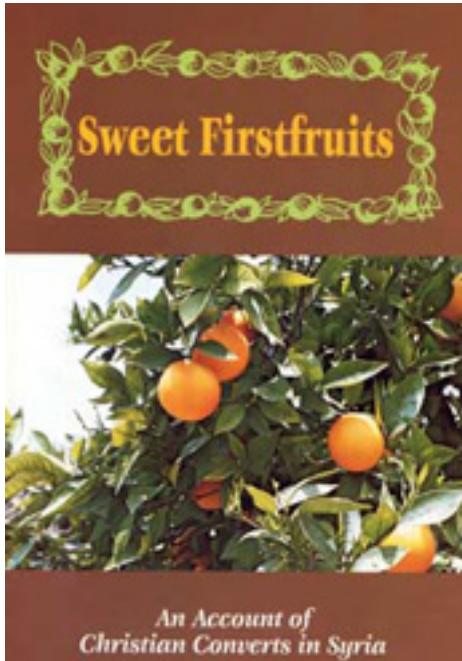


SWEET FIRSTFRUITS

An Account of Christian Converts in Syria

W.M.

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1. Forward

Praise be to the Heavenly King, who has revealed the truth to us in the Holy Scriptures -- a guide unto His people, and a light to show forth His glory!

I have written this story with a view to unveil hidden truths and precious mysteries by way of debate and dialogue. The tale makes no claim to literary excellence, but I trust that the method chosen may, with divine blessing, approve itself to the thoughtful and impartial reader, of whom I beg that he will treat with patience whatever is feeble or imperfect. I pray to God that the story may benefit both him that reads and him that hears the same. The Lord is my strength and Helper; to Him be praise now and for evermore!

W. M., Edinburgh, 1893

2. The Letter

There lived at Aleppo a Christian, Yohanna Gheiyur by name. Between him and a certain citizen of Damascus, a Sheikh called Abd ul-Hady, there grew up a close and lasting friendship. They used often to discuss questions bearing on their respective religions; and, as a result, the Sheikh one day received from his friend an earnest and well-reasoned letter: *Divine Truth in the Book of the Living God, and the Christian Faith Set Forth Therein, the Only True Religion.* While deep in study, Abd ul-Hady was visited by a pious and learned Sheikh, Ali Omar, whom he asked to read it, and advise whether it should be answered, and if so, how. Ali found the arguments so hard to answer that he declared himself unable, without the advice of fit and learned friends, to say whether any reply should be given. "And after all," he added, "two are better than one; what do you think?" Abd ul-Hady agreed, and so Ali at once invited a learned company of friends to come for that purpose to his house. Some were Sheikhs, some Sayyids (Islamic chiefs or leaders), and two Effendies (Arabs or Turks of noble birth); in all, with himself and a friend, twelve in number. So when, after supper, they had assembled in his private chamber, he explained his purpose, begging them to listen to the letter which his friend had received in support of the Christian religion, and thereafter to advise how it should be dealt with. Whereupon, at his motion, Abd ul-Hady arose and read it in their hearing.

The letter is of considerable length; it will suffice briefly to summarise the contents. (The arguments are all brought out in the later discussions, so that it would be unprofitable to give the letter here in full.) Its object is to establish the authority of the

Bible (as borne testimony to by the Qur'an), and of Christianity as based thereon. Holding it reasonable that man should look for a revelation of his Maker's will, the writer proceeds to show how that will was gradually unfolded to a chosen race, and embodied in the Books of Moses; and how, as a result of their apostasies, prophets were sent from time to time to recall the Israelites to the worship of the one true God. Such revelations ceased some four hundred years before the mission of Jesus Christ; and about one hundred years later (that is, about three hundred years before the Christian era) were collected in the form in which we now have them. Their genuineness is confirmed by various arguments: the fulfilment of prophecy, predictions of the Saviour and of His rejections, and the frequent story of the sin and backsliding of the chosen race -- subjects which, had the Israelites been inclined to tamper with their Scriptures, would surely have been removed therefrom. Of the many religions prevalent on the earth there can be but one true religion, as there is but one true God; and for that we must look to His revealed Word. The Hebrew books abound with references to the coming Saviour; and He was expected by the nation, as, for example, in the story of the woman at the well of Samaria. His mission was established by miracles, and His death and resurrection by the testimony of His followers who were threatened with persecution even unto death. The Incarnation, though beyond our reason, is in no way opposed to it; for nature abounds in things we believe, yet cannot understand. As little children take their father's word for things beyond their comprehension, so should man his Heavenly Father's. We must accept with

all humility what He in His word has revealed to us of His own nature.

His friend sent him a couplet by a profane poet, who asked, "How could God suffer, and where was the Father when the Son was crucified?" Such language shows incredible ignorance of what Christianity really teaches. It was in His human nature that Christ died, and His divine nature was not affected (just as the golden tissue remains when a scarf is burned). If the Father, out of infinite compassion, sent the Son to bear our nature, and as predicted in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, to bear our sins, is it for the creature to raise objection? If Divine Justice is satisfied -- as illustrated in Abraham's offering his son, and by the institution of Jewish sacrifices -- should not man be infinitely grateful? Passing over the objections of agnostics, who believe in nothing, and of the great mass of mankind who believe only in the religion they were born and raised in, the writer will address certain objections levelled against the Christian Scriptures. Alleged discrepancies are shown not to touch the essence of the revelation.

The series of books from the beginning to end of the Bible forms an integral development of the divine will. Six centuries after Christ, the Qur'an gave clear testimony to both the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures. Copies of these in the original, and translations into many languages, had by that time spread all over the world, and were in the hands of many conflicting sects, so that alteration since that date is an impossibility. In fact, the Qur'an accuses Jews and Christians, not of tampering with their sacred books, but of neglecting their precepts, and it scolds them in such terms as these: "Oh people of

the Book, you are nothing unless you be grounded on the Torah (Old Testament) and on the Gospel, and that which has been revealed unto you from your Lord" (Sura Al-Ma'ida 5:72).

How then is it possible (thus ends the letter) for you, my friend, without insulting the Qur'an, to cast the Old Testament and Gospel behind your back, seeing that they are the very same Old Testament and Gospel, genuine and unchanged, as were borne testimony to in the seventh century? If you receive the Qur'an, you cannot but accept the Bible. I call upon you to read it as the revelation of God. Admitting it as such, you cannot claim that it was intended only for Jews and Christians. God is one, and His revelation must be equally one -- a manifestation of the divine will for all mankind. Reading the Holy Scriptures, the truth will dawn upon you that, just as there is one sun which illuminates the whole world, even so the Son of Righteousness, the Saviour, is the light for all mankind. And in accord therewith, the divine command runs thus: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." (Mark 16:15)

Presuming on your kindness and love of truth, I have ventured, my friend, to write thus freely to you, and pray that you may find the blessed Gospel to be your guide unto everlasting life.

Your faithful friend, Yohanna Gheiyur

Having finished the reading, Abd ul-Hady sat down, and the company for some minutes remained silent. At last Sheikh Ali said: "My friends, you have heard the letter. What do you think?"

Sayyid Ibrahim answered: "The reasoning is weighty, and the arguments, at first sight, difficult to answer. We need to discuss them one by one, and then we shall be able to say in what way it should be treated."

Thereupon Abd ul-Qadir spoke: "Friend, said he, "the Sayyid is garbling the truth and leading you astray. Though I am the

youngest among you, I warn you not to forget that you are followers of the blessed Prophet and glorious Qur'an." With that, he began praising Islam -- a religion which, for him, provided the only means of salvation; and he warned them to beware of the subtle attempt to undermine their faith. "The honeyed morsel is steeped in poison; away with it," he cried, "if you are true believers!"

The aged Abd ul-Halim, arose then and spoke, leaning on his staff: "Abd ul-Qadir has said nothing wrong about the danger of heresy. But let us not judge hastily by first appearances. Everything red is not a cinder. Jewels may be hid in the sand, and in the clod a precious stone. With Sayyid Ibrahim, I advise that we do not cast the letter aside hastily. It contains no word of abuse against our faith, but rather, words of love and friendship. So, as wise and thinking men, let us study its contents. What is false we shall reject, and if there be in it any truth, we shall accept the same."

Omar Effendi then closed the conference. Agreeing with Abd ul-Halim, he objected to casting the letter aside as unworthy of notice. "Rather," said he, "let us consider it as learned and impartial Muslims should, and then reply to its criticisms. But the day is now far spent, and if it pleases you, we shall end our sitting now, and come together again, when, having had time to ponder over the various arguments, we shall be better able to come to just conclusions."

To this they all agreed. And so, after they had partaken of the refreshments, which Sheikh Ali placed before them, they departed each to his own home.

3. Deep Waters

The reading of the letter had a strange effect upon Suleiman, one of the company. On his way home from the assembly, he was lost in thought, hardly knowing where he went, till his head knocked against the lintel of his door. Entering, he could think of nothing else. Now sitting, now rising, he contemplated thus: "The Qur'an bears testimony to the Torah and to the Gospel; yes, yes; and they cannot have been altered since. Six hundred years after Christ they were attested by the Prophet as the Word of God. So Jesus must have been divine, dying for our sins. Oh Suleiman! What way is there out of this dilemma? Can it be that the Qur'an is not true? Never! That cannot be; and yet it contradicts the Book to which it bears testimony. How can I escape from this maze in which I wander? I must forget it all; and yet I cannot. Ah! What shall I do? I am not clever like the rest. I will go and reveal my doubts in the morning to Sheikh Mahmoud (one of the twelve), if indeed he can help me."

And so he went on all night until daybreak; when, wearied, he went off to sleep. In a couple of hours he awoke, and having first asked God's guidance, went straight away to Mahmoud's house. Shocked at his tired appearance, the Sheikh invited him into his garden, where they seated themselves under a shady tree. Then, with some hesitation, Suleiman began: "I was awake all night, thinking of that letter they had been reading. A voice kept ringing in my ears that it was true. I tried to banish it, but a cord kept seeming to draw me back to the dilemma, till, exhausted, I fell asleep. Upon waking, I said, 'I will go and reveal my thoughts to my friend, and seek for guidance at his

hand.'"

Sheikh Mahmoud, having listened, sat silent for a time.

"My brother," he said, "the matter that has disquieted you is indeed of supreme importance; and, believe me, the anxiety which has kept you awake is a blessing in disguise, for which you may yet thank God. Be comforted, for I myself have passed through the same experience. Will you give an attentive ear to what I now have to say?"

"Good master, say on," replied Suleiman.

"You know the earnestness and devotion with which I used to read the Qur'an, and how it used to move me even to tears. Well then, while thus occupied, I stumbled, as it were, upon a verse in the Sura Al-An'am 6:156, that struck me dumb with astonishment: 'Lest you (Oh people of Mecca) should say, "Truly the book has been revealed unto two peoples before us (that is, Jews and Christians), and we were neglectful of their reading of the same.'" Now, thought I, if this was a rebuke from God against the Meccans for their neglect of reading the Bible, how can we, without reproach, be neglectful of the same? Then, again, this other verse came suddenly upon me: 'If they (Jews and Christians) observe the Torah and the Gospel, and that which has been revealed unto them from their Lord, truly they shall eat (of good things) from above, and from beneath their feet' (Sura Al-Ma'ida 5:75). And yet further: 'Oh you people of the Book! You are not grounded upon anything until you observe the Law (Torah) and the Gospel, and that which has been revealed unto you from your Lord' (Sura Al-Ma'ida 5:77). "

"Pondering over these texts, I marvelled that I had never observed them before; and, longing to see the books that are praised thus in the Qur'an, I searched for them, like a weary traveller for a fountain in the desert. I succeeded at last in buying an Old Testament from a Jew. I hesitated getting the Gospel from any Christian, lest he should have inserted words concerning Christ's divinity and death. But at last I got one at a book depot, and also *A Guide to the Holy Scriptures*, which I borrowed from a friend. Reading these eagerly, I found the Torah and the Gospel to be in fact but one; then, indeed, I understood why, in the Qur'an, they are called the Book -- for they are one in spirit, one in object."

"Comparing the Scriptures with the Qur'an, I found them to agree in certain points, such as where, in the latter, Jesus is called 'the Word of God' and 'a Spirit from Him,' but to differ in others, as in the divinity of Christ, His death and atonement, etc. It distressed me beyond measure, seeing the Old and New Testaments in agreement concerning these doctrines, and yet to find them denied in the Qur'an. For many days I remained downcast and distracted, afraid to let my doubts be known, and fell into a weak and sickly state. At last I made up my mind to visit a learned friend, Sheikh Rashid, to whom I confessed my perplexity which arose out of the fact that, whereas the Qur'an bears witness to the Bible, it contradicts some of its leading doctrines. After a long argument with Rashid, in which I quoted texts from the Qur'an and passages from the Bible (such as Isaiah 53 opposed thereto, the Sheikh frowned upon me as an apostate, and warning me of my danger, stood up to leave. I kissed his

hand, and begging of him still to regard me as a friend, departed, marvelling at the force of prejudice which makes a man cling to what he has been born and brought up in, and blind to all arguments against it."

"After that I retired into my closet, imploring with tears that the Lord would guide me. Thus I continued to read and pray, often in great distress, tossed about like a tiny boat upon the waves, until in Ali's house I heard the letter in company with you. Then arose the dawn upon my heart, which, please God, will shine on unto perfect day."

This discourse, towards the close of which Mahmoud himself was much affected, produced a deep impression on Suleiman, who thanked God that he had been led to one who had passed through such deep waters. Then followed a long conversation, in which Mahmoud answered various difficulties of his friend regarding the alleged discrepancies in the Bible (after which he said there were far more in the Qur'an), showed that none were material, and that a Muslim must accept the Old and New Testaments as they stood in the seventh century, on the testimony of the Qur'an itself. Then they went over the wonderful terms in which Jesus is described in the Qur'an, involving attributes that could apply to none but a divine person.

"Strange," said Mahmoud, "that our learned scholars should not have been struck by this. I have myself read the Qur'an over and over five hundred times and more, yet never thinking of Jesus with a tenth part of the reverence I regarded Muhammad with; and yet He is the Sun (the Qur'an itself being witness) around

whom the prophets revolve as stars. Let us trust Him as our Saviour and Giver of eternal life. But having this faith, my friend, we must boldly claim it in the coming conference, not dogmatically, but bringing it out gradually by questions and discussion."

"And now," he said, "let us call another of our company, Sayyid Omar al-Haris, whom I have known as a thoughtful believer from his childhood, one who has often spoken wisely concerning the Old and New Testaments, that he may stand by us; for a three-strand cord is not easily broken."

So Omar came, and the three having revealed their most secret thoughts, found themselves of one accord and one mind. Omar agreed to be with them in the coming assembly.

"I am but weak in faith and argument," he said, "as you see, compared with those of riper years; but the Lord will be my Helper."

Then they went to their homes. And throughout the week the three met every evening by some hills outside the city, and talked these matters over.

4. Second Conference

At the time appointed, the twelve came together in the house of Sheikh Ali, who after a hearty welcome, opened the conference with a short address.

"We are meeting," he said, "as a little company, seeking, amid the religious strife around us, to find the truth. Muslims are known to debate angrily with Christians, and Christians with Muslims. But let us put bigotry aside and discuss the serious

question before us in a friendly spirit, seeking God's blessing, for His great name's sake."

Then, at the wish of the assembly, the letter was again read, and some took notes. It was agreed to take up the argument point by point. Sheikh Ahmed proposed that the authenticity of the Old Testament should be discussed first. Omar Effendi and Sayyid Ibrahim were chosen as speakers to open the debate on either side.

The debate, accordingly, was opened by Omar, who asked how it was possible for the writer of the letter to hold that the Torah was unchanged when he admitted that there were discrepancies in it. Ibrahim brought various arguments in reply. First, the Old Testament was full of denunciations against the sins and apostasy of the Israelites. Had tempering been possible, such passages would have been the first to be altered by them, as well as the predictions of the coming Saviour. He applied a similar argument to Christians, in regard to passages opposed to such practices as saint worship and the use of images and pictures. Thus the Western Church omitted the Second Commandment from its service and ritual and, to make up the displaced number, divided the tenth into two; but did not venture to touch the text in the Torah itself. The case is similar with the testimony of Muhammad, who always spoke of Jews and Christians as "people of the Book", and of their Book itself as "perfect in all that is excellent" and "a light and a guide" -- language implying its genuineness and authority, and entirely opposed to the accusations which they heard every day around them.

Omar now contended that differences in

the various translations threw doubt upon the original text, upon which Abd ul-Qadir, always on the alert, clapped his hands and said, "Well done, Omar!" But Ibrahim recalled his attention to the fact that many versions already existed long before the rise of Islam, such as the Septuagint in Egypt, the Syriac in their own land, and the Vulgate in the West. If discrepancies in these had affected the divine teaching of the Scriptures, the Prophet would never have praised them as he did, nor commanded their observance on the Jews and Christians. Omar replied that the Arabs had only the Hebrew text and knew nothing of the various translations; to which Ibrahim answered that such reasoning would find fault with the knowledge that, as a prophet, Muhammad must have had regarding the discrepancies in the various translations. Omar, thus driven into a corner, was simple enough to suggest that the Prophet might have been deceived by the Jews of Medina as to the purity of the original text, since he could not read. Abd ul-Qadir, quick to see the mistake, cried out that he had made a slip by attributing lack of prophetic knowledge to Muhammad. And Omar, now forced to give in, admitted that the Torah must be considered genuine and authoritative by every thoughtful and impartial person; even as the Prophet had taught it to be. To say otherwise would be as if one cried to the day, "O Night!" or addressed the full moon as "O Canopus!"

Hearing this, Hasan Effendi spoke. "Beware!" he cried, "of admitting anything that questions the authority of the blessed Qur'an!" And so saying, he praised it as the miraculous work, of which it has been testified that, "if men and jinn had joined all together, they could not have produced

a single verse like it" (Sura Al-Isra' 17:88).

Mahmoud said: "I am surprised at you, O Hasan Effendi. Is it not the Qur'an itself which bears testimony both to the Old Testament and the New? Would you forbid us to examine the books therein attested as inspired of God? We have said no word in ridicule of the Qur'an, and must confine ourselves to the subject at hand. Listen to the debate and then give judgement. Time now presses; let us go on to what remains. Who shall be the disputants?"

Thereupon it was agreed that Hasan Effendi should lead the attack, and Suleiman reply. The Effendi was at first reluctant; but at last agreeing, he proceeded to refute the argument built on the fulfilment of prophecy, by suggesting the insertion of prophetic passages after they had occurred. Suleiman met this objection by showing that some of the prophesied events were of a nature that must have been displeasing to the Jews, such as their punishment for idolatry -- passages which they would have been the last to fabricate; and again, by the fact that copies of the original text and of the Septuagint translation had already been spread over the world long before the event, such as the destruction of Jerusalem and other great cities in the East. Suleiman illustrated this view at great length from the Books of Isaiah and Jeremiah, as well as those of Moses, showing the fulfilment of predicted events, first in the captivity, and then in the dispersion of the Israelites, that once glorious people.

This address of Suleiman had a wonderful effect upon the audience, who sat for a time in silent reflection on what they had

heard -- all except Abd ul-Qadir, who arose and warned against the danger they were shutting their eyes to, of slipping away from Islam altogether.

"Be careful!" he cried, "you cannot receive the Bible now in the hands of Christians without rejecting the Qur'an. Beware, before it is too late."

"What!" replied Mahmoud, "do you shrink from the testimony of the Qur'an itself, and from the Scriptures confirmed by the same, and by so many signs from heaven? What answer shall we give our Lord if we cast them aside? Now, as our debate has led us to be satisfied in respect of the integrity of the Torah, we must proceed to consider what the letter says with regard to the Gospel."

Thereupon Sheikh Ali arose and said that he quite agreed with Mahmoud, but that as the time was now far gone, any further discussion had better be postponed till the Sabbath following, by which day they will have had enough time for further reflection. So he brought out a table and spread refreshments thereon, and when the guests had partaken of them, they departed, all of them thankful and satisfied, except Abd ul-Qadir, who left for home sorrowful and downcast at the turn the debate was taking.

5. Danger Threatens

That very night Abd ul-Qadir went off to his master, Sheikh Nasir al-Din, a learned scholar, filled with bigotry and hatred toward Christianity. To him he related what had happened at the assembly, and how that, when his heart was stirred within him at all he saw there of the danger to Islam, he resolved to come and tell it to his

guide and master.

"Is it true, my son?" cried Nasir, clapping his hands, and excited like a lion, "is it all true?" Assured that it was, he sat silent for a moment, stroking his beard, and lost in thought. Then looking up, he said: "Alas, alas! It is indeed a sad business; but be of good cheer, my son. I will show them their folly, the baselessness of Christianity, and the solidity of Islam. Then, if they still do not yield, I will, with the Lord's help, win them back to the faith, by force if necessary. But, my son, why did you not tell me all this earlier, that I might at once have crushed the abominable conspiracy in its cradle? These men have been my enemies ever since our school days, and that because I was their superior and more favoured by our master; and yet I have always tried to do them good."

Abd ul-Qadir blushed at the blame implied.

"I stayed to see the end," he said, "resolved that if any evil did transpire, I would lay it at once before my master; and I now beg of him to pardon the delay."

"The Lord preserve you, my son!" Nasir replied. "I accept your excuse. And now let us call my brother's son, Al Haj Qadur, a witless fellow to be sure, but one that will serve my purpose better than a wiser and more serious man."

So Al Haj was called, who, when told of what had happened, stormed like a madman, and swore that he would rouse the city, young and old, against the vile apostates. He was hurrying off with this intent when his uncle stopped him, saying that first everything must be done that lay in their power to recall their brethren to the truth. So he dictated a letter to his scribe,

addressed to the apostates, and sent it off in the morning to Ali's house by the hand of his son. He began the letter by casting contempt and ridicule on the Christian doctrines of the incarnation and atonement. Asserting the corruption of the Bible, he emphasised the danger of denying the Qur'an, and warned them of the risks they were sure to encounter by falling into apostasy. He offered himself to join their assembly, and discuss with them the dangerous treatise that had led them astray; and ended by praising the Prophet and his revelation. Pleading with them not to rush headlong into destruction, he begged that he might be favoured with an answer.

