

B-IS-M-I-'LLAH-I-'R-RAHMAN-I-'R- RAHEEM

CHHINDWARA, C.P.,

24th February, 1918.

MY DEAR MIRZA YAQUB BEG,

I have to commence this letter with profuse apologies for being so late in acknowledging your most precious gifts on Shaukat's behalf and my own. Need I assure you that you could not have sent to us anything more acceptable than the beautiful copies of the Holy Qur-án rendered into English by my learned and revered namesake, Maulana Mohammad Ali Saheb. I had read the specimen pages in the ISLAMIC REVIEW, that welcome reminder of our dear brave Khwaja's mission in Europe, and I was anxiously awaiting the announcement that copies could be had in India, or even in England. When the Indian papers first

ISLAMIC REVIEW

published the announcement so anxiously and eagerly awaited, I asked Shaukat to write at once to you to send us two copies per V.P.P. He was just about to write to you when on a Friday the two copies, so elegantly printed and bound, reached us. I took them to the Mosque to show them not only to Shaukat, who had just preceded me thither, but also to other Musalmans here, and I can assure you they gave us all a pleasure that nothing could equal. I would have written to thank you for the rich gift that very day, but, as you had asked me to express my opinion also on this great achievement, I put off even thanking you. However, I have been once more laid up with fever since then, and if I wait till I have read the translation and the notes through, you may have to wait very long. So accept this letter merely by way of apology for the delay in acknowledging the receipt of the two copies, and partly as an expression of our great gratitude.

Nevertheless, I feel I must express the opinion formed from an examination of the outward form of the publication, the beautiful printing, the excellent India paper, and the sumptuous limp green Morocco binding, and the several exquisite *tughras*, all indicating the love and affection that those who undertook this great task feel for the greatest Book of all ages and climes. I pride myself on being a bit of a connoisseur in these matters, as you perhaps know, and of course I have the greatest possible love and affection for the Great Book, and so naturally I examined this edition with critical and jealous eyes. You will therefore be glad to know that I *am amply satisfied!* This is no empty compliment; but a very jealous man's verdict of the love and affection shown by another for what he himself loves so ardently and dearly. The edition on thicker paper and with stiffer card-board and leather binding is also extremely good, and both were necessary.

As for the contents, I have gone through the Preface, and here and there through some introductory notes prefacing the various chapters and footnotes, and have, of course, glanced through the sectional headings and the index, and greatly admire the general arrangement. As for the English rendering, I am impressed so far as I have read with the simplicity and precision and the adherence to the text which indicate the reverence due to God's own Word from a true believer. I am a slow reader of things of such tremendous import, and it will take me some time yet to go carefully through the whole Book. But I do not pretend to be a scholar of Arabic, or a theologian, and whatever opinion I shall express hereafter will also be the opinion of a layman, and you must accept it for what it is worth. But the great thing is that the great task has been accomplished, and there now exists in at least one European

B-ISM-I-'LLAH-I-'R-RAHMAN-I-'R-RAHEEM

language a rendering of the holy Qur-án done by a true believer and not by a scoffer, by one who believes every word of the Book to be God's own, every word to be true and full of light, every word consistent with what has gone before and comes after, every word capable of easy interpretation, and not a rendering done by one whose sole object is to present the Holy Book to Europe as a concoction of an ignorant rhapsodist masquerading as a prophet, and exposing a voluptuary's character and tendencies and an adventurer's opportunism. The difference is apparent on every page, and Europe will not, I hope, be slow to see it. Believe me, Europe will be a changed Europe after this war, and there are already a thousand indications for those who know its ways and inclinations, and modes of thought, all significant of the coming great and tremendous disclaimer of its religious ideas and conceptions in the past. Christianity as variously understood by the various so-called "national" churches obviously did not prevent this awful cataclysmic war, nor did the Sermon on the Mount even soften the acerbities and harshnesses that cannot ordinarily be altogether eliminated from war. What is more significant, the Church in each Christian belligerent country blessed the banners of the national armies and called upon Christ to assist them in winning the war for their "righteous cause." All this makes one pause and think, could all this be Christianity, could any of this be Christ's teachings (on whom be peace)? Could hundreds of millions of educated Europeans remain content with a faith with such varying and apparently uncertain interpretations? Could they continue to spend millions upon millions for Church establishments that could so little affect the politics of Europe in the direction of Christ's teaching? Could a creed that included among the believers the singers of Hymns of Hate as well as Conscientious Objectors continue to satisfy the conscience of Europe? Well, as I said before, to me there appear a thousand indications that Christian Europe will take stock of its Churches and its creeds and its consciences soon after the war, and the spiritual change that would come over Europe will make the tremendous political changes that seem foreshadowed small and insignificant by comparison. European spiritual thought is already—to use an expression of the old Comrade—"drifting into part." But if we, the Musalmans, were created for a definite purpose, as we have been told so many times in the Qur-án that we were, then we shall have to pilot Europe into the safe haven of Islam, where nations with their Churches shall exist no more than the old barbaric tribes with their separate gods, where there shall be neither black nor white nor yellow, but one people serving the One and Only God; where there shall be neither peerage, nor gentry, nor labour, but

