

the tribe Korlish and to the family of Hashem, who had the title of "Princes of Mecca" and hereditary guardians of the Kaaba. All this notwithstanding, Mohammed was poor, and after the death of his father, Abdallak, was handed over to a Bedouin nurse, with whom he remained for two years in the wilderness. The boy was, however, afflicted with sickness. He had sometimes fits, which were thought to be caused by evil spirits. In order to come out of the reach of these he was again brought to Mecca. In the year 577 his mother, Aminah, died, and the little Mohammed was now conveyed first to his grandfather, Abd-el-Mut alib, and then, when this worthy gentleman died, to his uncle, Abu Talib. This last one he sometimes accompanied on his travels, and at other times he earned a living as a cowboy or shepherd in the vicinity of Mecca.

But fate smiled upon him. He obtained employment from a wealthy widow named Chidja, who conducted the business left by her husband. In his new position the future prophet had opportunities to make business trips to Syria and the southern parts of Arabia; and so well did he acquit himself of his work, that the widow rewarded him with her hand and heart, and everything pertaining thereto. Thus Mohammed became at once wealthy and occupied a respected position in Mecca.

Like many a great genius, Mohammed was of melancholy disposition. He loved solitude and retired very often to a place where he could meditate and contemplate. A cave in the mountain Hira, near Mecca, was often visited by him for such purposes. Here he began to receive visions and revelations, which were often accompanied by paralytic fits, a weakness which never left the prophet during his lifetime. Here he conceived the grand idea of reforming the religion of his countrymen and of cleansing it from gross errors.

The inhabitants of the Arabian peninsula, the Arabs, are descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's son with Hagar. Without doubt, their religion was originally nearly identical with that of the great patriarch, but at the time of Mohammed the people had almost entirely forgotten the traditions once handed down from Hagar and Ishmael. Sabaeism (the worshipping of the stars) and even lower forms of idolatry had found their way among the people, and had their centrum in Mecca. Here was the sanctuary, the Kaaba, which according to tradition had been founded by Ishmael himself. Hundreds of idols had seats of honor in this tower-like building; and here was the mysterious black stone which is still an object of the greatest reverence, as Mohammed had wisdom enough not to interfere with this building any further than to cleanse it from its idols. Hence Mecca, with its Kaaba and black stone (*Hadjar al-aswad*) is yet the central point of Islam.

Mohammed was forty years old when he first publicly announced his new principles. It was his idea

to cleanse the religious rites and traditions prevalent among the Arabs, and to leave them a religion in every respect identical with that of Abraham. His object was certainly so far good, and this explains perhaps why Islam in so many respects resembles Judaism and Christianity. Some have charged the founder with deliberate fraud in mixing Christianity and Judaism together with his own ideas, in order to be able to produce a new religious system. Nothing, however, substantiates this supposition. It was as far from Mohammed's mind to produce something as it was from Luther's. He wanted, like the real reformers, to bring forth again the old, long forgotten standards of perfection. This was his real aim. If he failed, if his opus became a *missum compositum*, well, which of the reformers was not more or less a failure?

It speaks well for Mohammed, for his moral character and sincerity, that among his first faithful followers was his wife, Chudidja, and others who best knew his private life. That he, as little as other reformers, went free from persecutions show that human nature is the same everywhere. In the shade of the wings of the blessed American eagle and on the burning sands of Arabia.

More than once his enemies laid plans to take his life, and he found himself under the necessity of — to use a modern expression — "taking the underground." But while in exile he labored faithfully in the work before him, and among the pilgrims who yearly came to Mecca he found many followers, particularly among the inhabitants of Medina, and these finally prevailed upon him to come and take up his residence in their midst. This flight to Medina the so-called Hedjrah (or Begira) took place on July 12th, 622, and from this event the Moslems count the commencement of their religion and the commencement of the Mohammedan era.

In Medina, Mohammed organized his followers and built the first mosque, and from now on the city was *par excellence*, the capital of the prophet and the centrum of Islam, a dignity which again, a little later, was returned to Mecca.

From Medina, Islam spread very quickly. It was announced as a commandment from God that this religion should be spread by the help of the sword; in blood and flame the Word should be given to men. Mecca was first besieged, and, after several struggles, conquered. The idols were now destroyed, but the Kaaba was declared to be the sanctuary of the one God and the true faith. An attempted invasion of Persia resulted in total defeat, but in other directions the sword of Mohammed was victorious, and at the death of this wonderful reformer the whole of Arabia had accepted Islam. The prophet died on June 8, 632, just as he had returned to Medina from a pilgrimage to Mecca. He left behind him nine lawful wives. Two had already preceded him to the heavenly paradise.

Concerning the visions and

ascension to heaven of this Oriental prophet, we are told the following: He had his first vision on Mount Hira, one hour's journey from Mecca. As he was engaged in prayer and meditation a voice was heard: "Cry!" and he said, "What shall I cry?" Upon which came the answer, "Cry out, in thy name, O Lord!" These words are the first of the Koran, although first found in the 98th chapter of its present edition. As soon as Mohammed awoke from his ecstasies he felt as if a book had been written in his heart. His wife, whom he always kept posted on his experiences, on hearing this, exclaimed: "Rejoice, dear husband! He in whose hands is the fate of Chaddjah is my witness that thou shalt become the prophet of this people." It seems from this that Mohammed was not only himself a prophet, but that he was fortunate enough to have a partner who was also in for prophesying. As the prophet, some time after this, in great despair, would throw himself down a precipice on the mount, he saw Gabriel standing at the end of the horizon, and the great archangel cried with a loud voice and said: "I am Gabriel, and thou art Mohammed." From this time revelations followed each other with few intervals for about twenty years. When he had his revelations he roared like a camel, his eyes rolled wildly about in their sockets and shone like embers. He sweat over his whole body.

Mohammed's ascension to heaven is also thus described: Gabriel took his heart and washed it in the well Zenzem, filled it with faith and knowledge and put it back in its place. After this the prophet mounted Borak (the lightning) and rode to the temple place in Jerusalem. From here he went to heaven on Jacob's ladder. In the second heaven the two travelers, Gabriel and Mohammed, found Christ and John the Baptist, in the third Joseph and David, in the fourth Enoch, in the fifth Moses, who wept bitterly when he saw that Mohammed was to come higher. In the last heaven was Abraham. Then came the tree where Gabriel lives, and from this Mohammed went on still further, until he came as far as within two bowshot lengths of the throne of God. Here a great silence prevailed. Nothing was heard but the pen with which the Word of God is written in the books of fate. (Comp. Emmanuel Deutsch, *Der Islam*.)

I do not think it absolutely necessary, as do Catholic and Protestant writers generally, to class Mohammed among the religious scoundrels of the world, to call him the false prophet or the son of perdition, thereby condemning him and his followers without mercy to the bottomless pit. There is nothing that I know of, either in the character or history of Mohammed, nor in the Word of God, to warrant such a judgment.

Mohammed undoubtedly had visions and revelations. The evidence of this is, to my mind, sufficient. His sincerity, and the moral charac-