Early next morning Sheikh Ali was startled by Nasir's son, who, entering the house, pulled this letter from his pocket and placed it in Ali's hand. Knowing well the intolerance of the writer, he but glanced at the contents, and then asked the bearer to thank his father and tell him that, after he had shown the letter to his friends, he hoped shortly to send a reply. So the son returned and told his father, who said: "Good! We shall see what will come of it."

Sheikh Ali retired to his chamber after the messenger had left, and as he read the letter over, he smiled and frowned alternately. Seeing the bitterness, clothed as it was in words of friendship, that lurked in every sentence, he thought thus within himself: "He warns us against being led astray, as if the Lord would suffer those that seek His face to be led astray. God forbid! For is it not promised that 'He will teach the meek His way'? And his threats of persecution! I foresee it all; for does not history tell us of the trials awaiting the confessor? But the Lord will give blessing and strength to bear the

cross. How hard and cold is the world! The Lord save me from the hatred of man, and give me light and grace to hold on unto the end!" Then, as he left his closet, he said: "Poor Nasir al-Din! How dare he speak so of the letter! As if he could write anything like it in defence of Islam! But so goes the proverb: 'Every youth swears by his father.'"

The story now turns to Sayyid Ibrahim. When he retired from the second conference, he entered his house happy and content at the turn the debate had taken. Then he sat down, and, opening his Qur'an on one side, with the Torah and the Gospel on the other, he went over all the passages he could remember in the Old Testament containing predictions of the Christ, then those in the Gospel which signified their fulfilment, and lastly, the parallel passages in the Qur'an mentioning the same. Then he copied these out, side by side, in three parallel columns, onto a large sheet or table. Having finished this table, he looked it over again and again with satisfaction, and was both delighted and surprised at the correspondence of the three columns one with the other, and especially at the clear testimony of the Qur'an given to the previous revelation and the person of Christ.

"How can our scholars," he thought within himself, "read the Qur'an over and over without seeing the supremacy there ascribed to the Messiah? And here I have myself been doing just the same thing! Thanks to the wanderer's Guide, who at the last has led me into the right way!" (The table is given by the author complete, with all the quotations in full, but need not be repeated here, as the various passages are fully brought out in the discussions which follow. There are six series of texts.

The first relates to "Immanuel," [Isaiah 7 and 9, Column 2; Matthew 1 and Luke 1, Column 3; Sura Al Imran 3:45 and Sura Maryam 19:20]. The second series is on "the Word"; the third, on the promised blessing to mankind from the seed of Abraham and line of David. The fourth, on the death of Christ; and the fifth, on His resurrection.)

Then he arose and went, table in hand, to his friend Suleiman, who told him he had just been through the same struggle, and was now convinced that Jesus is the Son of God and Saviour of the world. He praised Ibrahim for his fearless and impartial attitude in the debate of the previous day, and marvelled at his rapid growth in the knowledge of Scripture. Suleiman, much pleased with the table, then began a long discourse with his friend on the precious truths of the Bible. Men stumble over them as unperceived jewels in their path; or as precious simples in a field, that would cure the fatal disease of him who trampled heedlessly on them; or as a box of precious ointment thrown carelessly away. Then as to the varying testimony of the Qur'an, though some texts do deny the divinity of our Lord, others clearly admit it, like those in which He is termed "the Word of God" and "a Spirit from Him". In fact, the Qur'an, as it were, shows the glory of Christ on one side, and hides it on the other; just as the new moon reveals but a tiny streak of the shining disc, while one can trace dimly and darkly the shadowy outline of the full orb, well aware of the lustre thus concealed.

"And so, as to the objections against the atonement, are we," he said, "to sit in judgement on what the Lord has revealed of Himself, and not come with meek and lowly heart to learn His will? Does the

patient refuse the medicine prescribed for him till he knows its nature? Rather, assured of the physician's skill and faithfulness, does he not immediately follow his instructions? Even so with us; we must come to the Divine Physician and accept the remedy, take the blessed Son as our Saviour, and refrain from asking how or why."

And so, Ibrahim being delighted with Suleiman's excitement over the matter, the two sat long together in loving discourse. Then they took the table with them to show to their other friends, who were all delighted with it, and agreed that Ibrahim should be their spokesman at the next meeting, which would be the last, the subject being the authenticity of the Gospel.

6. Third Conference

When the time appointed for the third assembly had come the former company, with the exception of Abd ul-Qadir, came together at the house of Sheikh Ali, who, according to custom, opened the debate. He told them first of the letter from Sheikh Nasir al-Din, who had always been known for his intolerance of free inquiry. He had, no doubt, been informed of their proceedings by Abd ul-Qadir, and his witless nephew, Haj Qadur, whose ravings people mistook for bravery, might very likely have already spread the news abroad. The letter was then read aloud, at the contents of which the company was much moved and concerned. Omar al-Haris arose and said, "Sheikh Nasir has in this letter exhorted us to 'stand to the truth, at whatever risk.' That, at any rate, is sound advice, though not in the sense intended."

Then, at some length, he mentioned the necessities for continued effort to find out what the will of the Lord was, and then, at whatever cost, to stand firm, regardless of the results, seeing that their eternal welfare depended thereon. He closed with a prayer that the Lord would strengthen them to hold firmly by the pillar of truth. Others followed in the same strain; the good Lord would not forsake them as they sought after His will, whatever might be the pains and losses in store for them.

The group then proceeded to the question of the day, namely, the genuineness, and authority of the New Testament. Ibrahim was the speaker. He took out his table, which was passed around and reviewed by each. Then he expanded on his subject at some length. The blessed Gospel, he said, needed no outside testimony; but nevertheless a valuable service had been rendered by the Qur'an, which so confirmed the previous revelation and glorified Jesus, the son of Mary, that the Muslim had no option left but, in consistency with the same, to accept the New Testament with all its teaching. The whole company, after further debate, agreed that the genuineness of the Gospel had been made so clear as to admit of no further question. And so, after conference and mutual encouragement, they, one and all of them, confessed their faith in Jesus Christ as the Saviour of mankind.

Sheikh Ali then stood. He thanked God for these three conferences and for the spirit that had guided their discussions. There had been no happier hours in his life. He then reviewed, at considerable length, the arguments in favour of the Gospel, quoting largely from the Qur'an. "What the Qur'an tells us," he said, "is indeed only as a drop of water for the thirsty man, which but

increases his longing for the stream, whereof to drink and be satisfied; and the grand merit of the Qur'an is to point the thirsty one to the stream of life that flows from the Saviour." This he illustrated at great length from the Qur'an itself. God's justice, he went on to say, is satisfied by the atonement of Christ. Through His blood we have peace with God; for the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

"Let us then," he concluded, "cast all our care upon Him for giving us the light of the knowledge of His Son in our hearts, and hold firmly to His salvation. God be thanked for sending us that letter, which guided our steps towards the light, and grant the author thereof a good reward! My friends, let us fight the good fight of faith. They may persecute and separate us here, and may even put us to death; but they cannot hurt us beyond the grave, and we shall all meet in the blessed kingdom above. He that sows in tears shall reap in joy. Now the gracious Lord, who has called us into the kingdom of His Son and guided our feet into the way of peace, preserve and establish us unto every good work! He is our support and all-sufficient defence."

Sheikh Ali shed tears as he ended this address, which touched the hearts of all, and many wept. The company thanked him for his stirring words of faith and love, and all expressed their resolve to hold on, even unto death.

Then taking up Sheikh Nasir al-Din's letter, they commissioned Ali to draft a reply such as should go in the name of them all. This done, the assembly broke up, after hearing and approving the dispatch, which ran as follows:

We thank you for your concern lest we should fall into apostasy and its perils. God forbid we should wander from the straight path; rather, we trust to be guided into the right way. We have been led to inquire whether the Torah and Gospel are genuine or corrupt; and after careful consideration, are convinced that they are genuine. We had supposed them to have been corrupted and altered; but we find them to be, in point of fact, the very same Scriptures that are attested in the Qur'an, and there said to be 'a light and a guide from our Lord.' If you will honour us with your presence, we shall lay the proofs before you, if indeed you and your fellows might be partakers with us in the same blessing. For ourselves, we cannot give up the truth in which we have found rest and peace, even with the prospect of trial and persecution before us. Ours, indeed, are but poor bodies, liable to pain and suffering. But we have counted the cost, and prefer the will of God to that of man; peace of conscience to worldly honour; and even death, with the favour of God, to life. We are grieved at the threats in your letter. Suppose, as you think, that we have gone wrong: is it right to vex and punish us for it? Should you not, rather, recognise every man's right to private judgement and attempt to correct our errors? For we are ready to have them pointed out to us by reason and argument. If you will agree to this, good; otherwise we are in the Lord's hands, and He is the best of helpers.

Your faithful brethren, Ali and companions

"How Satan," they cried, "has hardened their hearts and blinded their eyes!" And they ceased not to shout the *Takbir*, "Allahu akbar! Allahu akbar!" at the top of their voice, bowing themselves low in prayer and adoration. Calming down after a time, they began to discuss what they should do -- whether to agree to the conference requested by the apostates, immediately report the scandal to the court, or once again repeat their warning.

At length Abd ul-Karim, calmer than the rest, begged to be heard.

"Ali and his comrades," he said, "are men of learning, discernment, and culture; some of them, indeed, for knowledge and ability, are in the very foremost rank. They have become, moreover, able in argument, and were we to begin a discussion with them, they might confuse us by dates, quotations and such-like, got from their Christian friends, which we might not know how to answer; and so the result might very possibly influence other lukewarm believers. Better not stir up slumbering ashes, or the end may be worse than the beginning. Rather let us send a couple of our number to address them in a friendly way, without entering into controversy, and urge them to return. It will be a last appeal, and if it should fail, then, in the interests of Islam, we must report them to the authorities." This was no sooner agreed to than the speaker himself, with another, left on the errand, the whole assembly crying after them: "Go in the name of the Lord! The Lord speed you! We shall not leave from here till you return."

After the letter had been dispatched and the company had broken up, Suleiman thought that something might happen

during the night to their risk, in consequence of the letter; so he went back to Ali and advised that their friends should be recalled for consultation. Ali agreed: "But let it be in Sheikh Mahmoud's house," he said, "and I shall be there myself before supper."

So the company again assembled there, about the first hour of the night, and began to talk the matter over. Some said that their enemies had no doubt already spread abroad the tidings, to stir up an uproar against them; or that they had very probably given notice to the authorities, who might take them up that very night.

Sayyid Ibrahim went calmly over all the possibilities. He agreed that the news of their defection from Islam had very likely been told all over the city, and that it might go hard with them in a land where free inquiry was not tolerated. Anyhow, he did not think that the authorities would lay hands on them until they first had had some warning.

Sheikh Ahmed spoke. He thought it quite possible for them to be arrested that very night, or in the morning. "Suppose," he continued, "that they decreed our banishment or death. Are we ready to stand firm or, to save ourselves, would we be tempted to recant and leave our faith? Christian resolve, my friends, stands not in knowledge, but in power from above to bear punishment and contempt; for such has ever been a leading evidence of the faith, as Christ Himself bore the burden for us, even to the death. Shall we then not follow after His example, and with Him be partakers of the reward? 'If anyone is ashamed of me,' He said, 'and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him

when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.'(Mark 8:38); and again, 'Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.'(Mt 10:38) -- nor is it possible for any, unless he be ready, for His sake and the Gospel's, to do so unto death. Should we, instead, prefer our ease and pleasure, it would be a fatal error, and a departure from our Lord. But if we resolve to live for Him, instead of for ourselves, He will support us through all our troubles to the very end."

At this appeal there was a general response to such effect as this: "We cannot draw back from the way of life in which, in the name of the Lord, we have entered. We are weak, but the Lord will strengthen and support us."

On hearing this Mahmoud arose and said, "My soul rejoices exceedingly. What is this but the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, even as the love of Christ, who gave Himself for us -- a love beyond conception! Is it then a great thing that we, for His name's sake, should suffer shame and persecution? Even as one of His apostles has said: 'Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.'(2 Cor 4:17) My dear friends, let us but trust in the Lord, and He will be our Helper."

He was yet speaking when they heard one knocking at the door of the hall in which they sat. Mahmoud stopped, and opening the door, was told by his servant that two persons stood outside.

"One of them is Sheikh Abd ul-Karim," he said, "who wants to see Sheikh Ali and yourself." Whereupon all exclaimed that it was just as Sayyid Ibrahim had led them to

expect. Mahmoud then asked his servant to let the strangers in. They entered with the ordinary friendly greeting, whereupon the company arose and invited them to be seated. So, after the customary welcome, and after coffee had been served, Abd ul-Karim said the following: "Dear friends, we have been sent by your brethren, Sheikh Nasir al-Din and a company of others, who are much concerned and grieved that you, chief men of the city and pillars of the faith, should have been tricked by the idolatrous Christians to follow their corrupt imaginations. After long consideration, therefore, they have sent us, a friendly deputation, with a brotherly warning. We have not come to argue. A word for the wise is enough. Think for a moment of our grief -- not only our grief, but the grief of the whole community -- at being separated in faith and worship from men with whom, in times past, we have taken sweet counsel together; and expel from your hearts the evil thoughts which the devil has cast into them. Return, and let us, as brethren, end our days in peace under the shadow of Allah and his Prophet, until, at last, we reach the blessed paradise through which living fountains flow, where there are pleasures for evermore."

After entreating them with many such passionate words, his companion followed up the appeal: "If it had been the scum of society, it would not mean so much," he said, "but you have been our chiefs and our guides -- the salt of the land; and now you have become a source of grief and a trial for us! There is no believer who will not regard this lapse with horror and dismay. Beware, lest thus acting, you lose both this world and the next. I urge you in the name of your brethren to return from

the path of destruction to the ways of peace that lead to the gardens of delight. The Lord is merciful and will surely pardon your offence. Give us to carry back an answer that shall gladden the hearts of them that sent us."

Sheikh Ali made reply: "They were thankful," he said, "for the kindness of their friends in sending them, but they would be still more indebted if, instead of bidding them to leave the path they had entered on, they would point out wherein it erred and led astray. A plaintiff is not rejected till his complaint is proven groundless, nor a defendant condemned till his evidence has been heard. Equally unjust was it to threaten them with the law until they had heard their reasons. If they recanted, it would only be a changing of the outward garb; their conviction would still remain. Where would they then be on that day when neither son nor father would be of any help?"

Then, after briefly noticing the testimony of the Qur'an to the Torah and the Gospel, and to Jesus as the "Word" and "Spirit from God," Sheikh Ali added: "This, then, is my faith, according to the testimony of the Lord, and I count not my life dear unto me now that I have known my Saviour. Nor do I mean that I am bolder than these my brethren; but they shall speak for themselves."

All then answered: "The faith of Sheikh Ali is our faith, and his confession our confession. The Lord is our help and He is the best of helpers."

Then Sheikh Mahmoud arose and said: "We ask you, dear friends, to think over what Sheikh Ali has been saying. Why should you desire our destruction and the

overthrow of our homes? We have not injured you at all; neither the government nor the people. Let us live the rest of our lives in that freedom of conscience which is the gift of God to His creatures. If you are pleased to enter into discussion with us, we shall give our reasons to the best of our ability. But we cannot disregard the voice from within that calls us to refuse your demands. Have compassion on us, as you would yourselves have compassion from the Lord."

The company confirmed the words of both speakers and prayed that their brethren, giving up their plan to report them to the Wali (Turkish ruler or governor), would rather enter into argument with them, either by word or letter.

The deputation replied: "We shall carry back your answer to our comrades, but we do not see how they can comply with your request. We were sent to warn you, and now you begin to preach, seeking to drag us into the same pit into which you yourself have fallen! We can only warn you of the evils and calamities that await you."

The company replied: "We trust in the Lord. If calamities do overtake us, He will give us strength to bear them."

On this the visitors stood and with an angry scowl departed.

When they had gone, the little company sat some time in silence. Then they began to speak one with another, and to say that they felt it necessary to pray to God for protection from the dangers arising all around. Before doing so, Sheikh Ahmed, taking up the Gospel, read aloud the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of Christ according to John, as well as the three

following chapters. All were soothed by the comforting words of our Saviour, so suitable to their present trial. Then they knelt down, while Sheikh Mahmoud prayed. He began by praising God for the gift of His Son, and for bringing them out of darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel. "We ask You," he cried, "to strengthen our weak hearts to bear the burdens before us, so that our walk and conversation may be in harmony with Your word, and with the glory of Your blessed name. Have mercy on our neighbours, who have thought to turn us from Your ways by threats. Enlighten their souls, Oh Lord, as You have enlightened us; guide them as you have guided us." Then he prayed for the government, the Sultan, their Wali, his council and advisers, that they might rule in righteousness and the fear of the Lord; and for themselves, that they might be vessels fit for the Master's use; and ended by praising the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

They rose from their knees with lightened countenances. Then Mahmoud, bringing forward a table with refreshments, asked them all to partake of the same, for it was now past midnight. So they all ate a little, and then departed to their homes in good cheer, praising the Lord for His goodness to them.

8. Summoned and Imprisoned

When Abd ul-Karim and his companion returned with the report of what had happened, the assembly still waiting in Sheikh Nasir's house gave vent to their feelings in wild language. The idea of a further attempt to reclaim the converts was abandoned. "It would be just as easy to cure the palsy," cried some. "May they be

smitten by the plague!" said others, "Why did they not take our warning?" Still, others said, "They have fallen so low that there is no use trying to raise them." But the most popular cry was: "When they get into trouble, and are well punished, they will soon return to their senses."

Abd ul-Karim, hearing it, interrupted. He knew better. "Indeed they will not; and even if some, after falling into trouble, were to recant, most of them will persist in their heresy. Cut them into a thousand pieces!"

Just then Haj Qadur, who had been in the country, came in, and learning what had passed, fell into a raging passion. "Allahu Akbar!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "I marvel at your patience with these fellows. Away with them! They deserve hell for abusing our faith, blaspheming our Prophet, denying the Qur'an, sowing sedition in the city; and yet you allow them to spread the plague. Truly, for this sort there is nothing but the double-edged sword!"

Sheikh Dervesh (raising his turban from his brow and stroking his beard excitedly) exclaimed: "By my life, he hits the mark! Al Haj is your man!"

"Yes," said Al Haj, "send me; I'll raise the city. I'll lay hands on them at once, this very night, lest they escape in the dark."

Abd ul-Rahim Omeyyah said: "Softly, my friend! Your zeal for Islam is good, but your words are foolish. What chance is there of laying hands on chief men like these? And if we could, it would at the present moment be the height of folly, for it would split the city into factions and cause fatal quarrels, for which we will be held responsible. It is a delicate matter to

lay hold of rebels like these, men of birth and honour. My advice is to report the matter early in the morning to the Qadi (a judge in matters of Islamic law) and the Mufti (a professional jurist who interprets Islamic law), and then at midday to lay it publicly before the authorities, whose concern it is. So shall we avoid raising a disturbance, the end of which it is impossible to know."

This advice was approved by all. Nasir al-Din and Abd ul-Qadir were chosen as a deputation to the Qadi; and the rest were to be ready at midday to go in a group as complainants, laying their case before the Wali as he sat in court. This arranged, the company dispersed.

Early the following morning, Nasir al-Din and Abd ul-Qadir visited the Qadi. Courteously received in his hall of audience, they told their story, mingling with it much insult, to inflame his mind against the accused. He sat grave and silent as they spoke. When they had finished he said: "If this thing be as you say, it is most serious and distressing. But I must say that the learning and piety of these men is against it; there must surely be some exaggeration or mistake."

"No, by the life and head of our Prophet! It is every word as we have said; and you will yourself shortly hear it all in court."

"Alas and alas!" cried the Qadi. "There is no refuge but in the Lord! What are you going to do now?"

"We plan to tell the Mufti; and after that the matter will come up in court before the Wali."

Said the Qadi: "No need to tell the Mufti, for I shall see him shortly myself. Bring it,

by all means, before the governor. But meanwhile keep it quietly to yourselves, lest it spread abroad in the city, and stir up commotion there."

"It shall be so, your honour;" which having said, they received permission to leave.

Now the Qadi was a wise and prudent man, with a kind heart and compassion. He told everything to the Mufti, who commented: "We must face the difficulty, which is all the greater because of the distinguished position of these men, some of whom are our relatives. If the case is as we have heard, then the citizens may even put up with it from feelings of old friendship, yet the Wali and his court are strangers to us and would feel no guilt for having them put to death. They have enemies, too, as you know, who, seeing them in danger, will not be slow to produce any sort of evidence to condemn them. And how, then, could we bear to see their orphans and their widows? Ah, it is sad! What do you say?"

The Qadi was much moved as he spoke. The Mufti observed his eyes moist with tears; whereat somewhat surprised, he said: "Recover yourself, my brother! It is a dreadful business, without doubt. I myself am also terribly distressed. But it is in God's hands. We are Muslims and our position demands the utmost firmness, both in support of the faith and in the administration of justice. We must not, and cannot, depart from the law."

"True," replied the Qadi, "but I would rather resign my office and beg my bread, with a dervish's staff in my hand, the wide world over, than have any part in the death-warrant of Sheikh Ali or Sheikh Mahmoud. Is it a light matter, my brother?

No, but I hope and trust that by your help and persuasion they may yet be delivered from these delusive heresies. And so," stretching his arms towards heaven he cried, "Oh Lord, I ask this of You. And you, my friend, will you assist me?"

"Indeed, it will be one of my first duties to do so," said the Mufti.

"And if all should fail, what will the end be?" added the Qadi. "If I could but only know!"

"We need not disturb ourselves with that just now," said the Mufti. "If they do hold to their errors, the best thing will be to exile them to some place where no Muslims dwell."

"Yes," said the Qadi, "that would be best; but who knows if we shall be able? May the good Lord guide us!"

So saying, they separated; and about the third hour of the day they met again in the courtroom of the Wali's palace. His Excellency, as usual, had taken his seat on the chair of state, when suddenly the hall was filled by a crowd of doctors, professors, and clergymen, with Sheikh Nasir al-Din and his company leading the way. The Wali and his council were surprised at the unexpected intrusion, but after the usual greeting his Excellency asked them to be seated. They refused until they had made known the alarming matter which had brought them there. The Wali's heart beat quickly.

"Alarming matter?" he cried, "What is it?"

"If it please my lord," said Qadi, "let the court be cleared of Christians and strangers, and let none remain but members of your Highness' council and officers of state; for the matter is indeed of

serious importance."

So the Wali gave orders and the court was cleared. The crowd of remaining visitors, at his Excellency's repeated command, then took their seats.

