



MOHAMMED AND HIS RELIGION.

MECCA, the birth-place of Mohammed, is a wasted town of Arabia, situated in a barren, stony valley, about fifty miles from the eastern shore of the Red Sea. For ages previous to his appearance, it had been a place of much celebrity and resort, as being the principal seat of the religion of the country. Here stood the Caaba, the great national temple, to which people resorted from all parts of the country for the worship of their idols.

The Arabs were divided into sections or tribes; and that tribe was deemed the most honorable which held the keys of the sacred temple, and superintended the national worship. This honor, at the time of Mohammed's birth, and long previous, belonged to the Koreish tribe, which, on this account, was regarded as one of high distinction. In this tribe, and in one of its most celebrated families, Mohammed made his appearance, A. D. 569. He was the son of Abdallah and of his wife Amina who, though belonging to an illustrious house, were themselves poor. They died while Mohammed was still a child, and he was left to the care of his grandfather, Abdol Motallub. Only two years later, Motallub died, and the child was committed to the care of an uncle, Abu Taleb. He seems to have been a promising child, comely in features, bright in intellect, and active and enterprising in habits and character. His uncle treated him kindly and generously. He took him on trading expeditions into Syria, Egypt and other

countries, by which means he became acquainted, not only with the caravan business, but with the habits, customs and religions of other nations. He associated much with Jews, and learned their views of God and his worship; and also with Christians of different sects, more especially the Nestorians. The religion both of Jews and Christians was at this time sadly corrupted, retaining but a semblance of its pristine purity and excellence; but such as it was, Mohammed saw it, and doubtless made many inquiries respecting it.

It is singular that, in these trading expeditions, in which Mohammed gained much reputation and had great success, he never learned to read or write. These were probably regarded as menial occupations, and were entrusted chiefly to servants.

In these years of youth, Mohammed also assumed the character of a soldier. He served under his uncle, who commanded the warriors of his tribe in their raids upon some of the other tribes. They returned victorious, and the experience which Mohammed gained tended to prepare him for more important military expeditions at a later period.

After separating from his uncle, Mohammed entered the service of a rich widow in Mecca, whose name was Kadijah. He conducted her business with so much skill and success that she trusted every thing to him, and after a time consented to marry him. She was older than he, but the connection seems to have been one of mutual affection, and of great importance to him. It raised him from a state of dependence to one of wealth and influence. He was a faithful husband to Kadijah, took no other wife so long as she lived, and they were blest with several children. A daughter named Fatima—the only one who lived to maturity—was married to his cousin Ali, who was among his earliest and most faithful followers.

During these years of prosperity, the thoughts of Mohammed seem to have been much exercised on the religious state of his country. By means of his intercourse with Jews and Christians, he had learned something of their religion, and was able to compare it with his own. He knew that he was a descendant of Abraham in the line of Ishmael, and that he and his other patriarchal ancestors were the worshippers of one God; and he seriously contemplated a reformation among his countrymen. He wished to abolish the worship of idols, and restore the lost religion of the patriarchs. He dwelt upon this subject until his mind, under the weight of it, became diseased. This is evident from his habit of retiring more or less, every year, into a cave in one of the mountains which surrounded Mecca, and spending much time in meditation and prayer. He was sometimes found in the cave prostrate upon his face, engaged in the intensest devotions, and insensible

to objects around him. He would sometimes fall into fits, resembling convulsions, in which he would swoon away, foam at the mouth, and perspiration would stream from his forehead in the coldest days. The disease at length culminated in a vision. He saw, or seemed to see, the angel Gabriel come down to him, and make to him direct revelations from God.

The night when this occurred, called Al Kadr, is one of great significance with Musselmen. At this time the entire Koran is said to have descended from the seventh to the lowest heaven, to be thence revealed, by Gabriel, in successive portions, as occasion required. The Koran has an entire chapter on this event, which is as follows :

In the name of the most merciful God; verily, we sent down the Koran in the night of Al Kadr. And who shall make thee understand how excellent the night of Al Kadr is? This night is better than a thousand months. Therein do the angels descend, and the spirit Gabriel also, by the permission of their Lord, with his decrees concerning every matter. It is peace until the rising of the morn. Chapter xviii.

The appearance of the angel on this memorable occasion, as described by Mohammed, was one of supernal glory. The light beaming from his body was too dazzling for mortal eyes to behold. The prophet fainted under it; nor was it till Gabriel had assumed a human form that he could venture to look upon him. The angel then cried aloud, "Oh, Mohammed! Thou art the apostle of God, and I am the angel Gabriel. Read this," he cried, as he gave his message into the prophet's hand. "I cannot read," replied Mohammed. "But you must read," rejoined the angel. Divinely assisted, Mohammed was then enabled to read his call to a ministry in the earth; and the angel, having accomplished his mission, majestically retired and ascended to heaven.

Mohammed hastened to communicate the news of his vision to his wife, who, after a little hesitation, embraced the message, and in a holy ecstasy exclaimed, "By him in whose hands my soul is, I believe my husband, and trust that he is to be the prophet of his nation!"

She had a cousin residing with her named Waraka, who called himself a Christian, who was able to read and write, and had some knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures. To him she communicated the message she had received from her husband, and he also embraced it. These were the first two, and for a time the only believers in Mohammed's call to be a prophet in the earth.

It has long been debated among Christians, whether Mohammed

was a fanatic or an impostor; in other words, whether he honestly believed that he had a call from God in the manner above described, or whether the story was fabricated for a purpose. My own opinion is that he was honest, at least in the early part of his career; that he was a deluded fanatic, and not a wilful deceiver. My reasons for this opinion are the following:

In the first place, he had no inducement, at the time of his vision, to enter upon a course of deception, such as has been supposed. He was happily settled in life, held an honorable position in society, and had all the wealth which his circumstances required. And why should he hazard all this by entering upon a course of social and religious reformation, which he well knew must expose him to violent opposition, and perhaps to death?

Then his habits of seclusion, prostration, self-mortification, and his fits, all indicate mental disease, and confirm the supposition of fanaticism. The visions which followed are just what might have been expected under the circumstances.

Also his constant and most solemn asseverations of honesty and truth, made under the most trying circumstances, entitled him to be believed. He was constantly urged by his most powerful friends to desist. He was flattered, entreated, threatened, persecuted even to the hazard of his life, but all to no purpose. He constantly affirmed, and that too without the least hesitation, that he had seen the vision, and received from Gabriel the messages which he had disclosed.

Are we then to believe that he had actually received these revelations? No; but that he *thought he had*. They were real to *him*, and he announced them, as he honestly supposed they had been delivered. His case is very similar to that of the late Baron Swedenborg, which occurred a thousand years later. Swedenborg really supposed that he had seen the Lord and his angels, and that he was commissioned to introduce a new dispensation of religious truth, as distinct from the gospel, as that is from the Mosaic law. He was undoubtedly honest in his pretensions; but this is no reason why they should be received. It was the case with both these fanatics (as it will be with all others) that their angels advanced the same thoughts and opinions which possessed their own diseased minds at the time. Swedenborg's angels taught the same philosophy and theology which he had inculcated long before. And so Mohammed had pondered a reformation in the religion of his country till his mind had become heated and burdened with it; and when Gabriel made his appearance, he announced the same cogitations and conclusions with which he had been so long occupied.