Muslims did reconquer Constantinople. These prophetic utterances, had they not been from the lips of a Divinely inspired Prophet, could never have been made and much less so literally fulfilled.

In conclusion, I must mention that, unlike the Gospels, the Holy Quran is till today in its pristine purity and the *Hadith* are a correct record of the Sayings and *Sunna* of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him!) I have discussed the Islamic Sources to show that, unlike the Christian Sources, we can accept their authenticity without hesitation. These Sources deal with the life and death of Jesus and can serve as a guide in coming to a proper conclusion.



Ghar-i-Hira (Cave of Hira)
(See page 56)