"Now," said the Wali to them, "what is this alarming matter that has brought you to my presence today?"

Thereupon Abd ul-Qadir got up and after flattering the Wali as the most excellent of rulers, he proceeded thus:

"Regarding your Excellency to be the defender of the faith, it has become our painful duty to tell you that Sheikh Ali and some others (naming in all eleven persons) have gone over to the Christian religion, denying the Prophet and the Qur'an. The cause thereof is a long-standing friendship between Sheikh Abd ul-Hady and a Christian from Aleppo. This man, some time ago, wrote a letter to the Sheikh, which he called *Divine Truth in the Book of the Living God, and the Christian Faith Set Forth Therein, the Only True Religion*. This letter was read before the group mentioned previously, with which also your humble servant was associated. These all, except myself, inclined towards the heresy. With all my power I fought against the false teaching of the letter, basing my plea upon the authority of the Prophet and the Qur'an; and I begged them to cast it aside, pointing out the subtle poison of polytheism and idolatry it contained. As they gave no heed to my words, I said within myself, I will wait to see the end. But when I found them going entirely over, I left them, and hurried to my master, Sheikh Nasir al-Din. Thereupon he wrote a letter, warning them of their danger and asking them to abandon their errors,

couched in friendly terms. But they answered rudely and openly admitted their heresy. Here, my lord, is the letter in Sheikh Ali's own handwriting." And he handed it to the interpreter, who placed it before the Wali.

It was about to be read out when Abd ul-Qadir asked permission first to finish his story, which being graciously accorded, he went on as follows: "Despite this offensive and hopeless answer, Sheikh Nasir al-Din thought it best, instead of bringing the complaint before your Excellency right away, to call together certain of the leading citizens -- these now in court -- and take counsel with them. It was resolved first to send two of their number as a deputation -- they are now before your Excellency -- with assurances of our distress, and endeavour to reclaim them by loving words and earnest pleas. It was all in vain. They confessed themselves Christians -- believers in the divinity, incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus. And more than this, they even sought to persuade the two visitors to join them in their apostasy! On their return we saw no alternative but to report the sad affair to the government, since it cannot but affect authority and endanger public tranquillity. This is what we have to lay before my lord Effendi, who will deal with it according to his most excellent wisdom and judgement."

The Wali then asked the rest of the visitors whether the affair was as Abd ul-Qadir stated it; and when they replied that it was entirely so, the interpreter by his command read out the letter before the assembly. They were all shocked and astounded at such words proceeding from any that called themselves fellow-citizens, and their faces flushed with anger. The Wali

scowled scornfully. Then, turning with a courteous greeting to the citizens who were sitting with him in council, he asked whether they knew the handwriting to be that of Sheikh Ali. Assured that it was, he called the captain of his guard: "Take this list," he said, "and bring these men before me into court."

So they were summoned; and as they entered, all were amazed at seeing the little company, some of them aged men and others among the most distinguished of their fellow-citizens for learning and piety; and still more, at their brave and fearless attitude. The Wali frowned upon them, but asked them to be seated. They excused themselves, but on the command being repeated once more, they obeyed. Then his Excellency requested the interpreter to read the letter over again, which he did in a loud voice.

"Who wrote this letter?" asked the Wali.

Whereupon Sheikh Ali answered, "It was I, my lord Effendi."

And all marvelled at the brave reply.

"Are you, then, a Christian?"

"Yes, my lord, by the grace of God."

"Silence!" shouted the Wali. "You idiot, for shame! Are you saying that by the grace of God you have become a Christian? Grace and mercy! That be far from you!" And, turning with a scornful laugh to the court, he said, "See how this fool thinks they have, by the grace of God, apostatised!" Then addressing the rest of the little company, he said, "And you, too, have you been led astray like him?"

"Not led astray, my lord; but guided to the truth which is in the Torah and the Gospel,

the Qur'an itself being witness."

"Then does not the divine Qur'an suffice?" asked the Wali.

They answered: "How can it be so, since the Qur'an itself leads to the Torah and Gospel as to a revelation 'of everything that is excellent, a guide, and a light, and an evidence from the Lord'? It was this testimony, my lord, that led us to the study of the Scriptures, and acceptance of that which is revealed therein."

"Out with you!" cried the Wali. "As for the Gospel, it has been shamefully tampered with -- even calling Jesus, son of Mary, both God and man; and pretending that this so-called God, after being crucified and buried, rose again the third day; and asserting that by His disgraceful death He has cleansed His followers from their sins! Could any grosser fabrication be imagined, any greater insult affronted against the Deity, or any more glaring apostasy followed than this? No, by my life! God forbid it! What could have led you into this pit of depravity? I protest that, instead of worshipping the one true God, you have become idolaters and polytheists. Imagine that learned men like yourselves, by the weak and silly arguments of an infidel, to be thus suddenly led astray! Shame on you -- brave warriors turning your backs at the first onset of the enemy! Now, I command you to turn from this accursed heresy to the true faith -- the faith of your fathers and forefathers. Confess your fault in the face of this assembly. Change your ways. So shall the Lord have mercy on you. Obey your Wali's command, and so it shall be well with you."

"Will you grant me a little of your mercy?" asked Sheikh Ali.

"Speak on," said the Wali.

"Let your Excellency then know that we have studied this question of the Book with anxiety and care, and that we find no trace therein either of change or of corruption. That which your Excellency has named as a proof of devilish tampering is in reality nothing but the truth from God, the purpose of the Torah and the substance of the Gospel. Of that we have most thoroughly satisfied ourselves. In every matter we obey your Excellency, except that of our faith; for, as the Wali well knows, that is a matter between man and his God. And we are constrained to obey God rather than man."

At these words the Wali, unable to restrain himself, called out in a fierce voice, "Silence, wretch!" and immediately ordered the captain of his guard to carry off the little company to prison, with irons on their legs. As this was being done, the Qadi approached the Wali and asked that they might first be brought back again into court, in order that, if it pleased his Excellency, the influential gathering of citizens present might speak kindly with them, if by chance they might yet be persuaded to return to the faith. His Excellency consented and on their reappearance motioned to the Qadi to address them.

"By the Viceroy's command," he said, "I am about to speak with you, my brothers. Be seated according to your rank, as usual, and listen to me, for the city is your own and its government is for the welfare of yourselves and of your households. And now this assembly, by permission of his Excellency, receives you with all honour and welcome. We cannot bear to think that our worthy fellow-citizens should be led

astray by such delusions. We trust that these have been dispelled by the solemn warning which our Wali, in his grief at what fell from your spokesman, felt bound to administer. Now sit down in comfort and thank his Excellency for the interest he has taken in you."

So they sat down in their midst, with every mark of honour and respect. The Governor himself smiled graciously upon them and ordered coffee and refreshments to be served, of which when all had partaken, his Excellency addressed them with every mark of cordiality and friendship: "Learned fathers, brethren in the faith, my children for whom I am responsible to our gracious sovereign! How can citizens of rank and learning like you leave the true faith for paths of infidelity? My heart is sore pained for the danger you are in and also for the fear lest your example should lead others astray. If you were dishonourable men, the matter would be comparatively easy. But with you, the chief and most learned among us, it becomes an affair more serious than I can bear to think of. I urge you by Allah and by his Prophet -- the Commander of the Faithful -- and myself his viceroy, and these your brethren, and by all that is dear to you in the peace of your homes, that you rejoin the faith of your fathers. Turn the bitterness of my heart into joy; and this, the darkest of days for us all, into a day of light and rejoicing."

These fair-spoken words had an evident effect upon the little company, who remained silent, with downcast looks; and this raised the hopes of the assembly.

"For, see," said they one to another, "and behold how gentle words are more effective than angry threats with men of

culture like these."

Then the Qadi asked permission to speak.

"Speak on," replied his Excellency, "and, after you have spoken, any others of our brethren in this assembly who desire to say a word may do so; for have we not met for this very purpose? And truly I know no reason more weighty than to persuade these our friends to return from their wanderings to the fold of the faith."

All praised the gracious words of his Excellency, and prayed for his long life and prosperity.

Then the Qadi uttered the following:

"Your hearts must be overflowing with gratitude at the mercy and tender concern of the Wali, as of a father for his children. This is no time for argument; rather it is a time for open discussion, forgetting, for the moment, rank and pride. My brethren, let us call to mind the happy days we have spent together, joining in worship in the house of prayer, and in religious and social conference, holding sweet conversation about the welfare of our dear ones, and of the land at large; how your own words have from time to time affected our hearts, and how, through your example, help and influence, our city has become a pattern to the world. Will you, by a sudden reversal, blight all these happy fruits? -- and such a reversal! No, no dear friends. A baseless, evil heresy like this shall never deceive such men as you. I appeal to you by all the claims of friendship and urge you by the Lord, to come forth from the wilderness into which you have wandered. And now, in this lordly gathering and in the presence of this our gracious Wali, let us lay aside all ceremony and unwind in such pleasant conversation as that of friends who, after

long separation, meet again, and change our sorrow into joy. Disregard not the call of his Excellency, made with such wonderful grace and mercy, nor despise the invitation of your friends. The Lord be gracious to us and you and gladden all our hearts!"

Then the Mufti spoke. He enlarged on the grief this affair had caused him. The first word of it was like a bolt from heaven on his head, like an arrow barbed with fire at his heart. Companions of his childhood, friends of his daily life, parted thus suddenly in faith, in creed, in worship and in future hopes; bitterer to the soul than death itself! As he prayed for them to soften and return, his eyes filled with tears and his voice trembled with emotion: "You will return," he cried, "to the faith of your fathers, the way of peace and happiness. And if you will have argument, let it be hereafter, private and alone. But now, in the presence of this royal gathering, accept his Excellency's gracious call and the invitation of your brethren. And now let us, according to our custom, pass the time in discussion and happy relaxation. And so, by the kindness of the gracious Viceroy, we shall recognise our obligations for your goodness and consideration towards us."

As he sat down, the small group, surrounded by this noble assembly, were troubled and confined in their breast, as men on whom some sore perplexity had fallen; and so the Wali desired that they should have time for reflection. Then he gave command for coffee and refreshing sherbets to be passed around. Thereafter they broke up into small parties, each member of the little company being occupied separately by two or three of their acquaintances in friendly converse.

And as they walked through the halls and reception rooms of the palace, every kind of persuasion was brought to bear upon them. In the end three of the company, yielding to these influences, gave in.

When all, therefore, after this customary stroll, had reassembled in the hall of audience, these three stood up in their midst and confessed that they had wronged their own souls, and done spite to the Lord and His Prophet by leaving Islam and joining the Christian faith. Then they acknowledged their belief in God and His Prophet. The assembly accepted their return to Islam with every expression of favour and delight. The Wali rejoiced and the Qadi congratulated his Excellency on their return to the true faith, and its forming a ground of hope for the others.

"For," said he, turning to the rest of the little company, "our joy will not be perfect so long as any of you remain behind, and frustrate our expectation. Come then, and bring back joy and peace to your homes and to the city. Now, in the name of the Lord, stand forth as these your brethren have and bear testimony to the Lord and to His Prophet, openly and in proper form, signifying thus your return to the right way."

As the Qadi ended, Sheikh Mahmoud stood up. "I stand before the throne," he said, "and in the court of our great Sultan, of whose reign may the Lord advance the power and glory, and give victory over every rebel and enemy thereof. I beg you of your grace and compassion, noble Effendi, to hear a few words as to what is on my heart and the hearts of these my companions."

"Say on," replied the Wali.

"Most noble Effendi and honoured friends, truly you have broken our hearts by the excess of kindness and loving pressure you have shown -- far more than we deserve. Our gratitude overflows towards your Excellency and our friends here present. But it must be manifest to you, my lord Effendi, that faith and conviction are matters of the heart; they do not issue forth except by evidence and reason. The brotherly influence you have brought to bear upon us, the warnings, the promises of honour and prosperity, have led some of us to give up that of which in our hearts we were firmly convinced. Such recantation can be but outward, not from within. It is not in our power to change conviction, nor in that of men to force it, or to alter our views of the authority of the Gospel, as now in our hands. We cannot, even on your Excellency's command, do violence to our conscience, nor obey otherwise than on clear evidence. But if you, my lord Effendi, and those here present would graciously condescend to argue the matter with us and bring proofs to convince us of our errors, it would be well-suited to the nobility and grace of such as you. If we are proved in error, we shall thankfully return to the faith of our fathers. If, in pity for our desperate condition, you will agree to this our humble request, good; but leave us free in the liberty wherewith our gracious Sultan has blessed all classes of his subjects. The matter lies in the hands of our lord Effendi, as it may seem right in his eyes."

During this address the Wali kept frowning angrily and for some moments there was silence throughout the court. Then he commanded, and the little company were led outside.

"What do you think," said the Wali, when

they had left, "of these apostates? And what shall be their punishment, now that we have failed by friendly treatment?"

"It is for his Excellency himself," they answered with one voice, "with his great knowledge and experience of such difficult cases to decide."

"No," he replied, "but you must advise me."

Then one said, "Let two or three of them be put to death as an example to the rest;" others, "Let them be confined for a long term, with a heavy fine;" still others, "Banish them far away, and seize their property."

The Qadi sat silent till he was called upon for his opinion.

"I was sitting silent," he said, "and thinking; for it is no light matter to give an opinion in proceedings so grave as these. No doubt your Excellency is well aware that, by the law and code of the empire, every subject is given the right to private judgement; that is, freedom to reject whatever faith or religion he wishes and equal freedom to embrace whatever faith or religion he may choose. Therefore, to punish these men for abandoning their ancestral creed would not be in accord with the law and constitution of the land. But even so, to set them at liberty at the present time would not be wise; for no one knows what might happen in the turmoil and excitement that would result. The way out of this difficulty I do not myself at the present see, but your Excellency's wisdom and experience for all emergencies will be sufficient."

The Wali was startled at the Qadi's explanation of the law, which he had never

heard before.

"You have spoken what is right," he said. "And now, my good Mufti, Effendi, what do you say?"

"The matter," said Mufti, "stands as the learned Qadi has described it. I would advise that the accused be detained for a time in some convenient chamber of the court, and that, in the meantime, their case be reported to the Sublime Porte (the centre of Turkish government in Istanbul, where justice was administered) for orders. And so, your Excellency and all of us shall be spared responsibility in the matter."

This was agreed to; and so the little company was sent away to an apartment in the palace, and kept there under supervision until orders should arrive. Meanwhile their relatives and families, as well as the Qadi and Mufti and other learned and leading citizens, had permission to visit them at certain times, on condition of doing their best to convince them to abandon their delusions and return to Islam. And a telegram, stating the case and giving orders, was sent to the Porte.

9. Conspiracy

The little company, led away to their place of confinement in the palace, entered it rejoicing, saying how good it was to suffer for the sake of truth. But throughout the city, when news of their imprisonment was made known, the utmost excitement prevailed. Crowds of people, not knowing the cause, came together in amazement, more especially the poor orphans and others who had been the subject of their kindness and care. There was nothing but noise and commotion in the streets. In this

ferment and turmoil the people were divided, some saying one thing and some another. The upper classes, men of letters, the poets and such-like, cried out against the cruel treatment of men who were patterns of all that was virtuous and good, ornaments of society and pillars of the city. For what crime could it be? Every kind of accusation was levelled against Wali and his council. But, among the better informed, the truth came out by degrees.

As for Sheikh Nasir al-Din and his party, these, joined by many who had hated toward the converts, spread it abroad in every corner of the city that the prisoners had not only become Christians, but (which few would believe) that they had also blasphemed the Prophet and the Qur'an, seeking thereby to stir up the mob against them. They further sought for means to bring the poor souls within the grasp of the penal law, and for that end assembled in the house of Sheikh Ahmed al-Keilani. After long discussion Abd ul-Karim summed up the matter: "We are all agreed that it is desirable for one to be condemned to death; after which, no doubt, others too will recant, and in the end all may come round. We must remember that at this time it would not be possible to get the government to sentence all, or even several of them, to death, because of the religious freedom that exists in the great states in alliance with our empire. And further, because the position of the rebels and their hold upon society is such that their execution would create an uproar, riots and loss of life in the city. We must not think of that, for we would not succeed; but against one we might."

When this had been agreed upon, they fell

to discussing who that one should be. Various names were suggested. At last Sheikh Ali Attar spoke.

"It seems to me," he said, "that we should single out Omar al-Haris. He is young, has no connection to speak of, and is, moreover, disliked for his rough manners and temper. Further, he lacks the necessary insight to properly perceive the situation, and so will stubbornly persist in his talk and be easily trapped by his own words. When he is condemned, the rest will soon back down too, the scandal to Islam will cease and so we shall have achieved a great gain to the faith."

The project was well received by all, except by one, Sheikh Ibrahim, who had till now been silent.

"By my life!" he cried, "let us hold by the law and by the right, not change piety into deceit, morning light, as it were, into midnight darkness. I cannot be a participant in the death of a man like this, nor have any share in this wretched work. What harm is it to us that a neighbour should choose what he believes?"

Sheikh Ahmed angrily asked him not to interfere. "We do not ask you to join us; only, if you will leave, keep what you have heard to yourself."

"Very good," he answered; but as he went his way he cried, "The Lord confound your designs against this honest man!"

"Never mind him," said Sheikh Omar, "he and his group are always contradicting. If one says, 'Honey is sweet,' they say, 'No, it is acid;' or if one says, 'Vinegar is acid,' they say, 'No, it is sweet.' It was foolish of us to have such a fellow in our company."

Nasir al-Din commented: "Now that he is

gone, let us return to our design, and see how we can best carry it out."

"Let us get permission to visit them," said Sheikh Ahmed. "Then, hiding our aim, we can secure their confidence by friendly conversation, especially with him whom we wish to convict. Let us ask him these two questions: Is the Qur'an from God? and, Was Muhammad his messenger? The poor creature will not know what, in his confusion, to say, but will answer in his simplicity, without a thought of the consequences. If he agrees, we shall have won him back; if not, it will be ground for capital punishment."

"But," said one, "Omar al-Haris is a man of few words, and will be hesitant to speak before his elders. I doubt if you will get him to talk at all."

"Oh," replied Sheikh Ahmed, "trust me for that. I will prolong the friendly discussion till all join in and he with the rest; and so, with the help of the Lord, we shall manage it."

Another said: "If we all enter together, they will suspect something, and we will not achieve our goal. Let three be chosen to visit them in their apartment. The rest of us can be about the palace, as if on some business of our own, and thus wait close by, for the result."

All agreeing, the three chosen were Sheikh Ahmed Keilani, Sheikh Ali Attar and Haj Yasin.

Now it happened that the Wali himself, his courtiers and certain of the council were also looking for reasons to condemn some of the converts, both in order to save the rest and as a lesson to all the people in the city, but could find none. The Qadi and

Mufti, on the contrary, were both against such cruelty and were especially on their guard against any such schemes. In this they were helped by many of the old friends of the accused, who told his Excellency and those around him the danger of such a course.

The little company had been now four days in confinement when the three conspirators visited the palace. Having obtained permission, on the pretence of trying to win them back, they entered their apartment and addressed them with friendly greetings and every mark of sincere regard. For some time the three visitors sat silent, as if in sad reflection, with downcast eyes. One could imagine them lost in an ocean of distress at the fall and misfortune of their friends, while in reality they thirsted for the blood of at least one of their number. At last Sheikh Ahmed opened his mouth, and after uttering expressions of deepest sympathy, he asked them to believe that the whole population had been thrown into alarm, small and great. Friends sorrowed, enemies rejoiced. The talk of the city was about nothing else. Some said they had lost their senses; others, that much learning had driven them mad. In every street and lane there was wrangling and fighting about them, and so danger to the public peace.

"Seeing all this," Sheikh Ahmed continued, "we decided to visit you and do what we could to make you repent. We urge you, brethren, by the Lord, to conceal nothing from us that might be of benefit to you, nor refuse to answer our questions." (Omar Zaki, aside to Sheikh Ali, said: "A plot and a trick, this sudden anxiety for our welfare. Be on your guard!") "How glad we would be if you returned! It would cast

a beam of sunshine into your homes, where your poor families sit in bitterness of heart. But if your mind is made up, we do not wish you to change it. Indeed, we are even ready to go with you, if you could only show us that the path you have chosen is the right way; for the life to come is much more preferable to this present life. So give us answers to the questions we may ask you, with all confidence and friendship, as we, according to our ability, will answer any questions you may ask us. The Lord guide us into the right and blessed way!"

"Ask us then what you will," replied Sheikh Mahmoud.

Sheikh Ahmed began: "Well, we learn from the rumours that you believe the Old and New Testaments to be genuine. And so we are shocked, knowing that these, as now in the hands of Christians, claim in respect to Jesus, son of Mary (on whom be blessings!), His divinity, crucifixion, death, and atonement -- articles of faith which the Qur'an denounces. Is not this to charge the Qur'an with lying, despite the fact that believers hold the Qur'an to be a revelation from the Lord? We await your answer."

But the company held back from saying a word, suspecting the net that was being spread before them. After a pause Omar Zaki spoke: "We see no reason to answer the question otherwise than that we do believe the Torah and Gospel to be the uncorrupted Word of God, for which, indeed, there are abundant proofs. But be not offended if I say we suspect you of being pretenders come to spy out our liberty -- lying in wait, if by chance something might escape our lips that could be used as a reason for complaint against

us."

Sheikh Ali Attar said: "The Lord forbid! We love you as we love our own brothers. But about this Bible, we are beginning to be distressed, thinking that the Qur'an might not be true, containing as it does such contradictions to those articles of faith; or if it is true, then the Book of the Jews and Christians must have been tampered with."

From this he went on to say that it was their distress that had brought them to make this visit, and they did not expect such unworthy accusations. It broke their hearts; and so saying, they rose as if to go.

Sheikh Ali (one of the small group) exclaimed in simplicity: "Oh, do not go; do not heed our brother's words. We recognise your kind motives and good intentions. But the question is not exactly as you have put it, whether the Qur'an is false, implying as it does that all inquiry beyond it is forbidden as a sin. If you read the Torah and the Gospel, you will see their wonderful agreement as we have seen. Then compare them with the Qur'an." He went on with his explanation, when Sheikh Ahmed Keilani interrupted him: "We know all that," he said, "And it is all good and quite right, and we shall do what you ask hereafter, if the Lord wills. But what we are asking now is this: If one asserts the genuineness and purity of the Bible, is that not equivalent to a denial of the Qur'an?"