ISLAMIC REVIEW

all servitors of one Lord ; where there shall be neither monarchy nor aristocracy, nor even democracy, but an all-pervading theocracy ; where there shall be neither " tariff wars," nor political spheres of " interest " and of " influence," nor protectorates and dependencies, but God's universal kingdom, the world-state in which He is Emperor and Pope and Parliament and all ; and there shall be eternal peace, that is Islam, the self-surrender of free souls to one divine purpose, His eternal and willing service, sleeping and waking, sitting, standing, and lying. Believe me, this is no rhapsody of one whose brain has been unhinged by three years of a cruel incarceration in a wilderness. Forcibly freed from a thousand distractions, my mind has been thrown in this solitude on its own resources, and constant contemplation has provided its own compensations. Like a spectator who proverbially sees most of the game, I have watched Europe as well as Asia with the necessary detachment for forming correct views, and without any optimistic bias *I clearly foresee that the future is spelt with I-S-L-A-M. Yes, Iqbal foresaw it ten years ago*, and as recently as only five years ago he emphasized it again in his inimitable manner, when he said :—

“ Ankh jo kuchh dekhti hai lab pe a sakta nahin
Mahv-i-hairat hoon ke dunya kya se kya hojagi.”

Well, this English rendering of the Holy Qur-án, the Gospel of Service of the One and Only Ruler of all Creation, is a preparation for the tremendous change that will come upon the world after this war, and if I live through it I pray to God to accept me as a humble servitor when I may roam about the world sharing with it the inestimable possession of Islam, and preach the dedication of our bodies and souls, and all we have and are, to our Lord and Master. The dear Khwaja is already among the *sabiqoon-al-awwaloon*, and it will be my great privilege to follow in his footsteps. This great ambition has consumed all other petty ambitions and aspirations, and I only await the opportunity to commence. In a limited way I do not shrink from doing my clear duty here, and in the holy month of Rabi-ul-Awwal I have for two years been speaking to local audiences on the life and teachings of the Holy Prophet, on whom be God's benedictions and peace. But the " fine frenzy " of the wandering preacher—a phrase that fits the true preacher even more than the poet—demands a wider field, though I do not ask for cultured audiences only, and I hope I shall not need the paraphernalia of a " missionary organization." Islam was spread by those who were impelled by the tumult within rather than supported by a methodical organization. I do not know whether I shall survive this war ; for my illness has now reduced my vitality to almost the lowest limits,

and I am now a prey to recurring periods of ill-health, which all betoken the approaching end. But whether I survive it or not, He who judges us by the intentions of the heart, whispered in the utmost privacy of the soul, as well as by the deeds accomplished in the sight of the whole world, will no doubt appraise my firm and honest resolve at its true value. May that value suffice to counter-balance at least a day's item of sinning in a far too sinful and wasted life.

Well, I must now take leave of you. If you see Maulvi Mohammad Ali thank him for me as a Moslem who feels proud of his devoted and fruitful labours, and shares with him the privilege of at least the most beloved of names in the entire world. " Bulbul hameen ki qafia-i-gul shawad baṣ ast."

If you write to my stalwart Khwaja send him my kisses for his shaggy old beard. My best salams to you and also Shaukat's.

Yours very sincerely and gratefully,

MOHAMMAD ALI.

P.S.—By the way, offer a suggestion from me to Maulvi M.A. In the next volume let him also include a short history of the Prophet and of Islam in the early days, arranged *purely from the verses of the Qur-án*, and also a summary of the various *Qasas as told in the Qur-án*, and a geographical Note.