Ali, startled and taken aback, was silent, suspecting now, with good cause, the true purpose and honesty of the speaker. In short, the poor company were in a crisis, afraid of committing themselves to what might lead them into still greater trouble.

They felt like a group of travellers, glancing on this side and on that, fearing an ambush.

Haj Yasin said: "Your alarm at finding us in your midst surprises us." (Omar, aside: "His assurance in saying that!") "We are your brethren. Have you ever seen or heard anything from us to cause this alarm? Why this change of attitude toward us? Please tell us."

Omar al-Haris (the poor fellow was simple enough not to see the trap and the danger of approaching it) said: "Your urgency in pressing the question, for which there appears really no occasion, is what makes us suspect your motives and puts us on our guard. It would seem plain enough that our leaving Islam is a sufficient answer to the question. Why, then, are you pressing it? (Now the moment Omar began to speak, the countenances of the visitors brightened and they prepared themselves, so that the arrow should not miss its mark.) No one doubts that the Qur'an contains many excellent things taken from the Torah and Gospel."

Whereupon Sheikh Ahmed, standing forward and stroking his beard, interrupted him.

"Well said, my good sir. But has it been revealed to Muhammad (omitting, as part of the snare, the ordinary invocation of blessing on his name) -- that is, revealed to him by inspiration?"

In a low voice Omar, caught in the snare, answered, "If I believed that, why then did I become a Christian?"

At these words the visitors cast off the veil of hypocrisy and Ahmed, changing his soft and winning voice, cried out in loud and

violent tones: "Then, my friend, you mean to say the Qur'an is not from God, and Muhammad, his Prophet, a deceiver, who has misled mankind with his lies. Mercy on us! God forbid! (Then growing louder) Oh, Omar, you have blasphemed the Qur'an and the Prophet in words past all endurance. Allahu akbar! Has it come to this? Ah, you have insulted our holy Book, blasphemed the Prophet, and reviled the faith!"

Now, while he was crying out in this excited way, the rest of his party, who, with a crowd of ignorant people, waited outside in expectation of something of the kind, took it for the signal to raise a tumult and storm around the prison house, as indeed it had already been planned. And so, gathering now into a mob, they rushed to the spot, crying out together: "Muhammad! Islam! Allahu akbar! Away with the infidels!" Then at the top of their voice, they screamed: "You dog! You swine! Ibn al-Haris, blasphemer of the blessed Qur'an and of the Prophet, the Messenger of God! He calls the Qur'an a fabrication and Muhammad an impostor who tricked the Arabs with his forgeries. Oh Prophet of the Lord, help! Oh true believers! This dog of an apostate has abused your Prophet and insulted your faith!" The screaming and shouting had reached a fearful pitch, when the angry crowd made a rush upon the prison door, but were beaten back by the palace guard.

On this, new multitudes, which were drawn by the commotion, kept running to the spot, both members of the common mob and also friends of the little company within, and the fighting became fierce. You might have fancied it an attack of Timur (Tamerlaine) or Bonaparte and fatal results might have followed, had not a

battalion of guards and police come up, dispersed the riot and arrested the ringleaders. These were at once taken before the Wali, who, presiding in the viceregal court at the moment and frowning as they entered, denounced them for raising an uproar before his very gate. Such wild outbursts, he said, brought discredit upon their religion and could be of no possible advantage to the Prophet or his revelation.

The accused answered: "Will our gracious Effendi, in his mercy, hear us and after that do as it may please him?"

Permission given, they said that they had visited the palace on personal business and, happening to pass the chamber in which the apostates were confined, heard Sheikh Ahmed and his friends talking with them and warning them. "So we said one to another, 'Let us leave these good people alone in their effort to bring the renegades back to the faith;' and so we continued with our own affairs. Shortly after, however, some of us passing by heard Omar al-Haris crying aloud that the Qur'an was not of God and that

Muhammad the Quraishite was a liar and deceiver. On this, we all crowded back to the door and such blasphemous words sounded in our ears from the apostate -- worse than any Jew or Christian could utter -- that our eyes flashed and our hearts burned with righteous indignation and we could no longer restrain ourselves. We would give up our lives rather than listen to such abuse of Islam and our Prophet. And so the riot arose and we became involved. We meant no offence to the state, but are the Effendi's humble and obedient subjects, who, admiring your grace and favour, thank your Excellency for patiently listening to us."

The Wali was satisfied and ordered them to be seated. Then he called Ahmed and his two companions, asking them to submit a petition in the prescribed form. And this was the petition, signed by Ahmed, Ali, Yasin, Keilani, Attar and Cabacabi:

Your Excellency,

Your servants humbly make complaint and say that, distressed at the apostasy which has occurred, we went with others to the apartment where the rebels are confined, vainly trying to convince them of their error, but we met with nothing but opposition. And when we asked whether the Qur'an denies the divinity and crucifixion of the son of Mary, one of them, Omar al-Haris by name, said that the Qur'an did not descend from God. We answered, "But the Prophet and Messenger of God has said so." "Oh indeed!" said Omar mockingly, "how could he, as a lying Quraishite that deceived the Arabs by his craft and falsehoods, have been a prophet?" At this our wrath was kindled and we answered him angrily as he deserved; which, when those standing outside heard, there arose the riot and violence which your Excellency has heard. This is our statement of what occurred. We leave the punishment of this slanderer and blasphemer of all that the true believer holds dear, to our Effendi's wisdom.

On this, the rioters were sent to prison and the council was summoned. Omar al-Haris was then called into court. The presiding judge informed him of the charge of blasphemy set forth in the petition. He denied the charge and explained exactly how it had all happened, concluding thus: "While I was admitting that the Qur'an contained much that was good, as taken from the Torah and the Gospel, Sheikh Ali Attar interposed, 'Is not the Qur'an then inspired?' I replied to this charge, saying, 'If I believed that, why did I then become a Christian?' Whereupon the Sheikh shouted at me with the false charge here

set forth; and he and his two companions, crying out, raised this commotion -- this is conduct unworthy of an accomplished Sheikh like him."

The Qadi, aside, said, "The problem is that the two ever entered into discussion with one another at all."

The Judge said to Omar, "Surely the meaning of these words of yours is just such as is complained of, confessing as you did that you have blasphemed the Qur'an and the blessed Prophet before many witnesses."

Omar replied: "As to what your Honour says of the meaning of my words, I would say that all other people, neither being Muslims, nor believing in the inspiration of the Qur'an and the prophetic office of Muhammad, if they were questioned as I was, could only answer as I did. And are they punished for it? As for the other words attributed to me, I utterly deny them. The Lord knows they have been fabricated against me. God forbid I should be guilty of such folly! The accusers are enemies who desire my death; and your Honour knows that, with many, a lie supported with false evidence is lawful, if only the goal is in the interest of the faith. Now, if sentence is to be passed on the evidence of the mob who stormed the palace of our confinement, owing to my alleged blasphemy -- such being their very motive for waiting there -- would that be just? Is it in accordance with the law that a recent convert like myself should be condemned on the evidence of Muslims making such an attack against me, who, moreover, was at that very moment in confinement under the hand of the law? I plead for justice in accordance with the law."

"Silence!" cried the Wali. "We can show you no favour but what is in accordance with the law."

Then he ordered him back again into confinement.

The next day, when the council met, the prisoner's case was discussed by them in the presence of the Wali. Most gave their vote that he should be beheaded. The Qadi and Mufti objected, the former saying that neither by law nor statute could sentence of death be passed on evidence of Muslims in such circumstances as the present.

The president of council interjected: "It looks, my honourable friend Effendi, as if you sided with the apostate set. Does your Honour lean toward their persuasion?"

Qadi, smiling, said: "Be that far from me! But we are sitting in an imperial court and we must decide in strict conformity with law and statute."

The Mufti agreed, saying: "In a council such as this, it is of necessity that we put aside all leanings, whether of religion or of race. Our empire is composed of many nationalities and peoples professing diverse faiths; and so, were we to decide apart from the imperial code on sole consideration of religion, we should be opening the door of oppression, rebellion and disaster. My humble advice is then: If, according to law and constitution, there is reason for the prisoner's execution, good and well; otherwise not. But the matter rests with you, most excellent Effendi."

After reflection, his Excellency said, "Let us first see the witnesses, and having heard their evidence the council will be better able to advise."

Accordingly he called on the accusers to

produce their witnesses; and having done so, he called to the Qadi; and when he had come, his Excellency whispered in his ear: "What do you think? I trust that the right thing will be done. We must see that the witnesses are not from among the common folk, but respectable and trustworthy men. And now I trust that you will not take any further objection to the proceedings."

"As your Excellency pleases," said the Qadi who returned to his seat.

The accusers brought forward many witnesses, but their evidence was not deemed satisfactory. Finally, three were produced, of respectable appearance, mature age and acknowledged piety. The accused, Omar al-Haris, was summoned. The witnesses, then put on solemn oath, gave circumstantial evidence similar to that of the accusers and supported the charge of the prisoner's blasphemous statements. The Wali and his council frowned angrily at the offender as they listened to the seemingly indisputable testimony.

"What do you say to the evidence of these respectable witnesses?" asked the president.

Omar replied: "My prayer is that their respectability and credit may be multiplied abundantly. Decide what you will."

"No, but if you have anything to say in your defence, speak."

"Then I make bold to say how amazed and perplexed I am that men of age and standing like these should give such false and trumped-up testimony. Has speech like this ever been heard from me? The Lord pardon you! How shall you account for this on the Last Day, the Great Day of

Judgement? To me it is of little importance; for me, death is better than living on in this wicked world. But let these conspirators know that my blood will not accomplish that which they desire. My trust is in the Lord and He is the best of helpers."

"Silence, wretch and apostate!" cried the Wali. "Do not revile men who are better and truer than yourself."

But many in the council said secretly to one another, "Surely, Omar al-Haris is the truer and the better."

Omar was then taken back to prison. After the court had been cleared, the assembly continued their discussions. A number inclined towards the innocence of the prisoner, but their objections were overruled and the sentence of death agreed to. A telegraphic dispatch was then prepared for transmission to the Porte and the assembly broke up.

As the Qadi and Mufti walked home together, the former asked, "My brother, what do you think about the evidence of these men?"

"It seemed to me shamefully trumped up," said the Mufti. "I am shocked at respectable, religious-looking persons like these giving before God such testimony in a case of life and death. Have they no fear of the Lord before their eyes?"

And so they conversed as they went along. The Qadi on the way called to mind the story of a false witness discovered and discarded by a few close questionings of the Caliph Omar. "Just so," he said, "with these creatures who profess much piety, but practise it not, as it is said, 'They think to deceive God, but deceive only their own

souls' (Sura al-Baqara 2:8). Alas, that it should have come to what I feared; but did not I tell you so from the beginning? Signing the warrant of arrest for this innocent man has turned against us! And who knows but that the rest of the company may be likewise condemned on the evidence of such 'respectable' witnesses? Rather than that I would quit my office and leave the city."

The Mufti, however, set his mind at rest on that point. He had heard reports of the plot to get Omar condemned, with the object of having it be a lesson to the people and also saving the rest, because he was poor and had no influential relatives to back his defence. "It is different with the rest. Sheikhs Ali and Mahmoud have many powerful friends and I myself will oppose any evil overtaking them to the utmost of my ability. So, I think, my friend, you need not be under any fear for their safety."

"Thank God, my brother!" said the Qadi. "The Lord reward you! You have lightened my heart and calmed my anxiety."

And so separating, each went to his own house.

As for the little company in confinement, the uproar that occurred after the conspiracy filled them with alarm -- all except Sheikh Ali, who maintained composure throughout the ordeal. But when they heard of the fatal sentence, they all broke down and wept bitterly; for Omar was young, under thirty years of age, father of two small sons, handsome, gifted in speech, wise and able in conduct, far removed from all that was false and frivolous and so was beloved by all around

him. When he returned to his friends after the trial and sentence, he sat down in their midst, leaning his elbows on his knees, his eyes on the ground and silent for a time. None of the company, immersed as they were in grief, could say a word. At last, looking up through his tears, he said: "The time has come for me to leave you, beloved friends, and seal my testimony with my blood. If it be the Lord's will that I should die, then death to me is sweet because it is the way that He directs. But I am weak and sorrowful; and one of my sorrows and anxieties is that, when you see your brother covered with blood for holding true to the Gospel, you shall become faint at heart and waver. But I pray that the opposite may be true and that God may strengthen you in the truth. My poor wife and two dear boys I leave in my Heavenly Father's hand. I hear that she has gone with them to her father's house. I trust I may see them once again before I die. And I pray that my honoured friends, Sheikh Ali and Sheikh Mahmoud, would cast an eye of pity on the orphan children of their brother, who now transfers upon them his responsibility of bringing them up in the fear of the Lord, if it please Him again to free your path and give you standing in the city. As for me, I shall be put to death, as I think, tomorrow. But let not that grieve you too much; for I die not because of any offence, but for the truth's sake and the sake of Him who died for me. This is my crown of rejoicing before the Lord. They may kill my body, but they cannot touch my soul. This separation is but for a moment and there will be a joyful reunion before our blessed Redeemer. The Lord is my refuge and to Him I fly as to a hiding place."

Then the rest began to speak comfortingly

to him, one after another.

Sheikh Ali said: "If only the arrow had been shot at me and that you had escaped! How evil the craft of mankind! If they put to death the blessed son of Mary, who came to bless them, is it strange for them to put to death His followers? Thank God, who has established your faith and strengthened your heart." With many such words he comforted Omar, and then ended: "May the Father of mercy and God of all grace bless your two sons, of whom, if it please God, we shall take the charge as if they were our own."

Mahmoud followed in the same strain with a cry of anguish: "Ah, the young are taken and the old are left! Might it yet please the Lord to save him!"

And so they spent a great part of the night in sorrowful discourse and prayer.

The same evening a message came by telegraph from the Porte. It expressed the Sultan's grief and concern at the apostasy of the eight heretics, as reported in the first telegram and at the charge of blasphemy against one of them in the second. "Now," it proceeded, "if, on the testimony of trustworthy witnesses, it can be proved that the accused spoke despitefully of the Qur'an and the Prophet, we ordain that he be executed by the sword on the day after receipt of this command, in the presence of the officers of state, of the troops and of the apostates themselves, as a warning to them. As regards these, however, as long as there is no offence against the law, change of religion does not of itself subject a convert to punishment. But if there be reasonable fear that their presence may cause commotion and disturbances in the city, then they must be removed to some

other land for a period. But during their absence their goods, homes and families must be protected."

On the receipt of this imperial dispatch, the officers of state, the general commanding the troops, the heads of the city and other leading men were summoned by the police. When all were assembled before the Wali the order was read aloud to them, which, on hearing it, they shouted, as with one voice: "Long live our Sultan, Commander of the Faithful, and you, his Viceroy, our governor!" The Wali then said that the execution must proceed tomorrow as commanded. Some proposed an early hour; but the Qadi suggested after midday, so that the condemned man might have time for reflection and for seeing his family and friends, who might be able to recall him to the faith. After some consultation with the Mufti, this and the exile of the rest of the company on the 14th day of the month were agreed to. The interpreter then made proclamation accordingly, whereupon all praised the mercy of his Excellency, and every man returned to his home.

In the morning the prisoner was formally notified of the sentence and time of execution. This being publicised, his family and friends grieved bitterly. His wife, taking her two little sons, one five, the other seven years of age, hurried along the road to the palace followed by her mother, brother and husband's sister, her garments torn and her hair dishevelled, weeping as she went. Entering, she fell senseless at Omar's feet. Then, beating her face and dwelling on his love for her and hers for him, she begged Omar to have pity on her and her orphaned children.

"Alas and alas!" she cried, "think of these tender ones and of your handmaid, all robbed of their protector. Oh, as you love me, change your mind or keep it all within your own heart until the Lord shall open a way of safety!"

And again she fell at his feet, bathing them with her tears; the children cried bitterly. Omar raised her gently, and calling her the dearest object to him in the world, asked her to quiet her distress and listen to what he had to say. So she sat by him, as he wiped the tears from his boys' eyes, held them close to his bosom and kissed them tenderly. Then, with difficulty restraining himself from an outburst of grief, he began to speak to his wife. In a long and loving address, interrupted over and again by fits of emotion, he dwelt on the changeableness of earthly things and the reunion beyond. Separation from her, the flower of his life, his very heart's blood, was grievous; but to deny his Saviour would be still more grievous, make him miserable here and lost hereafter. Should he outwardly repent, keeping his faith in his heart, as she had suggested, out of love for her and the children, that would be hateful hypocrisy toward God and the selling of his Saviour. He could not go back as he had often told her.

"If you truly love me," he continued, "cease with your request and let me go to my Lord. Then, if you will join me in the path of truth, we will soon meet again above." And so he encouraged her and the relatives that accompanied her to embrace the faith of Jesus, repeating John 3:16, as well as other passages on the love of God and eternal life:

For God so loved the world
That He gave His only begotten Son,

That whoever believes in Him
Should not perish
But have everlasting life.

After that he entrusted his sons to the guardianship of Ali and Mahmoud, and holding them close to his bosom, prayed: "May the Fountain of mercy, grace and comfort, bless you, my beloved sons, and guide you both, as your father has been guided, into the right way! Man may separate us now, but they shall not be able in His heavenly kingdom."

His sister, who had been standing by, weeping, embraced him now.

"My soul!" she cried, "how can I live without my brother, the light of my eyes? My only brother, dear! I would not add to your grief; but where shall I go and what is life without you? If only I had never been born or that I had died before you. To see your blood shed -- Oh, that my eyes were hardened to hide away the sight! Oh, that the Lord might yet keep this calamity from happening!" And she threw herself upon him, kissing his hands and neck and feet with bitter crying.

He wept too and kissed her. Then he quieted her with loving words and begged that she should take his wife away.

"Never!" she said, "I will cling to your side as long as I may see your face. Do you not know that every moment by you is dearer to me than all my life?"

Just as this scene, which might have melted a heart of stone, was going on, the Qadi and Mufti came up to see if they could not make Omar repent; but he refused. Then the Qadi took him into an adjoining apartment by himself alone and

did his utmost to persuade him to return to Islam outwardly. Then he promised him a pardon and that he would get him sent away to Europe or to Lebanon, where he might in safety profess the Christian faith; and he gave him the Wali's solemn guarantee to that effect.

Omar thanked him kindly for the interest he had shown in him, both at the court and now. "But God forbid," he said, "that I should forsake the Gospel, even for a time or in appearance, or say with my tongue that which is opposed to my heart's conviction. But I well know that it is nothing but affection that has led you to make me this offer."

Then grasping his hand with the prayer that every blessing might attend him, he kissed it, while the Qadi kissed his in affectionate return. After that the Qadi headed homeward with the Mufti, both deeply affected at the devotion and steadfastness of the youthful confessor.

Great numbers of friends and relatives kept crowding the room in the vain hope of making him change his mind. And so things went on till the hour arrived and his brethren and family embraced him with a last farewell. His wife and sister, since his return from the interview with the Qadi, had not ceased clinging to him in their uncontrollable grief, when the commandant of the guard entered and, having hung across Omar's bosom the fatal decree, led him forth from the place of confinement with his family, friends and the little company of converts. Just then the general appeared with a squadron of horses. The procession was formed at once. A column of gendarmes marched in front and a body of the imperial troops in the rear. The prisoner and his friends,

surrounded by the officers of state and other grandees, were in the centre. There followed a crowd of citizens and a great multitude of common people. Most of the latter were pleased at the sight, but of the more intelligent classes many were distressed and sorrowful. And so they moved slowly on till they reached the place of execution. There the squadron, with its glittering weapons, was drawn up on one hand and the gendarmes on the other, with the crowd on a rising ground behind. The Mufti now came forward and separating Omar from his wife and sister, who had both till now been holding his hands on either side, carried them to a suitable site nearby. Then having obtained permission, Omar spoke as follows: "I rejoice that it is not for any crime that I am about to suffer. Before Heaven I affirm that the evidence against me is false. May the Lord forgive them that gave it. I have done no wrong, but am nevertheless ready to die for the Gospel's sake. And in the presence of the great assembly, the rich, the learned and multitude of fellow-citizens, I confess that I have embraced the blessed faith of the Messiah. And I testify that Jesus, son of Mary, the wonderful 'Word of God' and 'Spirit from God,' has come to save you from a death far more fearful than the one I am about to suffer. Jesus came to give, through His death, eternal life to as many as receive Him as Lord and Saviour. Look on me, my fellow citizens, how I rejoice in this faith with the sword unsheathed above me. Thanks be to God for letting me tell you this! And now, if I have wronged anyone, I crave his pardon. The hour will come when we shall all stand before the judgement seat of Him who shall render to every man according to his deeds."

Having spoken this in a loud voice before the whole assembly, he knelt down and prayed for a blessing on his home and people, on the Sultan and all rulers and governors, and on those who had sought his life, ending thus: "Oh Lord Jesus, the Messiah, into Your hands do I commend my spirit!" He ceased and as he continued kneeling in perfect peace, with quiet and downcast look, his noble countenance lightened with tranquillity. Everyone stood awed at the sight -- one which made an impression they would never forget.

At the fatal trumpet blast, the sword flashed upon his neck and the head rolled from the body which fell all gory to the ground. His relatives moved forward to the spot, weeping bitterly. His sister caught up the head and pressed it to her bosom, while the poor widow fell upon the corpse, wailing loudly. The remains were then placed upon a bier, covered over with a pall of crimson velvet and, by order of the authorities, borne to the Christian burial-ground where, with all reverence and regard, they were committed to the dust.

10. After the Execution

The courageous attitude, last words and prayer of Omar had a wonderful effect on the people at large, who said that there must be something good in that which made the martyr smile under the unsheathed sword. There was a feeling of revulsion and the conduct of those who planned the plot and gave false witness was made known all over the city. The most remarkable result, however, was the conversion of a man of rank, Ahmed Effendi al- Khotli, who, after the trial, went and bought a Bible and some

Christian books. Finding that the Qur'an itself gave testimony to the Gospel, he spent much of his time studying it. Guided thus to the divine light by the example and steadfastness of the martyr, he at last embraced the Christian faith.

Let us now return to the three converts who, under the allurements of the Wali's council, had gone back from their profession. The scene at the execution struck deep into their hearts. They were self-accused at having disowned their convictions and they repented of what they had done. Sayyid Mustafa was miserable, as indeed the other two also.

"Alas!" he said, "why did I deny my Saviour, and prefer the present life to that which shall not end? My head, as Jeremiah said, is a fountain of water, from which tears run down night and day."

Hasan Effendi joined in the same bitter lament, but he could not at the present moment face the anger of the people and wrath of the government, with the same fate of Omar before him. He would wait for a short time and when things mended he would then make profession of the faith. But he could not do it now.

Sayyid Hasan, the third, said the same; but Sayyid Mustafa replied: "Shall we follow our Saviour in seasons of peace and safety and not also in times of difficulty? How can I do violence to my conscience? And if I return, He that forgave Peter will also forgive me." With many such words he declared his resolve to renounce his previous recantation. "If it does come to the death, we shall be safe with our Saviour; if spared, we can join ourselves to the rest of the converts."

The other two, amazed at his boldness,

said that they must put off their decision to a more convenient time and with these words they departed.

Mustafa, grieved at their defection, presented himself before the Wali in court the next morning. The Mufti asked the reason, and he said that ever since he had renounced the Christian faith ten days earlier, he had been in a whirlpool of misery at having denied his Saviour and now came to withdraw his recantation. The council were astonished at his bravery and the Wali cried, frowning severely, "So you lie before the court of your sovereign! You hypocrite! You swine! What shall be your punishment now?"

"Yes," he replied, "or rather, before my God and King, I lied. If I deserve it I am not afraid to die."

While the Wali thus stormed at him, he remained unmoved as a rock amid the waves. They now saw the error they had committed in putting Omar to death and the fruits it was bearing. After consultation he was sent back to prison with the others. It was a joy and revival for these to be rejoined by their lost companion, who told them of what the Wali had said and of the refusal of the other two to obey their convictions. They conversed gladly on the kindness of God to them, and kneeling down, offered up thanks.

After Mustafa left the court, the Wali was astonished at the steadfastness of the man, as well as the result so contrary to all they had expected as the effect of the execution. But the Qadi said he had never approved the sentence of death, fearing an outcome such as this; and he was lost in admiration of the great strength and firmness of the confessor, despite the fierce and angry

look of the Wali. Then one arose and said, "This was nothing more than the work of the accursed Satan, who got hold of vain and conceited souls, making them believe right wrong, and wrong right. Make them labour; that would be more effective than any load of threats and penalties."

"That would be true," answered another, "if these were low and conceited fellows, instead of some of our best and wisest citizens. But how such Satanic delusions could have entered the minds of these men, I cannot conceive."

The Mufti admitted that the case which had just come up was not singular. The popular feeling had turned much that way. Omar, they said, was unjustly executed; the evidence was false and made up. Such errors should be refuted by argument, not by the sword. To use the sword in suppression of false beliefs was out of step with the times.

"What is all this you are talking about?" cried the Wali. "It is altogether out of order."

"No!" replied the Mufti, "by my life it is but the truth."

The Wali was very excited and sat silent for a while, the marks of anger engraved upon his face. Then, quieting down, he said: "No more of this objectionable speech. We must act according to the law and custom of the land."

So they held their peace and planned to continue applying pressure upon the converts.

Now Nasir al-Din and his friends were very distressed and angry at finding their plots against the converts not to have succeeded as they had expected, but that,

on the contrary, Sayyid Mustafa had gone back to them. So in their anger they set out to stir up the city and ran through the bazaars and streets, crying out that the apostates still indulged in abusive language against Islam; and that, despite Omar's execution, they persisted in their disruptive ways.

Chief among these was the half-witted Haj Qadur, already noticed, who went about the lanes, bazaars and coffee-shops in his strange clothing, holding his hands up, according to his wild and crazy fashion, to attract attention, prancing on his toes and with every silly movement and action screaming, with crowds around him, against the converts. The populace enjoyed the sights, but most of the better class were shocked and tried unsuccessfully to stop the crazy creature, who went about shouting in this way: "*Al hamd ul lillahi*. Praise the Lord! The idolater's head was cut off for abusing the Qur'an and his soul has gone to hell. Why have not the rest of them been sent there too? It would be good for us to be rid of them all!"

Several times he had been stopped by the authorities, but he soon began again. One day, when behaving in this wild way, swaying to and fro like a drunken man and screaming like a madman, he passed by the shop of Haj Ibrahim, a wise and pious Egyptian merchant, who had often before tried to stop him and now called kindly to him to come near. Refusing to be reasoned with, he grew wilder and wilder and like one possessed, poured forth his senseless chatter against the apostates and eventually on the good Egyptian himself. At last a neighbour, interposing, asked the Egyptian what use it was to correct a fool who was always misbehaving, having been imprisoned and fined over and over for it?

And so the good man, thanking him, gave up the attempt.

Now the families and acquaintances of the converts were alarmed at the treacherous attacks of the hostile party and their attempts to excite the people against them. So they tried in every way to stop the attempts made on their safety and to free themselves from the risks that confronted them. Thus they attracted the attention of the Qadi and Mufti, of the ladies of their households and of many others, who like them were merciful and compassionate. The better part of the city was like-minded, sympathising with the sufferers, whereas the party of Nasir al-Din, along with the baser sort, and Haj Qadur at their head, continued with their schemes.

One day, as Al Haj was continuing in this wild way at one of the cafés of the town, Sheikh Hasan, Ali's brother, happened to pass by and Ali's name caught his ear in connection with disrespectful and abusive words. Peeping through the lattice of the shop, he saw the fool in his antics, surrounded by a company of like-minded simpletons, screaming against the Christians and dancing around like a crazy camel.

Now Hasan was a tall, handsome young fellow, strong and powerful, among the best athletes of the city, cultured and of gentle bearing, of few words and as courteous as can be. He restrained himself as long as he could, till at last, suffering under the abuse of his brother and the other converts, he could bear it no longer and standing before the door, called the maniac to account for seeking to drag his brother to a fate the same as Omar's.

"By the Lord!" he cried, "not a drop of his blood shall be shed, but, for every drop, fifty dogs like you shall die. If Sheikh Ali became a Christian or even a pagan unbeliever, what is that to you, you wretch?"

The fool returned the threats in blustering language, calling Hasan a coward, apostate and idolater.

At these words Hasan darted like an eagle on Haj Qadur, threw him to the ground and kept tossing him about with his feet, like a ball, while the wretched creature screamed: "Oh followers of Muhammad, he is killing me! Oh Muslim brothers, this accursed Christian!"

The masses from all around flocked to the spot and a riot and uproar occurred. But the friends of Hasan -- a man very popular with the better classes and who despised the capering fool -- soon came to the rescue, upon which the mob turned and fled, all except Haj Qadur, who was so bruised with the kicking that he could not run away with the rest. So, stopping his screams, he slipped into the corner of a mosque and lay down for shelter there. But he had hardly rested at all when the crowd rushed back again in still greater force -- all the dregs of the city, young and old. The riot became worse than ever and if a company of soldiers had not arrived on the spot, the consequences would have been serious indeed.

Al Haj and Hasan, with a number of those who began the disturbance, were summoned before the magistrates, who sentenced the two, as ringleaders, to a year's imprisonment with a fine of fifty liras; and the others to two months and a fine of twenty liras. After ten days,

however, they were let out on the security of respectable citizens and the payment of a fine -- a small matter for Hasan, but serious for Qadur, who had to borrow the money. On release, they were summoned before the Wali, who warned Qadur that if he slandered the men in prison again or maligned the Christian religion, he would be severely punished.

Al Haj cried out in reply that he had done nothing to be attacked by Hasan in that way and now to be punished so, and fined, a poor man like him, with so heavy a sum!

"It is your own folly and ill-mannered ways," answered his Excellency, "that have brought this upon you. Be gone! Mind your own business. Do not interfere again in matters that do not concern you."

Hasan then made a feast for the four friends who were taken up with him, paid their fines and sent them away rejoicing with handsome gifts. But as for the fool, he still talked foolishly, went about complaining that he had been punished because he spoke the truth about the apostates and crying out, "Alas, alas for our religion!" After going on for some time in this way to the annoyance of the whole city, he fell sick and died.

Now the Wali was much bothered and troubled by these outbreaks and fearing their recurrence, summoned an assembly of the leading men of the city into the hall of audience. As they were seated on his right hand and his left, he called on his private secretary to address them. So the private secretary arose. He recounted the circumstances from the beginning -- the arrest of the rebels, the communications with the Porte, the execution of Omar and the order to deport the rest for the sake of

peace in the city. It was the Wali's earnest desire that all should co-operate in practising these arrangements, in which event they should have his favour as good citizens. But if there were any opposition or disturbance, the severest measures would be taken. It was his Excellency's wish, as a father, to promote the happiness of his children; but if there were any more rioting or up risings, they would have cause to repent.

The chief governor of the city made a courtly answer, thanking the Wali for his kind hand over them and promising obedience. His Excellency had indeed treated them as any caring father would. There should be no more disturbance. They agreed in the wisdom of sending away the Christian converts to prevent recurrence of excitement in the city, and hoped they might yet come back to their ancestral faith, bringing joy and satisfaction with them.

The Wali expressed his pleasure and then commanded the order for exile to be prepared. Coffee and refreshments were served, and the assembly broke up.

When the converts in confinement heard of the outbreak they were much disturbed, not knowing what the consequences might be. Ali, especially, was greatly distressed, till, after a day or two, they heard the result. So when Hasan, now set at liberty, visited the prison chamber, his brother chided him for giving way to his anger: "Let the half-witted Haj and his fellows say what they like and fabricate what lies they will. The Lord sees them and the Lord is a sufficient Helper for us."

The others also all enjoined self-restraint and patience on their friends.

Now, from the time of their final imprisonment and especially since Omar's execution, not only the Qadi and Mufti, but great numbers of the chief citizens as well as their immediate friends and relatives, crowded to their chamber with earnest requests that for the sake of their families they would return, at least in outward appearance, to the faith and thus not be forced to leave the homes that were so dependent on them. These appeals were the sorest trial they had to bear. And, in truth, no one who has not himself gone through it all can tell the bitterness of it. Thus, wearied and distressed, they longed for the day when they should be taken away from the city. And thus they talked one with another.

"One's own tears comfort the heart," said Ibrahim, "but the tears of one's household smash it to pieces."

Suleiman added, "A mother's tears bind us as with a cord to the home below; grace in the heart as a cord to the home above."

Mahmoud continued, "Yes, her tears are sore to bear; he that can stand against them is sure to prevail even against the sword."

Ali spoke of the love of our Saviour for us on the cross, as an example to His followers to bear up against the bitterness of separation from one's home.

Then Abd ul-Halim added: "The tears of parents do not succeed in bringing back children taken away by death. How then can they help to bring back children who, like us, have died in Christ?"

With such living words did they pass the time and comfort one another.

Now, after the order of exile, the Qadi and Mufti visited the city administrator, the

treasurer, the imam of the Great Mosque and certain of the provincial governors, and resolved with them on a last attempt to lure the apostates back to Islam. So, after asking the blessing of the Lord on their attempt, they waited on the little company in prison and courteously saluted them.

Then, the Qadi arose and made a touching appeal. The order of exile had melted the hearts of all their friends. With much emotion he made mention of the inmates of their harems and asked them not to harden their hearts to all these miseries. They came with the aim of recalling them to the faith of their fathers and still had hopes that they would turn their weeping into laughter and joy.

The little company were greatly moved, especially Sheikh Mahmoud, who had a very tender heart. The visitors all addressed the converts in the same way and then Sheikh Ali made reply.

He begged to be heard graciously, even as they would that the Lord should hear them. In terms of overflowing gratitude he thanked them for their goodness and concern. Referring to the letter which had led them to question the reliability of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, he challenged discussion and entered into the arguments which had caused them to accept the Gospel and the Christian faith. Conviction like this cannot be put aside.

They answered: "If we are proved wrong, we are ready to come back; but exile from city, home and all our dear ones, is more tolerable to us than would be a return to Islam against our peace of conscience. Though we must hold to our decision, we do acknowledge your kindness, which we will never forget. It is the Lord's help we

look for in our troubles and sorrows -- He is the Great, the Merciful, the All-Sufficient One and the Best of Defenders."

To all this the Mufti replied very briefly. They were distressed that their effort had proved fruitless. They came with no intention of entering into a discussion, because the company of converts were as learned as themselves on all these points -- probably more so; and they felt it would be of no use. Grieved at heart, Sheikh Ali concluded the matter: "We can only leave you in the hands of the One who is able to deliver you from the paths of error and plant your feet in the way of truth and peace."

And so the visitors left.

As the Qadi made his way homeward, he was much exercised in mind about all this -- the brave attitude of the company, the powerful address of Ali and the appeal to bring the matter to the test of argument. "What arguments had I," he kept saying to himself, "of equal strength? Can I shut my eyes to the appeal? Is it not a reasonable demand?"

The poor prisoners had become so distressed by continual visits of their well-meaning friends, that they longed for a place of quiet and peace. Yet they were much encouraged by the interview just described. "Was it fear," said one, "of not being able that held them back from contradicting our arguments -- fear of disgrace and love of the world?"

"Or," said another, "because they saw us so well prepared?"

And the effect was to give the little company confidence and assurance in the

truths they held.

11. Examining the Claims of Christianity

The following day, the Qadi and his friends met again and, talking the matter over, Hasan the prefect said he had been thinking they were bound to answer the challenging claims of the Gospel; otherwise it would be taken as admission of weakness. "How can we, heads of the Muslim faith, continue to boast the unbeatable strength of our religion if we refuse the opportunity set before us; or blame them otherwise for acting as they have? We are surely bound to answer the appeal, and so deliver our own souls." All agreeing, they fixed the night of the 4th Safar for the purpose. The little company rejoiced greatly on being told of this, though some feared it might be a plot, as before, to entangle them. So they prepared for the conference with fasting and prayer.

Accordingly, on the night appointed, their friends invited them to a room prepared for their reception, where they were received with a kind greeting. The Qadi said he had thought it right to respond to their challenge; there would be perfect freedom of speech and no unfair advantage would be taken of careless slips or faults on either side. "And now it is for you, my friends, to open the argument in any way you will."

Sheikh Ali, after thanking the visitors for the promised freedom of speech, said, "I understand that you are seeking an explanation for our leaving the Muslim faith."

"Just so," said Qadi. "Let us choose a speaker for each side; the rest are to be silent unless asked to speak."

The Qadi and Ali being chosen, the former thus opened the debate: "We will not go back upon the arguments we have heard before. I wish simply to ask you this: Cannot the Almighty devise the salvation of man, other than by sending His Son (supposing there is a Son) to be incarnate, to live our life and to be put to death at the hands of wicked men?"

"Everything is possible with God," answered Ali. "This is consistent with His perfection and attributes."

"Yes; but explain your meaning."

"I mean that He is just, as well as almighty, and that His power must be exercised in a way not opposed to justice."

"But can this be asked of God? When He commands a thing, who can say unto Him, 'What have you done?'"

"How then can God be just and yet forgive the sinner?"

"Why need I to know that? God acts in accordance with His perfection and is absolute."

"Yes; but it is needful for man to know the goodness and love of God and so to praise Him for the same; and also that he may know exactly how to approach his Maker, and by the door provided for him; otherwise, why would he need a Book and a Revelation at all?"

The Qadi claimed that after experiencing punishment, the creature enters Paradise; while Ali held that sin cannot be thus treated. If a man is freed after experiencing punishment, where then is room for the mercy of God? And how, if the sin be against the Infinite requiring appropriate penalty, can the justice of God be

reconciled with His mercy?

After this argument was carried out to a wearisome length, the Qadi blushed and said, "I do not know, except that 'He pardons whom He will, and destroys whom He will'" (Sura Al-Ma'ida 5:21).

Ali asked whether slander against the Sultan and slander against the Prophet would be considered equal offences. "No," replied the Qadi, "the one would be punished slightly and the other by death."

Then Ali commented: "Here the sin is against the Infinite and the penalty must consequently be endless. But the Bible shows how God's justice in pardoning is compatible with His mercy."

At the Qadi's request, Ali proceeded to explain the plan of salvation, both from the Old Testament and the New. He quoted Isaiah 53, which the Qadi admitted to be significant, if indeed it was reliable.

"Sacrifice," continued Ali, "as laid down in the law, points to the death and atonement of Christ."

The argument then passed on to the subject of the Trinity. Whereupon the Qadi exclaimed: "The Lord our God is one Lord. How then do the Christians talk of the Father and the Son? God forbid! It is all against reason."

Ali challenged his opponent with the following question: "Can any but God Himself know His own nature?"

"No."

"Then we need a revelation of the same from Himself. This is compatible with reason. For instance, the sun is a trinity of mass, heat and light; so is man as a unity

of body, soul and spirit. We can accept only what the Almighty has been pleased to reveal of Himself in the Bible, and as embodied there in the form of words at baptism, enjoined by Jesus Christ Himself on His disciples."

The Mufti then entered the discussion. He quoted Sura al-Ikhlas 112: "'Say: He is God, the One, the Eternal, He neither begets, nor is begotten; neither is there any one like unto Him.' Tell me, how can a Son be said to be born of God, implying time, when God is eternal -- likewise the Son, said to be God of very God? It is impossible for me to believe that this is the Word of God! It must have been inserted into the text."

"That is out of the question," said Ali. "The doctrine of the Trinity runs through the Bible, beginning with 'Let us make man' in Genesis 1; moreover, the Christ is spoken of as 'the Everlasting Father' in Isaiah 9:6,7. All this is in the Old Testament -- a book not in the hands of Christians, but one in the hands of the Jews, a people who reject this doctrine. The Gospel, again, is but the fulfilment of the Old Testament, which signifies the death of Christ for the redemption of mankind. We cannot tell how the Son was begotten of the Father before all time. Perhaps it might illustrate it to say that heat is begotten of the sun, while having its origin with the sun at the same time. All this has been revealed to us out of the Father's love, in terms adapted to our finite understandings. And it is all in accordance with the Qur'an."

"In the Qur'an?" asked the Mufti, "this teaching?"

"Yes; it is so."

"Good! Show it to us, if you can."

"For example, we read in Sura Al Imran 3:43: 'When the angels said to Mary, 'Truly God sends good tidings of The Word (proceeding) from Himself: His name the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary; honourable in this world and in that to come; and one of those that draw near (unto the Throne).'" All this plainly signifies that the Word was a person, the possessor of this dignity. Further, the expression, 'The Word of God,' is evident proof that the person born of Mary -- namely, the Messiah -- is of the nature of God; and this Name and Nature are just what we find written in the Gospel: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'; and again: 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us' (John 1:1,14); and yet again: 'He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God' (Revelation 19:13). This all means that the Word, an attribute of Jesus, born of Mary, is from eternity of the Godhead; and the Words 'with God,' and 'was God' signify the distinct personality of the Word, as well as his being very God. Remarkably, though 'the Word' is grammatically feminine in Arabic (*Kalimat*), it is interpreted as masculine in the above Qur'anic passage. This agrees with the Gospel."

Abd ul-Hamid, with the Mufti's permission, interposed here: "No one," he said, "can interpret the Qur'an, but the Lord alone, and our great authorities. In so serious a matter it would be rash to trust our own judgement. Let us go to such commentators as al-Baidawi and al-Razi. Now Baidawi's interpretation is this: 'Truly the likeness of Jesus is as the likeness of Adam. He created Him out of

the dust; then said to Him, 'Be,' and He was' (Sura Al Imran 3:58); that is, He became man, not God, as the Christians think. Then again, in Sura Al-Ma'ida 5:125, we read: 'And when God shall say: Oh Jesus, son of Mary, have you said unto men, "Take Me and My mother for two Gods besides God?" He shall say: "God forbid! It is not for Me to say that which I ought not.'"

Ali objected that every man must judge the meaning of such texts for himself; for, just as one writing a letter would put in it what his friend would understand, so with the message in the revelation of the Almighty. No doubt there are obscure passages in the Qur'an that require explaining by commentators. But those respecting Jesus, son of Mary, are plain and simple. "If I speak to a child of 'milk from the goat,' or 'dates from the tree,' does it require a learned doctor with his laws of grammar to make the child understand? No! And likewise with the passages which tell us that Jesus was born without an earthly father -- 'the Word of God,' and 'a Spirit from Him.' Any man of sound and unprejudiced mind would understand that. But people recite the Qur'an by routine memorisation, without thinking of its meaning. I make bold to say that I myself have made some proficiency in these studies, and have the commentaries of both the imams you have referred to; but after all, these do not help you or me in the same way as our own sense and intellect. I admit that there are passages in the Qur'an which deny the divinity of the Messiah; but these do not affect our right to stand upon those other grand verses in the Qur'an that are in accord with the Old Testament and the New in this matter."

Abd ul-Hamid interposed with the

objection that "the pronoun *min* ('from') in the phrase 'Word from Him,' does not imply that the Word was a part of, or an emanation from, the Deity; but simply 'from' Him or 'sent by' Him."

Ali continued: "Had the meaning been as you suppose, then in the announcement of the birth of Jesus, would not an ordinary form of speech have been used, as in the case of Abraham's guests, who addressed him thus: 'We bring you tidings of a wise son' (Sura al-Hijr 15:52); or in the case of Zacharias: 'The angels called to him as he stood praying in the chamber -- Truly, God sends you good tidings of (a son named) John, who shall bear witness to the Word (proceeding) from God, honourable, chaste and one of the righteous prophets' (Sura Al Imran 3:39)? How different were the tidings conveyed to Mary regarding Him who was Himself of the Divine nature: 'Oh Mary, truly God gives good tidings to you of the Word from Him'; not of a wise son, nor yet of a righteous prophet, as in the case of Zacharias and Abraham. How different also is the passage in Sura al-Nisa' 4:169: 'Truly Jesus, son of Mary, is the Apostle of God, and His Word, which He conveyed unto Mary, and a Spirit (proceeding) from Him.' What other prophet, I ask, is given such a description? The verse not only attributes prophetic rank to Him, but adds 'His Word'; and, lest we should understand this in any way other than was intended, there is added, as it were in explanation, 'a Spirit from Him'; to show that Jesus was not as other prophets, but as a Son sent by His Father into the world. Are not these verses in entire conformity with the Gospel? Moreover, what stress is laid on His birth, different from that of all other men, without an earthly father; and the heavenly

relation to the Deity, different also from that of all other prophets and messengers! Is it not then correct that He is called 'the Son of God,' as we find in the Gospel?"

"And now, let me tell you the story of a Christian with whom, some four years ago, I, while still a Muslim, was arguing; and I was talking, according to our custom, of Muhammad as above all other prophets -- 'the chief of the sons of Adam,' as the Imam Ghazali calls him. As I was saying this, I saw the Christian smile; and I asked, 'Why do you smile?'"

"'Oh, it was nothing,' he answered."

"'No, but you did smile; and, by the Lord, I must know the reason!'"

"'Well,' he said, 'a certain thing caused me to smile; but why should I tell it, unless there were some necessity?'"

"Getting impatient I said, 'Tell it me at once, you Christian dhimmi! (*Dhimmi* is the term used for Jews and Christians, describing their position as dependent and protected people in an Islamic state.) What was it?'"

"'Well, it was because of your placing Muhammad above all the prophets, and the chief of mankind quite contrary to your own Qur'an and tradition; for these place Jesus far above all the prophets and messengers of the Lord.'"

"Whereupon I replied, 'Bring me the proof, if indeed you be one of those that speak the truth.'"

"'I have six reasons,' he answered; 'four from the Qur'an, and two from the Hadith, the traditions. Of those from the Qur'an: First, Jesus is called the "Word of God" and "His Spirit". Muhammad is only a

Messenger from God; and without doubt the spirit of someone is far above his messenger. Second, His supernatural birth; for if He had not some special relation to the Deity, then why this wonderful conception? Third, miracles such as no prophet, either before or after, has ever shown. Fourth, Christ was entirely free from sin; whereas the Qur'an mentions the need of the greatest of the patriarchs and prophets (as Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Solomon) for the pardon of their sins; and as regards Muhammad himself, the Qur'an speaks of "the forgiving of his former and of his latter sins" (Sura al-Fath 48:2), and also that God "has eased the burden which burdened [his] back" (Sura al-Sharh 94:2,3). As for Jesus, however, it is never mentioned that He asked for pardon, or that the Lord pardoned Him; from all this, we gather that Jesus stood singular and alone, above all prophets in nature, rank, and sinless perfection."

"Now from tradition," continued my Christian friend, "there is, first, this tradition in the collection of the Imam Muslim: "One day Muhammad told Aisha that every child, born of the seed of Adam, received the prick of Satan at its birth, and was affected thereby, except the Son of Mary and His mother;" so that, according to this saying of the Prophet, the sting of Satan affected all the prophets at their birth, himself not excepted, saving only the Messiah and His mother; and the absence of power in Satan, the accursed, to touch Him alone, is proof of His being above all others. Second, We find the following tradition as given by the Imam Ghazali: "When Jesus, son of Mary, on whom be blessing, was born, the devils came to Satan, saying, that in the morning

the idols were found all hanging down their heads. Satan could not understand this, till in his rounds he discovered that Jesus had just been born and that the angels were around Him, rejoicing. So he returned to the devils and told them that a prophet had been born a day earlier; and that never had a mortal man been born before, at whose birth he had not been present, but only this; and so the devils despaired of any idols being ever worshipped after that night, as they had been before."'"

"Now these six evidences," continued my Christian friend, "taken from your own books, should raise the rank of Jesus Christ in your hearts far above that of Muhammad. Being called "the Word of God" and "His Spirit"; His supernatural birth; His being surrounded at birth by the angelic host, lest the evil one should come near to touch Him; and His freedom from sin -- can these things be without meaning? No, by my life! And every mention of the Messiah in the Qur'an only leads one back to the Torah and the Gospel, "the Light and the Guide," as the Qur'an calls them. How much, then, are we indebted to Muhammad for this invaluable testimony! And truly, O Sheikh, if I were a Muslim like yourself, I should give no rest to my soul until I found a solution to these important questions. It is a marvel to me to see your learned doctors casting these blessed Scriptures behind their backs, as if simply to ignore them were a sufficient answer."'"

"So spoke my Christian friend; and having heard it all, I said: 'Enough, you Christian dhimmi! I will look into this matter, if the Lord wills.' So we parted. But my heart was burdened with these weighty arguments, and ever after I used, as it

were, to hear a voice saying to me, 'O Ali! What do you think of these things, their secret and their cause?"'

Then Hasan Effendi, by the Mufti's permission, said: "These mysteries, no doubt, have a cause and an explanation. But as it has not been revealed in the Qur'an, the Lord alone knows, and with Him we leave it. In so far, however, as Sheikh Ali has referred us for answer to the Christian Scriptures, we cannot accept them as final, seeing that they have been in the hands of unprincipled corrupters."

Sheikh Abd ul-Hady then obtained the Mufti's permission to reply to this objection, as Sheikh Ali must have been tired speaking, and answered as follows: "Sheikh Ali," he said, "has already, in reply to the Mufti, given proof of the genuineness of the Old Testament; and the Old Testament is proof of the genuineness of the New, because of its agreement in their common end and object -- the New being, as it were, the key to the prophecies of the Old. But if you will, please state what you consider evidence of corruption, and we shall then reply."

"Well, then," answered Hasan, "there is the assertion of the divinity of Jesus, though He was subject to human frailty, and (as you say) suffered death; then there is the denial of His mission by the Jews; and, lastly, variations and contradictions in the Scriptures themselves."

"Now, first, please mention the discrepancies," said ul-Hady.

"Here are a few: Matthew mentions two blind men cured; but the other Gospel accounts mention only one. Matthew speaks of bringing a donkey and its foal to Jesus; Mark, only the foal. In Acts 9:7 the

men with the Apostle Paul heard a voice; but in chapter 22, they heard no voice. The Apostle Paul claims that faith saves without works; James says that works indeed do justify us. These are a few examples. Such confusion and contradiction are clear proof of corruption."

Abd ul-Hady retorted: "In respect to the human weaknesses of Jesus, these were all necessary to establish His perfect manhood; just as His miracles and sinlessness were necessary to establish His claim of divinity. The union of the two natures was possible with God, for whom nothing is impossible; and it became necessary, when He desired that His Son should appear in the form of a servant, in order to effect the great purpose of man's salvation. As for the denial of the Jews, had they wished to tamper with their books, would it not have been in texts relating to the Saviour, and those also which denounce their own backsliding and idolatry? However, the fact that the Old Testament still contains the prophecies of the Saviour, and the fact that we can still read about their terrible sins, are undeniable proofs that they did not tamper with their sacred text."

The minor discrepancies were next explained by Abd ul-Hady, who then proceeded to the matter of faith and works: "There is here no contradiction," he said, "but rather, teachings which differ, out of necessity, in respect to the views of those being addressed in the particular epistles; the one party leaning upon Jewish ordinances and works, without faith; the other, on faith not evidenced by works -- the discrepancy being in appearance only."

The Qadi, admitting that much had been

explained, still held that some of the minor differences remained, being proof that the text was not to be relied on.

Sheikh Ahmed smiled and said that he thought his argument had really triumphed, for, had tampering been intended, it would surely have been in more important matters; and further, that apparent contradictions being allowed to remain was rather an argument that the books were exactly as written by their inspired authors. "But now," he continued, "allow me to ask your Honour one question: This tampering with the Scriptures, was it before or after Muhammad?"

Qadi, after a pause, said, "Will you, my good friend, pass over this question for the present?"

"No," replied the other, "how can we pass it over? It is the very key to the door I want to open."

The Qadi blushed, his forehead was moist, and he turned to his fellows, as if for help.

Abd ul-Rahim whispered, "After Muhammad"; to which the Qadi replied: "No, I cannot at the present moment speak; but it is open to you to make this answer. The responsibility is with you."

So Abd ul-Rahim spoke out: "Well, I say that the corruption was after the Prophet's time."

Abd ul-Hady replied: "Muhammad arose six centuries after Christ, at a time when Christian kingdoms prevailed over the world, of every variety of tongue and literature, and the Scriptures were in the hands of all, translated into their various languages. Now, long before that time, the Christians had broken off into a multitude

of sects, as Arians, Nestorians and Paulicians. These were hostile one to the other; and yet they all based their differences on the same sacred text. Such being the case, you admit that there was no corruption before the age of Muhammad in the Scriptures, as attested by the Qur'an. Now, if there was no corruption before, with all these opposing sects, different doctrines and varying ritual, is it possible that there could have been any afterwards?"

"Quite possible," said ul-Rahim.

"I did not expect this reply from so shrewd a disputant," ul-Hady commented. "How could it have been possible, unless they had all agreed in the alterations? And had they agreed, they would surely have first settled their differences, and come to one religion, ritual and doctrine. But they continued in their variances and hatred; and here you still find them opposed to one another, and yet holding to one and the same Book in their different tongues and churches -- a clear proof that there has been no tampering with their Scriptures. So that if these were not corrupted before the rise of Islam, they could not possibly have been corrupted after. Now, I ask again: Men do not enter on an action without an object; what possible object could the Christians have had in falsifying their Scriptures?"

"I do not know. Do people always tell the object of what they are doing?"

"No," said ul-Hady. "But here the charge is made that people altered the Book for a purpose; and yet they are found to disagree, and to be in violent opposition one to the other. In that case it is required of the accuser to say what the object was.

Is it not so, noble Qadi?"

"It is," replied the Qadi.

"Then you are prepared to admit that the Scriptures are free from corruption?"

"Well, I cannot say that; but I shall see hereafter what to say in response."

"Good," dear Qadi, "I will but add that if the churches could have had an object, it would surely have been to remove those passages that condemn their teachings, rites, rituals and ways of worship, which are opposed to the Scriptures; and to lead each of the opposing sects to do this in accord with its own practice. In particular, would they not have removed the references to their stubbornness and idolatry? -- practices which prevailed, and still prevail, in many of the main churches. But thanks be to God, they never tried to stretch out their hand against these; and there they remain, a witness against their departing from the truth."

Abd ul-Hady then gathered up his argument in an eloquent speech, ending with the metaphor that the Bible is an eternal pillar of faith, with its pedestal on earth, and its capital reaching even to the heavens.

At this point the Qadi said to his brethren: "We have had enough for the present, and the time is far gone, being now the seventh hour of the day; and it is evident that there is no advantage in continuing our discussion with these our friends. How true is the saying in the blessed Book: 'Truly you cannot direct whom you will; but God directs whom He pleases' (Sura al-Qasas 28:57)."

Then they walked together. Abd ul-Rahim asked his companions whether they

thought he had done wrong in saying that the Gospel was corrupted after the rise of Islam; for if not changed before, it could hardly, for the various reasons given, have been so after. "Perhaps I should have said it was corrupted before?"

"But the Qur'an distinctly approves of the Scriptures at the time they were in the hands of Jews and Christians," said Hasan. "What could have made you think of such a thing?"

Abd ul-Rahim answered: "Consider this verse in the Qur'an: 'Oh Prophet, do not let those grieve you who hurry after infidelity -- those who say, "We believe," with their mouths, but their hearts believe not; or of Jews who give ear to a lie -- give ear to other people, and come not unto you; they pervert the words from out of their places' (Sura Al-Ma'ida 5:47). Now who are these who 'pervert the words' if not the people of the Book?"

Mufti interjected: "We must look at the interpretation of the passage, which does not in reality help you, for al-Razi takes the 'perversion' to mean the denial of certain truths in their books, not the changing of the text. These are his words: 'They change the words from their places'; that is, from where the Lord has placed them -- meaning the demand of obligations, or release therefrom, or the hallowing of certain things. This is illustrated by the tradition of the adulterer and adulteress of Khyber, regarding whom the Jews concealed the passages containing the order for stoning; but there was no charge of falsification, only of hiding a certain text. Or it may be, according to Razi, they perverted the reading with their tongues, not the Torah itself. So, again: 'Of the Jews, there are

some who change the words from their places' (Sura al-Nisa' 4:45); of which instances are given again, without any accusation of touching the text; and once more: 'Woe to those who write out passages, and then say, "This is from God," thinking thereby to deceive Muhammad' (Sura al-Baqara 2:79). And if you ask, How could this be possible, if copies of the Torah were scattered over the East and West? I would answer that those who were learned in the Jewish Scriptures were but few at Medina and therefore could without difficulty produce such altered passages; or, more likely, the meaning of this 'perversion' may have been the giving a false interpretation to passages, thus changing words from their true meaning to a false, just as heretics do in our day; or, yet again, as Razi puts it, 'They used to visit Muhammad and ask him questions, then go out and misrepresent his words, thus changing or perverting them.' We Muslims cannot believe that the Book was corrupted before the Prophet's era, since there are so many passages upholding its genuineness, without any charge of falsification, but the reverse; the only accusation being that the testimony the Book given by our Prophet was withheld. Thus, in Sura al-Baqara 2:148: 'They to whom we have given the Scripture know him (that is, Muhammad), even as they know their own children; but a party among them hide the truth, although they know it.' So also Sura Al Imran 3:70: 'Oh people of the Book! Why do you clothe the truth with what is false, and hide the truth, although you know it?' These passages clearly recognise the authority of the Book, and only charge against the Jews the withholding of its contents; and even that not against all, but only against 'a party' of them, who

opposed our Prophet's claims. What place, then, is there for charging the possessors of the Scripture with falsification, prior to the time of our Prophet? To say this would be like him who, fleeing from a scorpion, is bitten by a snake."

So the Imam Abd ul-Rahim was convinced, and, much ashamed, confessed that he had made a slip in his suggestion.

Then they departed each his own way.

12. The Qadi and Sheikh Ali Converse

The Qadi, depressed at the success with which Sheikh Ali and his companions had defended their position, retired to his chamber and kept thinking about the discussion, the strength of the Christian arguments, and ease with which those of his own party had been put aside. "It was as if we fled from a shower of pebbles; or rather, as if without weapons we went forth to attack an enemy shielded in an impenetrable armour. Clearly, as far as the charge of falsification, there is no hope of success; the proofs are all against us. What then shall we do?"

Much troubled, sleep fled from the Qadi's eyes till morning, and he awoke late in the day, when his thoughts returned to the controversy. "Why should I not carry the war into the enemy's camp," he said suddenly to himself, "and challenge them to refute our proofs?" So he went over the various arguments for Islam, the Unity revealed, the Arabs converted, the marvellous spread of the faith. "I will lay these before Sheikh Ali, if by chance they may convince him." So he planned to meet him that evening in a chamber at the City Hall.

As regards the Christian company, they were much encouraged by the discussion. This new call of the Qadi gave them fresh hopes, and they sought the Lord's blessing on the conference. At the appointed time and place, the two met; and the Qadi, when they had sat down, said he had sought this second meeting to follow up a thought that had occurred to him in the morning, and asked a patient hearing, which when Sheikh Ali had promised, he proceeded thus.

"My dear friend, I am going to ask you to call to mind the prophetic claim of Muhammad, on whom be peace and blessing! Listen to me, and be not one of the stiff-necked. Think how he called the heathen tribes of Arabia to the worship of the true God; how, in the midst of a people that gloried in the worship of Lat and Uzza, he preached the Unity. Where, but from divine inspiration, could he have gained that wonderful doctrine, in the midst of a nation having many gods and lords? -- he, unlearned, unable even to read or write, a poor, needy, solitary orphan, alone in the faith. How could such a one, except by inspiration, have given us that marvellous Qur'an, 'the like of which man and jinn, let them unite all together, could never produce'? That God should have made him victorious over the idolatrous Quraish and heathen Arabia; that his followers of the Quraish and the citizens of Medina should have so rapidly increased; and that the faith should, in an inconceivably short space of time, have spread over Arabia, Syria, Iraq and other lands -- is not all this clear proof of the Divine mission of our Prophet, that he was inspired to be a warner and a preacher of glad tidings to the whole of mankind? -- so clear, you might say, that he who denies it

might as well deny that the sun shines at midday."

Ali tried at first to excuse himself from entering on the discussion of the prophetic claim of Muhammad, unless forced to it. But pressed, he proceeded thus. He used, he said, himself to have the same ideas as the Qadi, and did not yield in pressing them upon learned Christians as an unconquerable proof of Islam, until the veil fell from his eyes and he found he had been, as it were, wandering in a maze.

The Qadi said: "How was that? Speak freely, my friend. Do not fear, nor be ashamed to do so."

Ali, after thanking him for this free liberty, proceeded to say that Muhammad's proclaiming the Unity was proof not of his prophetic claim, but of his power and shrewdness of intellect; for the conception is clearly within the scope of human knowledge. Nor was the doctrine itself unknown in Arabia. It was held by the Jewish tribes, which occupied a prominent position in the land, as well as by the Christians, such as the inhabitants of Najran, the Beni Kinda, and others. The Prophet himself also repeatedly passed from the Hejaz into Syria, and there saw monasteries and church-es, and must have met monks and clergy, from whom he may have learned much; for in the Qur'an many of the monks and clergy are spoken of as patterns of virtue and piety.

"Nor can evidence be drawn from the rapid spread of Islam, for its success was due to the sword; not like Christianity, which prevailed with the help neither of sword nor spear, but by the power of God, and in spite of persecution. Moreover, Islam has long been declining in its power,

while Christianity ceases not to grow marvellously in every land and climate. Your Prophet also showed no signs, like Moses, as proof that God had sent him to deliver people out of captivity. And again, Muhammad denied the truths revealed in former Scripture."

The Qadi interposed here: "Muhammad surely did not deny the Scripture revealed before him; but on the contrary, attested the same. For, see Sura al-Baqara 2:98: 'And when there came unto them an apostle, confirming the Scripture that was with them, a party from among those to whom the Scripture was given cast the book of God behind their backs, as if they knew it not.' And again, in Sura Al Imran 3:2: 'He has sent down unto you the Book with truth, confirming that (revealed) before it; for He had sent down the Torah and the Gospel for a time, a direction unto men.' It is clear that the Apostle of God did come, confirming the previous Scriptures, both of the Jews and the Christians; how then, my friend, can you say the contrary? Then, again, on the other point, have you forgotten the many signs and miracles Muhammad showed, such as the splitting of the moon into two parts, one part over Mount Cobeis, the other over the hill Caynocaâ; raising his parents for a season to life, so that they professed their faith in Islam, and then returned to the dead; bringing forth water at Majaz; raising to life the son of a woman of Medina; producing much out of little, and suchlike? Strange that you should have forgotten all this, my friend, witnessed to as they have been by a multitude of pious folk."

Ali smiled as the Qadi went over this long list of miracles.

"God forbid, my friend," he said, "that I should assist you in fabricating such stories, either for or against the Prophet of Islam. As regards your first point -- it is clear that there are many passages in which the Qur'an attests the previous Scriptures; but we must look closer, and then we find that many essential truths in them are denied, such as the incarnation, crucifixion and atoning death of Jesus. Not only are the Scriptures authentic, as we have seen before, but these truths had already been distinctly acknowledged by the Christian Church. Long prior to Islam, the Council of Nicaea, under the first Christian monarch and attended by a multitude of bishops from Christian lands, was assembled to consider the teaching of Arius, who denied the eternal generation of the Son and His equality with the Father in essence and dignity, and after a prolonged discussion they all condemned the heresy. And, indeed, a glance at the Scriptures, existing in every country and language of the world, Old and New, shows that their great object is to represent the messiah as divine -- God and man -- and His death as an atoning sacrifice. What, then, was the advantage of the Prophet's confirming the Scriptures revealed before, when he denied these their essential truths? I am lost in amazement to think how he could have said all this when there were everywhere thousands and thousands of copies of the Book existing at the time, all bearing testimony with clear voice to these precious truths -- the eternity of Christ, his offering Himself up to fulfil the Father's will and the sanctification of believers through this one offering of Himself. And truly, my friend, had Muhammad really accredited the Scriptures in the hands of Jews and Christians around him, he would

then, without doubt, have been himself a Christian."

"Next, as regards the alleged miracles of the Prophet described in the traditions and biographies of Muhammad, I say that I myself, when a Muslim, boasting of the faith and glorying in the Prophet, never dared to mention them before Jews and Christians. Indeed, I felt much shame when asked about them; and I marvel that my learned friend speaks of the same as real with the Qur'an in your hands."

Qadi asked, "Now, where is there anything in the Qur'an about them?"

Ali again expressed his amazement; and the Qadi blushed as he added: "Really, I cannot call them to mind. Enlighten me. It will be a favour unto me."

"With pleasure, my friend," said Ali. "There are not many passages; but I will mention these: (1) Sura al-Ra'd 13:9,41: 'The infidels say, "Unless a sign be sent down unto him from his Lord (we will not believe)," but you are only a warner...It is not given to any prophet to come with a sign, unless by permission of God'; (2) and yet again, in Sura al-'Ankabut 29:50: 'They say, "Unless a sign be sent down unto him from his Lord (we will not believe)." Say, Signs are from God alone, and I am nothing more than a public preacher'; (3) and lastly, in Sura Al-Isra' 17:60: 'Nothing hindered us from sending you with miracles, except that the former peoples gave them the lie.' These passages indicate clearly that Muhammad did not claim to show miracles like Moses, Jesus and the other prophets. If Muslims then bring tradition to prove miracles, when the Qur'an distinctly says that the Prophet showed none, is that not the greatest

possible insult to the Qur'an itself, my good friend?"

The Qadi waited a little, evidently taken unawares, perplexed and downcast. Then in a grave voice, he said, "I must consider the meaning of these verses further and consult Baidawi."

"Very good," replied Ali, "but surely the meaning is clear enough, without reference to commentators. I have an extract here, however, from the same Baidawi, which you might hear and think over at your leisure."

The Qadi agreed.

Ali commented on the last verse (Sura Al-Isra' 17:60). He said: "That is to say, 'We have only abstained from sending you with miracles,' as the Quraish demand, 'Because the former peoples' -- those of like temper with them, as the tribes of Ad and Thamud -- 'gave them the lie,' and so likewise would these men of Mecca; 'and they would otherwise have been destroyed, according to our custom,' (that is, if they had rejected the miracles); so 'we determined not to destroy them,' seeing that there are among them those that believe, or will have believing seed."

The Qadi, on hearing this extract, said: "True, that was the reason the Lord did not send His Prophet with miracles. It is clear that tradition is here at fault, and deserves no attention. I thank you, Sheikh Ali, for bringing all this to my notice, which I had overlooked."

"But now," continued the Qadi, "I will ask you whether the Qur'an itself is not a miracle, for its sublime language, matchless beauty and heavenly utterances raise it altogether beyond the range of

human possibilities."

"No," replied Ali, "a miracle is that which is outside the course of nature and its laws -- such as the raising of the dead. The composition of a book, however beautiful and grand, is not a miracle, but a wonderful work of man's genius, like those of the old Arab poets, as Imru'ulquais, al-Mutanabbi, al-Hariri, Qoss and Luqman, who produced poems and tales of deep emotion and eloquence; and as these are not miracles, no more is the Qur'an. Moreover, the greatest part of the stories, and the finest, are taken from the Old Testament; and certain of them, as the narrative of the Creation, the Flood, Abraham offering Isaac, the histories of Lot, Joseph, Moses and Pharaoh, etc., are repeated over and over, some even as many as ten times, in different parts of the Qur'an. If all these were taken away, what of the miracle would remain?"

"That is all true," admitted the Qadi, "but, then, consider that the writer was entirely unlearned; and, as such, to compose so wonderful a work, may we not regard that a miracle?"

"Everything agreed," said Ali, "it is still within the limits of human intellect. The Torah and Gospel are not miracles, but revelation; and miracles are given to prove the revelation. And then we all know in what way the various suras and verses of the Qur'an were collected, and how difficult it would be were we to demand legal proof to make certain what portion of them really came from the Prophet himself."

The Qadi at last agreed that the Qur'an, as a mere composition, could not be considered a miracle; but still argued that

its elevated teaching and sentiment altogether surpassed the range and ability of the men of the time.

"Yes, I agree with you there," said Ali. "The intellectual power and spiritual elevation of Muhammad are marvellous. But did you consider why it was that the Prophet fell back on the testimony of the Torah and Gospel?"

The Qadi said, "In order to tell of the creation and fall, the story of Mary and Zacharias, and other such histories, as well as of the origin of certain ritual observances."

"But then he omitted the most important of all the truths, or denied them," Ali insisted.

"What are these?" asked the Qadi.

"Some have already been spoken of. He has shown us the fall and expulsion from Paradise, but not the way of pardon and restoration. Now again, observe the promise to Abraham of 'a wise son' (Sura al-Saffat 37:97-108). It is there implied that it was Ishmael, not Isaac (yet unborn at the time), who was to be offered up; but the kernel of the grand promise is left out, namely that 'in Isaac's seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed.'"

"How do you prove that?" asked the Qadi.

"In various ways: First of all, the promise was given at the time when Abraham was about to offer up his son Isaac (Genesis 22). When Sarah wished Abraham to turn away Hagar, Abraham was told to listen to her, 'it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned' (Genesis 21:12). The promise was repeated to Isaac (as in Genesis 26:4), when the Lord spoke to him after his father's death: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the

sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed'; and again to Jacob, when going to the land of Haran (Genesis 28:14): 'Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.' So, my friend, you see that the promise clearly was to the offspring of Isaac and Jacob."

"What, then, are you trying to prove by all this?" asked the Qadi.

"Why, just this: that the promise of that seed in which all nations of the earth were to be blessed ran not in the line of the Arab nation, but in the line of Isaac and Jacob; the promise, namely, of Jesus, son of Mary, the Saviour of the world."

"You have indeed cast out father Ishmael, together with his mother Hagar, from his father's house and from the blessing," said the Qadi, "and yet it was from him that our grand Arab nation descended, with all its famous tribes and chiefs! Are you saying that this was without the blessing of God?"

"No, my friend," Ali insisted, "I am not saying that. God did bless the race of Ishmael and vow to make of him a great nation, but the promise rested with Isaac. Sura al-'Ankabut 29:25 says something to the same effect: 'We have given to him (Abraham), Isaac and Jacob, and have placed among his offspring the gift of prophecy.' Thus the promise is not to Ishmael, though he was the first-born. He was left out of account, as having no spiritual portion. Isaac and Jacob are raised above him; 'prophecy and revelation' were placed in their line, not his."

"But how can you tell that the promise was limited to Isaac alone?" asked the Qadi, "The promise to Abraham's offspring might have been in more than one line."

"There is yet another passage in Sura al-Jathiya 45:16," said Ali: "'Truly We gave to the children of Israel the Scriptures, and wisdom, and prophecy; and We fed them with good things, and preferred them above all the nations.' Is not that a confirmation of the promise that in this line -- and in it alone -- all nations would be blessed?"

When they had got so far in their argument, it being now late, they refrained from further discussion. The Qadi, after a moment's reflection, raised his head and said, "Yes, my friend Sheikh Ali, that verse is conclusive. Now the day is far spent. What has passed is enough for this evening. But, if you please, I will come again on the third evening to continue the discussion."

"As it may please your Honour; but before we part, let me say one word more."

"Say on, Sheikh Ali, dear friend."

Ali continued: "The promise as we have seen, is in the line of Isaac. How, then, can it point to any other than to Christ, the greatest of all the prophets? The Torah and the Gospel proceeded from that people. From where, then, should we seek guidance about the knowledge of God and His will concerning us, if not from the same Scriptures which are declared by the Qur'an itself to be a 'light and a guide,' a 'guide and instruction to the pious,' 'perfect and complete in every respect, a guide and a mercy' -- Scriptures which initiate us in the mystery of Christ, and so remove the incredible difficulties which

every Muslim must see in the various passages concerning him in the Qur'an. My friend, neither forget this nor cast it aside; for herein is the blessing and life, and without it none."

"I thank you, my good friend," said the Qadi, "and I hope to resume our conference at the appointed time, if the Lord wills."

And so they arose and departed.

On reaching home, the Qadi examined the Qur'an. Going over the various passages again and again, he paused as he repeated: "We gave to Isaac and to Jacob -- We gave -- Isaac and Jacob -- But where is Ishmael? He was not given anything, but was born in the ordinary way." After pondering awhile he went on: "'We gave prophecy and revelation' in his line." And he placed his finger on the parallel passage: "'We gave the Scripture, and wisdom, and prophecy to the children of Israel,' and," with a finger still on the text, "'a light and guidance' -- all, all in the line of Isaac. Ah me! Ah me! All nations blessed in the Israelites. Why, then, is another revelation from another nation even necessary, one other than the Israelites?" Looking forward with perplexity to the next meeting, he asked, "What if the truth is with him?" For a long time he leaned his face upon his knee. He suddenly sat up, remembering the promise to Moses that God would raise up "from among his brothers" a prophet like unto him, whom they would hear. "That must mean, not of Israel, but of another branch, and what other branch but Ishmael's and what other prophet but Muhammad? Even so, would not this replace the Jewish and Christian Scriptures and the religion built thereon -- Scriptures spoken of in the Qur'an as a perfect guide?

I do not see the way out of it, except that I bring it up in discussion with my friend, and see whether he can set it aside or not."

And so he lay down and fell asleep.

On the appointed evening the Qadi left for the place of meeting and sent for Sheikh Ali.

The Qadi said: "You see I have returned to renew our discussion on the points raised the other night; in addition to which there is one which I then forgot -- namely that which the Lord said to Moses: 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers... I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.' (Deuteronomy 18:15,18,19). Now, this prophet is undoubtedly our Prophet -- on whom be blessing and peace."

"What, then, is your proof that this refers to Muhammad of the Arab race?" Ali challenged.

"The prophet was to be 'of your brothers,'" said the Qadi, "that is, not of Israel. Moses is addressed in person; also, the race of Moses, the Israelites, signifies a single race; and the prophet was to be of their brethren, not one of themselves. Again, he was to be a prophet like unto Moses, a lawgiver, leader and commander, to execute judgement on the heathen; not like Jesus, the meek and lowly. Who could this be but Muhammad, the Quraishite, who fits the description in every way?"

"This is the argument in the *Sirat*, the biography of the Prophet," said Ali, "and it is good, if it can be proven. Let us look,

then, at the text in the Hebrew. Verse 15 of the chapter quoted says that the prophet is to be raised up ‘from among your own brothers,’ which means from among the children of Israel, not from among others.”

Qadi agreed: “If these words be there, then there can be no doubt it must be so.”

“No doubt of it,” said Ali, “and the same expression is used in the preceding chapter: ‘Be sure to appoint over you the king the LORD your God chooses. He must be from among your own brothers’ (Deuteronomy 17:15), signifying from among the children of Israel, not strangers; and the same as to the coming prophet. The prophecy of a coming prophet must therefore mean a descendant from the midst of the children of Israel, neither Ishmaelite nor Midianite, and therefore cannot refer to Muhammad. The prophecy must refer to Christ, who resembled Moses in these respects: Moses was the mouthpiece of the Lord; Jesus, the ‘Word of God,’ and giver of the Gospel. Moses was mediator of the Old Covenant between God and the Israelites; Jesus, the mediator of the New -- that is, of grace and mercy between God and man. Moses was the leader of his people to the promised land; Jesus, to eternal life. Moses delivered his people from the bondage of Pharaoh; Jesus, from that of Satan. Moses fought against the enemies of the Lord; Jesus will soon destroy His enemies, and put all things under His feet.”

To this, Qadi responded: “These similarities are all, except for the first two, spiritual; but what we are led to expect is an outward and material likeness.”

“Surely the spiritual similarity is what is meant,” said Ali. “But as for Muhammad, there are these points of essential

difference; Moses showed wonderful miracles, Muhammad none; Moses fed his people forty years in the wilderness with bread from heaven. Where is there any resemblance here?”

Then gathering up the argument, Ali drew the conclusion that none other than Jesus could be meant as the coming prophet, both from the indications in the Qur'an and also in the Old Testament; and he put it to the Qadi to admit either that Muhammad was not the prophet there promised, or that both the Qur'an and Torah were mistaken.

“Well, even if all this is true,” said the Qadi, “is it not the case that the Torah predicts that Muhammad, the Arabian, will follow Jesus as the last of the prophets?”

Ali, with a sigh, exclaimed, “Alas, good Qadi, I had not thought that a learned one like you could have believed such a passage to be in the Old Testament.”

“Why not? In the *Biography of the Prophet*, by Mian Ahmed Zeini of Mecca, there are traditions given from certain of the Companions of Muhammad, who tell us that in the Torah there is a prediction of a great prophet to arise out of the seed of Ishmael, called Ahmed; and that in the Psalms a variety of names are given to this coming prophet (such as *Hamyat* [“protector”], *Tab-tab*, [“good”] etc.); and in the Gospel, the term *Paraclete*, meaning ‘Ahmed’ or ‘The Praised One’; and further, it is said that Muhammad himself told Omar that he had been foretold by these names.”

“But how can you prove the truth of all these stories?” asked Ali.

“Well, if they are not true, what traditions

are we to believe?"

"I ask you to excuse me from answering that."

"No, you must answer freely," said Ali. "Have you seen anything in me to cause alarm? There is none between us but God alone. Speak, and fear not."

"Then I say that there is no ground whatever for any one of such passages being in the Torah or Psalms. I marvel exceedingly at the Prophet having made any such claim (if, indeed, he did); or rather, at it having been made for him. Not one of the names you mention appears in the Torah, and it is matter of utter astonishment that any such stories should ever have been circulated. True, there is in the Gospel the promise that the Paraclete (the Comforter) would descend after Christ's ascension into the hearts of the disciples, and would strengthen and enlighten them, and bring the sayings of Jesus back to their remembrance; also, that He would empower them with the ability to work miracles, in proof of the good tidings they were to publish, and as a seal of their ministry. It is easy to make such assertions as you have referred to, but difficult to prove them. Just look at the passage preceding that which you quoted from the biography. There the Prophet is represented as telling Omar that it was he who gave the Torah to Moses, the Psalms to David, and the Gospel to Jesus -- foolish things, opposed both to Scripture and reason, which unprincipled people have passed off on Muhammad, to magnify him in the eyes of the simple and gullible. Can any faith be put in such terms? What do you think, my friend?"

Qadi (in a subdued voice, lest any should

hear him from outside) said: "That is enough, Sheikh Ali. Truly you have done your best to discredit both the Prophet and his Companions."

"I wished to avoid all this; but you would not let me leave without having said all that was in my heart -- pleasing or displeasing. I have only tried to speak the truth. Pardon me."

"I am not upset or offended with you in any way, my friend," said the Qadi. "You have said nothing out of place, nor stepped beyond the right of controversy. Knowing your fairness and self-restraint, I entered on this arena, intending to stop when I had reached the proper limit; and not without the hope of being successful, or, at the least, by your kindness, of gaining some advantage. But it appears that this hope has gone to the winds."

Ali answered the Qadi thus: "I was, as you know, zealous beyond my equals in jealous attachment to Islam, and the study of its authorities. But it cannot have escaped you, my friend, and truly the Searcher of hearts knows, that I was always pained at such stories and traditions, for which I found no grounds, either in the Old or New Testaments. And when our experts used to uphold them as believable arguments, I only laughed at their gullibility. It is exactly such traditions that first led me, disputing with Jews and Christians, to doubt the whole foundation of Islam. And so things went on, till the Lord was pleased to open my eyes, and He led me thus into the way of truth. And why should not you, my dear friend, embrace this same way -- the way of that blessed Saviour, who, in the Qur'an as well as in the Gospel, is exalted far above all other prophets?"

The Qadi sat for some time lost in thought. At last he arose, saying, "Praise be to the Lord and may He grant us a favourable ending!" Then he thanked Ali and hoped to return again at some future time to more pleasant and profitable discussion.

Ali, too, arose and they both, after shaking hands, parted one from the other.

As the Qadi made his way home, he kept thinking about the stories concerning Muhammad's miracles and the made-up prophecies about him in the Torah, though there existed absolutely none such in reality, seeing that the tales were in opposition to the Qur'an itself. "I take refuge in the Lord," he cried, "there is no resource nor refuge but in Him; may His mercy guide us!"

Sheikh Ali, on the other hand, returned rejoicing to his people, who were thankful at all he was able to tell them of his conference with the Qadi.

13. Exile and Return

Next morning, the Mufti, having heard of the conference, visited the Qadi and hoped the result had been satisfactory. The Qadi gave him a brief outline of what had passed. The Mufti, amazed, sat for some time thinking. At last he said: "I have always felt it a mistake that such traditions, as you speak of, are found in our religious books. I have gone over the Old and New Testaments repeatedly and never have I found anything of the kind in them. Thinking that possibly they might have been removed by the Christians, I once visited a Jewish rabbi of integrity, who assured me on the most solemn of Jewish oaths that there was no mention of such things in their Scriptures. And of

course you remember the late Sheikh Abbas Ishmael Ahmed, who learned Hebrew by the aid of a Jewish doctor, for the purpose of being able to judge for himself the value of these traditions, of which he was extremely fond. When he found that they had no existence in the Torah, he gave up one article of faith after another, till at length nothing remained but the simple rites and faith of the Khârejites. And when I asked him once, 'How about the testimony to Muhammad in the Qur'an?' he laughed and said, 'Oh, it is all non sense.' The fact seems to be that the Jews, knowing the Prophet to be unlearned and wishing to curry favour, told him such-like stories, or rather, perhaps, told them to his Companions and made them take it all in; and they, to further spread Islam, gave heed to the fictions, as if, to reliable evidence."

"Strange that our Prophet should have been deceived by the Jews of Medina," admitted Qadi; "and if deceived by them, where is his prophetic claim? If liable to be deceived in other matters, why not in the Qur'an itself, which contradicts both the Old Testament and the New, especially as regards the nature and the death of the Messiah?"

"Enough for the present," said the Mufti. "The Lord knows what the truth is. Are you not aware that multitudes of our experts are in doubt about the faith? They live, resting in the name, but know nothing of its reality."

"How, then, are we to find a way out of it all?" asked the Qadi. "Can we rest in hypocrisy and falsehood or not rather search for a path that shall lead us to certainty and truth in respect of the true Messiah and revelation?"

"Let us stop for now. We can resume this weighty question hereafter, if the Lord wills; and He will guide us aright," said the Mufti.

So the Mufti went his way, leaving the Qadi confused and troubled in spirit.

On the following day the Wali summoned them both, with the rest of his council, to decide on the country to which the little company should be sent. Some said Rhodes, others Armenia, others again, Crete. The Qadi (whose habit it was not to speak till all the others had spoken) was then called on by the Wali.

"In reply to your Excellency," he said, "I would suggest, as the most suitable place, some town in Lebanon. It is outside the province of Damascus."

Said the Wali: "But it is close at hand and not like banishment from the land of Syria." Then he turned to the chief judge, who said, "Indeed, it is quite close and, in fact, just like leaving them in their own homes."

"Yes it is near" exclaimed the Mufti, "but it will answer all the objects in view. We are not called on to punish them, but simply to remove them away from the city and neighbourhood with the view of avoiding further disturbance in the city; and it is still far off enough for that."

The rest of the council opposed this view, saying that the Qadi and Mufti were always on the side of the apostates. Lebanon would be of no use; offenders like them should be banished to the utmost limits of the empire. The president said that such charges against the Qadi and Mufti were quite unnecessary. It was their kindly hearts that had influenced them.

Some of the company were aged and weak and a lengthened journey would be hard for them; if any were to die, the government would be blamed. There could be no possible harm or disturbance for Syria in this arrangement. Thereupon the remainder were silent and at last the Wali approved the proposal of the Qadi, on whose judgement he greatly depended. The Qadi showed his acknowledgements and the Wali turned to him again, saying, "But what place shall it be in Lebanon?"

"Deir al-Qamar," he replied, "which is the farthest from the seat of your Excellency's government."

So it was agreed that they should be sent away there on the 14th of the month, after midnight; but the decision was for the present to be kept secret.

On the 13th of the month it was made known to the company that the time for departure was at hand, but neither the hour nor the destination; and the hearts of some sank within them. But most held themselves bravely, especially after the Qadi had, by the Wali's permission, given them some general idea of the direction and of the arrangements for the journey. So, on the 14th after midnight, they were awakened suddenly, taken out and mounted on beasts with a guard of fifty regulars and as many police. They had been asleep only two or three hours, and some were aged and weak from having been so many days in confinement. They were affected to tears at having to leave so suddenly without the opportunity of once again seeing their families. The escort made them travel all that night and the next day without stopping. During the darkness, as they were carried along, the moon shone forth full and bright -- a light,

as Sheikh Ali said, that might remind them of a light which was leading them to the rest above. The dawn beginning to break, Sheikh Mahmoud said it was like the journey through life to the morning beyond. And then, as the sun arose, Abd ul-Rahim spoke of it as a type of the true light, revealing clearly all that had been dark around them. With such reflections they comforted one another and whiled the time away. Tired and wearied, they asked their conductor to allow them a little rest. At first he refused, but, offered some money, he allowed them to stop at midday and again in the afternoon and evening. They reached their destination the following midnight and rested outside the walls until the morning, when they made their entry. The leader then gave his letter to the governor of the district, by whom the company were graciously welcomed and accommodated in suitable quarters. The escort was then dismissed.

On the morning after their departure, when their friends and families discovered that they had been sent away during the night, they were much distressed and assembled before the palace, crying out against their secret exile. The Qadi appeared and quieted them; but he could not make known their place of banishment. After a couple of months, however, it was revealed and then Hasan, the brother, and other relatives of Ali and a company of the children, kinsmen and friends of the others set out to visit them.

The joy at this meeting knew no bounds. The exiles embraced them and wept aloud, shedding tears of affection and delight, and inquired after the welfare of their beloved ones at home. They received also, at their friends' hands, supplies of such things as they had need of. Their friends remained

with them fourteen days, during which time Ali and his companions taught them many things regarding the Christian faith; and they drank in their words, especially a Sheikh and an Effendi, even as the dry land drinks in the generous showers of rain. Several of them and of their sons were baptised in the same way as the exiles themselves had been; for these had been baptised shortly after their arrival at Deir al-Qamar. At last they were sent back.

"Return, dear friends," said the exiles, as they bid them good-bye, "return now to your homes with the peace of God; and tell them there of our welfare. But do not forsake the Book of God and prayer; for light and blessing spring therefrom. Fear not man, but fear God, who has created you and breathed into you the breath of life; and we shall hope to meet again in peace."

So they departed, and talked joyfully on the way of what they had seen and heard. On getting home, they made known to their families the place of exile, their health and welfare and their kind treatment by the governor and all the people of the town and country from the very day of their arrival at Deir al-Qamar.

Now love and affection for the exiles had sunk deep into the hearts of the dwellers in Lebanon. They visited them day and night in great numbers and held them in high regard for their culture, piety and learning. They received them with distinction and honour also in their public places, halls and houses, and whenever they went abroad. Moreover, the heads of the Christian religion, of whatever church throughout the country, came to visit them and rejoiced in their company. Their

conversation turned much upon questions of spiritual growth and the interest of the faith and all marvelled at their rapid advance in the Christian life, their quick understanding of Scriptural doctrine, and their wisdom, piety and devotion. The exiles were so filled with gratitude to the people of the town and villages around that they spoke thus one to another: "If it were not for the love we bear to our home and country, we should prefer remaining always here, instead of returning to Damascus."

Now the exile of the Christian company was made known throughout the various lands; and so the narrative thereof came to be published in the European journals. The circumstances thus coming to light, the consuls of the various powers and other representatives in Syria made inquiry into the matter and in the end a representation was submitted to the Porte, with the prayer that the Sultan would give permission to the exiles to return at their free discretion to their families and homes. The following revision was accordingly issued by the Porte:

"Let it be known to you that the Christian converts were not exiled because of their embracing Christianity; which, indeed, would have been in contradiction to our desire that there should be among all our subjects perfect freedom in the choice of their religion. The reason was that conversion to Christianity was so new and unusual a thing in Damascus and the inhabitants thereof so backward in civilisation and so fanatical and intolerant, that, for the peace and safety of the city and to avoid consequent tumult and disturbance, we consented, on the representation of the authorities, to the converts being sent away for a time to

some place outside the province. And so they were removed to Deir al-Qamar in Lebanon, a spot not very far from their own homes; the inhabitants of which, moreover, are all of the Christian faith. Our desire is for the peace and comfort of our subjects, of every faith and race. And so we shall now command our Wali to report to us as soon as there may be no more threat of tumult and disturbance in the city. Then we shall give orders for their return, in accord with our desire for the comfort and happiness of all."

Accordingly, in the beginning of the second year of their exile an imperial order was issued, permitting them to return to their homes and directing such perfect liberty in their profession of faith and performance of religious rites as they might desire.

On receipt of these orders, kept secret from the city, the Wali sent an officer with a troop of horses to conduct them from their exile. So, when the officer arrived at Deir al-Qamar, he handed the Wali's letter to the governor of the town, in which permission was given for the return of the exiles to their homes. The governor, and with him all the dwellers of Lebanon, rejoiced exceedingly at the good news; except only that they grieved at the prospect of their separation.

Now, the same evening, the governor and all the chief men of the place assembled publicly in the city hall to testify their joy at their friends having been allowed to return home; as well as to assure them of their grief at the prospect of separation and the loss their departure would mean to the town.

To this, Sheikh Ali made reply: "Words

fail to express our sense of the kindness and benefits you have showered upon us -- your Excellency, the governor, the authorities and all of the dwellers in Lebanon and its surrounding villages, without exception. We are returning to our city, but our hearts remain captive here to your love and affection, which have almost made us forget our own city and its people. So long as we live we shall never forget your goodness to us. It is not in our power to repay the favours which you have so abundantly showered upon us; but we ask the Lord (who suffers not even the cup of cold water to be forgotten) that He would grant you an abundant reward."

The governor responded thus: "They were all conscious," he said, "of how far the town and district around had come short of their duty to such angel visitors. The debt they owed for the pleasure and benefit of their friendship would remain always in their hearts. The sad distress of their friends and households at Damascus had brought a blessing to Lebanon, and they thanked God for it, and prayed that He would give their friends a prosperous journey, and every blessing in the future. Finally, they hoped hereafter for news from them of their peace and happiness."

The exiles then took their leave, with expressions of gratitude and thankfulness. Early in the morning they started on their journey, accompanied by their escort, and also by a party of horsemen sent in their honour by the principality to lead them down into the plain. They journeyed leisurely and in comfort, where they liked, and rested as they chose. On the morning of the second day they entered Damascus and were conducted to the presence of the Wali, who received them with a certain amount of favour. By his desire, the order

of the Sublime Porte was read aloud to them; and they were dismissed to their homes with the command to observe quiet and peace and warned not to bring up the subject of religion in conversation with their Muslim neighbours.

Meanwhile, the expected return of the company becoming known, their families were anxious as to how they would be received in the city and concerned themselves as to how they should act. Just then the sons of Ali, and the families and brothers of the other exiles, gathered together in the house of their uncle, Sheikh Hasan, in much watchfulness. They were talking over the serious aspects of the matter, when a knock was heard at the door. Hasan was startled and his heart beat quickly, for he said, "That truly, was like the knock of my brother," so he hastened and asked who was there.

"Open, O Hasan!" came a voice; and all knew, rejoicing, who it was.

Opening the door, Hasan beheld his brother Ali; and he embraced him and kissed him and Ali seized his hands and kissed them, as the drops fell from his eyes for joy. Then the whole party entered and welcomed him. And when he told them that all had returned and were at his house, they left on the wings of joy. There was passed there a night of rejoicing such as is past description -- a grand reunion after so long a separation.

In the morning, when their return was made known, men began to come in multitudes to welcome them. Then they returned their friends' visits and settled down as before. By their virtuous lives and exemplary citizenship, they had gained a high place in the esteem and respect of all.

It is true that Nasir al-Din and his people -- their enemies and detractors -- maintained their hostility and indulged in their slander as before; but few now minded their words.

It was about this time that Ahmed Effendi al-Khotli, already mentioned, made public profession of his faith in Christ and became a zealous adherent of Sheikhs Ali and Mahmoud and their party. Ever since becoming an inquirer he had entertained the highest regard for the letter which had first caught their attention. So one day he said to them: "How much we are indebted to the writer of that beautiful letter that guided us to the truth! Have you ever sent him any acknowledgement of our thanks and obligations for the great service he has rendered us?"

Sheikh Ahmed replied that they had intended doing so while at Deir al-Qamar. "But," added he, "after making inquiries about him and his residence, we heard that he had died some eight months before; and we were distressed that we had not written to him earlier."

So al-Khotli wrung his hands, saying, "If only he had lived to see the fruits of his work!"

"Yes," answered Ahmed, "but he will see them in a more glorious way, in the presence of his Lord. The righteous pass away, but their fruits die not. They shall reap the harvest they have sown in that day when not a single grain shall fall to the ground."

14. Death and Funeral of Sheikh Ali

Five years passed from the return of the

company to Damascus when Sheikh Ali fell sick of his last illness; for he was aged and his strength failed day by day. Sheikhs Mahmoud, Ahmed al-Hady, Ahmed Effendi, and other friends attended him, one or other of them hardly ever leaving his bedside. He did not care for any reading but the Gospel, nor any talk but about our Saviour. In his hours of weakness, when no one was near, he might be heard repeating such words as these: "He died for me, His love and grace their height and depth; redeemed and saved. Oh, when shall I then see Him?" And no one left his bedside without his having said something to them of Jesus.

On the day of his death there gathered around his bed a group of Muslims, men of learning and rank in the city. He raised himself to receive them; then, after they had all sat down for a little, Sheikh Abd ul-Hamid, Imam of the Omeyyad Mosque, spoke as follows: "Oh Sheikh Ali, my old friend and loved companion, if I say a word to you about returning to us, can you bear it, out of love for me? It shall be very short."

"Speak on my honoured friend," said Sheikh Ali.

"My dearest Sheikh, I remember with delight those precious days we used to spend together in mosque or college, talking about social and spiritual matters. Seven years have passed since then; and now you are removed far from me in faith and worship. But friendship remains. The separation has been grievous to me all these days; and now you are about to depart to the world beyond. Call to mind, I beg you, the blessed Qur'an and that which our Lord has revealed therein; and from the ways of error into which you

have wandered all these years. Return unto the faith of the Lord and his Prophet, and you shall obtain pardon through the intercession of the chief of the prophets and entrance into the paradise of delight and peace. Receive the prayer of one who loves you as his own soul, and your example may bring back those others who have erred like you. You shall thus obtain a great reward and turn my sorrow into joy and peace."

During this address Sheikh Ali at times smiled, and at other times looked serious and troubled. His friends around him were much distressed; and one thought to answer for him, but held back, as it seemed hardly what he would like. At last the aged Sheikh raised himself on his couch, and answered: "Yes, my dear and honoured friend, I have come to the end of my journey here. And I thank my God, who has sent you to me, that I might bid you a last farewell with words I have long wished to speak to you. I ask you to listen with patience and with the affection of so generous a friend; for, be assured, my concern for your welfare is not less than yours for me."

He then went briefly over the manner in which he had been led by various passages in the Qur'an to study the Scriptures, in which he found peace. He urged his friend to read the same with an honest and open mind, when he, too, would find Jesus to be the Saviour, the WORD of the living God. He had himself been a strict follower of Islam and devoted, even more than his friend, to its system of good works as a means of acceptance and salvation. Like his friend, he used to look on the Bible as having been tampered with; but, in company with others of his friends, after careful sifting of the evidence, they had

found it to be beyond doubt genuine and been led thereby into the straight path the path of everlasting life.

"And now," he ended, "my journey has come to a close. I do not fear death, for my Saviour has stripped it of its horrors and its sting. He shall change this vile body into a glorious one at His coming in the clouds; and with these very eyes I shall see His glorious face. Darkness will hardly have overshadowed the earth this night before I shall be in that blessed paradise where there is no night; for the night of grief and weeping, of toil and warfare, will have given place to the morning of light and joy. But a few minutes more, and the sun of glory will have arisen upon me. I beg of you, my friends, I beg you, my dearest Sheikh, to take it as my last request, a sacred trust, in return for all your love and care, that you redeem the time by studying the Bible, which God has sent to be the guide of faith and life; the Book to which the Qur'an bears witness and which will enrich its followers with divine grace and favour."

His heart was moved with emotion as he spoke and the tears rolled down his cheeks upon his beard. All present were hushed as he ended the affectionate appeal and amazed at his noble attitude and heavenly presence, full of peace and joy. They sat silent around his couch, unable to leave it till the end was near. Then, seeing numbers of his Christian friends and ministers arrive, they rose and silently slipped away.

After the sons of Omar the martyr returned from Lebanon, the exiles did everything in their power to get charge of them, especially Ali and Mahmoud, whom their father had constituted their guardians; but

failed. The boys remained under charge of their uncles, who placed them in the Rashidi College. Now, on Ali falling sick, their mother visited him and sat in much sorrow by his bedside. The aged man spoke comfortably to her and also reminded her of her husband's desire as to the guardianship of her boys. At this she wept.

"Blessing on his dear eyes!" she exclaimed, as she wiped away her tears. "I wish not that there should be anything not in accord with his request; but you know, my honoured sir, that it is not within my power to make complete fulfilment of its terms."

"I know it well," answered Ali, "but, please God, your sons will not be left or be forgotten by Him."

Then he began to speak wisely and kindly to her about the Christian faith and the hope of the life to come, which had led their little company to give up all worldly comfort, and her husband life itself for the same. She became much affected, for she was a wise and thoughtful woman; nor had she forgotten what her husband had taught her, especially in his last days. She listened carefully to all and asked the Sheikh many appropriate questions as to our Saviour's history and teaching, which he answered with much feeling and delight. Then she took hold of both his hands, and thanking him for his kind and loving words, kissed them and said that, please God, she would embrace the Christian faith, follow in the path of her husband and use all her strength to bring up her sons in the same. Then, as she rose to go, he slipped into her hand a little purse of golden dinars. At first she declined to take it, but he pressed her,

saying, "It is for your own dear boys." So she took it thankfully and departed; and the Sheikh had full confidence that she would fulfil what she had said.

Now, after her husband's death, many of the citizens had sought her hand, and though some of them were among the rich and noble, she refused. She was young and fair to look upon and one of the most discreet and attractive women in the city. So, after she had gone away, the Sheikh called his brother Hasan, who was unmarried, and left it as his last wish that he should try to engage her affections and take her as his wife when she had embraced the Christian faith and so bring up her sons as his own. This Hasan promised to do.

We now return to the death-bed of the Sheikh, after the departure of his Muslim friends. The interview and his earnest address to the imam had left him very weak and he lay quiet and restful thereafter for about an hour. The pulse and strength began gradually to sink and he thought that he would die at sunset. After a little he revived and called his sons and daughters to his bedside. As they stood around he said with a firm voice, "My brother and dear children, call to mind how, throughout my life, I have sought patiently and kindly to guide you, both in the things of this life and of that which is to come. When your mother died, I did not take another wife, lest she might have been unkind to you and perhaps to me also because of my love for you. Forget not your father's affection and labour for you. I bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has called me through the knowledge of His Son into His blessed kingdom, that He has given me before my death the desire of my heart, to see my

brother, and my children following the Saviour. And now I die happy, in the hope of meeting you in the kingdom of rest and joy above. But there is one thing above all others with which I charge you;" (pointing to the Bible that lay on his table) "bring the Bible to me," and they brought it. "This priceless treasure wherein are the words of eternal life, I leave with you. It is the best inheritance. All else passes away; but the Word of the Lord abides for ever. Amen."

Then, after giving much advice, he warned them lest they should be seduced by the world and its temptations; and he begged them to live in peace and love among themselves and also with those outside and ended thus: "Now the God of peace and love, who has called me and watched over me, and kept me from evil even unto this day, bless you and forward you in all godly and holy living, according to His good pleasure, and grant us to meet at last in the kingdom of His glory. Amen.

Amen."

They all wept and embraced him, and kissed his hands; and he, too, kissed them. And they promised that they would strive to live according to the Gospel and never forget his precious last words. And he rejoiced greatly at that; and again pressed them to his bosom and kissed them.

Then he turned to the Christian friends and brethren who now crowded around him. "My companions and comrades in the Christian warfare, with whom I have lived in all brotherly comfort and love! I rejoice exceedingly in calling to mind your steadfastness and the good fight you have fought against the temptations of the world and the deceits of the flesh, and all the hostility and opposition around us; the

help also you have been to many, to your own households, friends and especially unto me. Thanks be unto God, who has called us unto His eternal kingdom. And now, brethren and beloved friends, the time of separation has come; for I go to my Saviour and shall behold with my own eyes what I have until now known by faith alone; and you see me rejoicing in this hope through the merits of my Saviour. May you have a long and prosperous life, to the glory of God, and may we all meet hereafter in the everlasting kingdom of our Father! And I have the hope that you will look with an eye of affection on these your brother's children around my bed, with all needful advice and care for their godly upbringing. Now, draw near unto me, brethren, that I may bid you farewell." So they drew near and embraced and kissed him, and he kissed them, saying, "May the Lord have you in His holy keeping, my beloved friends, and give you to finish your journey in peace and joy!" Then they departed all in deep distress.

When they had gone, Sheikh Mahmoud said: "Dear friend, you must be weak and weary after so much speaking. We pray the Lord, if it be His will, to restore you to health, that you may yet live to His glory here. But if it be not His will and you precede us to the heavenly rest, then God bless you; and our hope is, by the merits of our Saviour, to meet you in that blessed land where there is no more parting, sorrow or pain. Your brother and your children will be watched over by our Father. To Him be praise that they are followers of the Saviour, in all virtue and godly endeavour. We hold them as our very own brother and children; and shall regard it as one of our sacred duties to attend to them in all that may require our

care. Let your heart on that point be set at ease."

Ali gave his heartfelt thanks. "The Lord calls me and I long to go and see Him. Pray not, therefore, for my recovery and return to this world's life; but praise the Lord and bless His holy name."

Then he drew up his feet into the bed; after that he could not speak for over an hour and tossed about as one that is tossed at sea. But this passed and then he lay still and quiet with the marks of peace and comfort on his aged face. At times he looked as if his lips were moving with a smile. Finally, he opened his eyes and said, "Yes, Lord; here I am, ready;" and then for a time again, after a little, in a low but clear and peaceful voice, these words: "Oh Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And so, at last, he gave up the ghost and his spirit returned unto God his Saviour.

Seeing that he was gone, they all gathered round his bed with loud crying. When news of his death had been publicised, crowds of his friends, Muslims as well as Christians, surrounded his door, all equally mourning his decease; for he was a man greatly beloved for his generous life and his benevolent and noble bearing. Moreover, although his conversion had grievously pained the Muslim community, the greater part, and not merely his intimate friends and companions, retained their regard and affection for him. When the news of his death reached the authorities, they resolved on sending a guard to accompany the funeral to the burial-ground, lest anything should occur on the way. So an officer was deputed with a company of fifty gendarmes to go in front of the bier.

Now his family and friends all helped in preparing the body for the burial and wept as they placed it in the winding-sheet, and so upon the bier. On the following day, about the sixth hour, the procession was formed. First went the military escort, next the clergy, ministers and chief officials of the various Christian churches, then the bier, and behind it the family of the deceased, with the other friends and relatives following; then an immense crowd of all religions. The procession passed along to the Evangelical church, into which the bier was carried and reverently placed. Then one of the clergymen went up to the pulpit and after reading a passage from the Gospel, gave a touching address on the life of the deceased, and the victory he had won, from the text: "I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Write, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" 'Yes,' said the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labours and their works follow them'" (Revelation 14:13). A marvellous calm hushed into stillness that great gathering of all races and religions. The address ended. There followed a hymn of praise to God, and then the bier was again lifted and carried to the Christian cemetery, where, in the presence of all, it was committed with honour and reverence to the dust.

The brothers and sons of Ali placed a beautiful monument over the grave, with the dates of birth and death, and that also of his embracing the Christian faith. Various verses were added from the Gospel which he had been fond of repeating; and in large letters of gold, these words, which he uttered with his expiring breath: "O Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Most of Ali's companions, mentioned in this story, lived long after his decease in perfect freedom and peace, drawing many by their life and example, of various faiths and races, to believe in the Gospel. And in the end they all died in the Lord, leaving behind them the memory of a Christian life and conversation as a precious legacy to their families and friends.

And lastly, we should not fail to mention that the request of Sheikh Ali, to seek in marriage the hand of Mariam, widow of the martyr Omar, was fulfilled. With their mother he took also her two sons to his house; and they all lived in peace and happiness many years, advancing in knowledge, virtue and piety all the days of their lives.

15. Quiz

Dear Reader, the following quiz is provided to confirm your knowledge of the subjects raised in this book. If you answer at least 32 questions correctly, we will send you one of our other publications. (Note: The numerical sequence of the questions in this quiz represents the order in which the answers can be found in the text of the story.)

1. When were the books of Moses collected in the form in which we now have them? In what ways is their genuineness confirmed?
2. Several times throughout the story, the narrator says that the great mass of mankind is content with believing only the religion they were born into and brought up with. Do you think this is true? Why?
3. What part of Christ died on the cross: His divine nature or His human nature?
4. How do Scriptural translation and the presence of conflicting sects show that alteration of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures after the coming of the Qur'an is an impossibility?
5. Indeed, the Qur'an does not accuse Jews and Christians of tampering with their sacred books, but of neglecting their precepts. Which Qur'anic verse upbraids them (quote it and include the reference)?
6. If God is one (as indeed He is), what must consequently also be one?
7. Quote the Qur'anic verse that Sheikh Mahmoud relayed in his discussion with Suleiman. What was his reaction after stumbling upon this verse? Quote the next two Qur'anic verses he found, and again describe his reaction.
8. In the Qur'an, the Torah and the Gospel are called "The Book." Why?
9. On which subjects do the Qur'an and the Scriptures agree? On which subjects do they differ?
10. On the testimony of the Qur'an itself, what must a Muslim do in respect to the Old and New Testaments as they stood in the seventh century?
11. In the debate opened by Omar, what were the various arguments brought by Ibrahim that show the Torah was not changed?
12. What did Muhammad himself say in reference to the Jews, Christians and "The Book," showing that the Scriptures are indeed reliable?
13. How did Ibrahim answer Omar's charge that differences in the various Bible translations throw doubt upon the original text; and his claim that the Arabs had only the Hebrew text and

- knew nothing of the various translations; and that Muhammad's not being able to read opened him up to deception in the matter of the purity of the original text? What was Omar then forced to admit?
14. How did Suleiman answer the Effendi's argument that the prophetic passages in the Scriptures were inserted after they had occurred?
 15. Why did Omar al-Haris recommend that he and the other converts should stand firm whatever the cost and whatever the results?
 16. When the Wali asked who had written the letter, Sheikh Ali confessed that he had. Then he turned to the rest of the men and questioned them. Quote their first and second responses.
 17. What scheme did Sheikh Ahmed devised so as to trap Omar?
 18. Who said the following lines: "The accusers are enemies who desire my death; and your Honour knows that, with many, a lie supported with false evidence is lawful, if only the goal is in the interest of the faith"? Who are "the many" and what is "the faith" referred to? Do you think this is a justifiable charge?
 19. Describe what Omar said to his wife as he, with difficulty, restrained himself from an outburst of grief.
 20. After the Qadi asked Omar to return to Islam outwardly, promising him the opportunity to go to Europe or Lebanon (where he could profess his faith openly and in safety), how did Omar respond?
 21. What impresses you about the farewell speech of Omar?
 22. Name the man who became a Christian by the example and steadfastness of the martyr.
 23. Quote the question Sayyid Mustafa asked himself after contemplating Omar's martyrdom. Quote his words after Sayyid Hasan hesitated confessing his faith.
 24. As the debate between the Qadi and Sheikh Ali opened, what two facts about God's nature did Ali keep stressing?
 25. How did Sheikh Ali answer the Qadi's question: "The Lord our God is one Lord: How then do the Christians talk of the Father and the Son"?
 26. When the Mufti entered the discussion between Sheikh Ali and the Qadi, he quoted Sura al-Ikhlas 112. How did Sheikh Ali respond to him, and what Qur'anic verse did he use in his response? What Qur'anic verses did Abd al-Hamid add later, in an attempt to show that Jesus is not divine? How do these very verses contradict other verses in the Qur'an?
 27. What does the phrase, "a Word from Him," show us about Christ? What two verses from the New Testament support this supposition (quote them)?
 28. How did Sheikh Ali answer Abd al-Hamid's following objection?: "The prounoun min ('from') in the phrase, 'Word from Him,' does not imply that the Word was part of, or an emanation from, the Deity; but simply 'from' Him or 'sent by' Him."
 29. Sheikh Ali tells of a conversation that he (while still a Muslim) had with a Christian dhimmi. Summarise the six reasons (four from the Qur'an and two from the Traditions) he mentions that

- show Jesus to be far above the prophets.
30. What were the three discrepancies Hasan Effendi charged the Scriptures with having, and how did Sheikh Abd ul-Hady answer them?
31. What did Sheikh Ahmed say the seeming contradictions in the Scriptures prove?
32. Abd ul-Rahim quoted Sura al-Ma'ida 5:41 and claimed that those who "pervert the words" are the people of the Book. How did the Mufti answer this charge? Quote the Qur'anic verses (five of them) he mentions, and explain how he interprets them.
33. At the second meeting between the accusers and the Christian company, the Qadi asked Sheikh Ali several questions. Briefly summarise the questions as well as answers of Sheikh Ali.
34. Briefly summarise the questions and answers of Sheikh Ali.
35. What does Ali give in answer to the Qadi's claim that the Prophet Muhammad upheld the Scriptures. Also, what did Ali say in response to the Qadi's claim of Muhammad's alleged miracles? (Include in your answer the Qur'anic verses he mentions.)
36. How did Sheikh Ali answer the Qadi's claim that the Qur'an itself is a miracle by reason of its beautiful language?
37. How does Sheikh Ali prove to the Qadi that the blessing to all nations was to come through Isaac's descendants (Israel) and not through Ishmael's? Quote the verses from the Qur'an and the Bible that he uses to prove his point.
38. How does Sheikh Ali prove that the Prophet referred to in Deuteronomy 18 was not Muhammad?
39. What are the five ways that Jesus (as the Prophet predicted in Deuteronomy 18) resembles Moses?
40. How does Sheikh Ali answer the question of the Qadi: "Does not the Torah predict that Muhammad, the Arabian, will follow Jesus as the last of the prophets?" How does he answer the charge that the Psalms predict Muhammad as "Ahmed" and that the Gospel predicts him as "the Paraclete"?
41. Which foolish things did unprincipled men pass on to Muhammad, so that he would be magnified in the eyes of the simple and gullible?
42. In a conversation with the Mufti, the Qadi is amazed that Muhammad could have been deceived by the Jews regarding some of the traditions. What does he then conclude may be the case with the Qur'an?
43. What did you learn from the story? Do you think it wise to use force in matters of religion? Does God use force with us? Why?

Please send your answers to the address below. Include your full name and address on the answer sheet as well as on the envelope. If you have questions about the Christian faith, we will answer them for you.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR THEY SHALL BE SATISFIED.

[Please use our Email-Form to contact us or write to:](#)

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