

marched with that of Persia. His northern ran along the Altai from the Kirghis steppe, north of the desert of Gobi. But it did not include Korea, which was conquered and made tributary by his son. This Tang dynasty civilized and incorporated into the Chinese race the whole of the southward population, and just as the Chinese of the north call themselves the "men of Han" so the Chinese of the south call themselves the "men of Tang." The law was codified, the literary examination system was revised, and a complete and accurate edition of all the Chinese classics was produced.

To the court of Tai-tsung came an embassy from Byzantium, and, what is more significant, from Persia came a company of Nestorian missionaries (635). These latter Tai-tsung received with great respect; he heard them state the chief articles of their creed, and ordered the Christian scriptures to be translated into Chinese for his further examination.

In 638 he announced that he found the new religion entirely satisfactory, and that it might be preached within the empire. He also allowed the building of a church and the foundation of a monastery. There exists at Sian-fu to-day a carved stone (the Nestorian Monument) dating from A.D. 781, upon which these facts are recorded in Chinese.

A still more remarkable embassy also came to the court of Tai-tsung in the year 628, seven years earlier than the Nestorians. This was a party of Arabs, who came by sea to Canton in a trading vessel from Yanbu, the port of Medina in Arabia. (Incidentally it is interesting to know that there were such vessels engaged in an east and west trade at this time.) These Arabs had been sent by that Muhammad we have already mentioned, who styled himself "The Prophet of God," and the message they brought to Tai-tsung was probably identical with the summons which was sent in the same year to the Byzantine emperor Heraclius and to Kavadh in Ctesiphon.

But the Chinese monarch neither neglected the message as Heraclius did, nor insulted the envoys after the fashion of the parricide Kavadh. He received them well, expressed great interest in their theological views, and assisted them, it is said, to build a mosque for the Arab traders in Canton—a mosque which survives to this day. It is one of the oldest mosques in the world.

§ 8

Intellectual Fetters of China.

The urbanity, the culture, and the power of China under the early Tang rulers are in so vivid a contrast with the decay, disorder, and divisions of the Western world, as at once to raise some of the most interesting questions in the history of civilization. Why did not China keep this great lead she had won by her rapid return to unity and order? Why does she not to this day dominate the world culturally and politically?

For a long time she certainly did keep ahead. It is only a thousand years later, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with the discovery of America, the spread of printed books and education in the West, and the dawn of modern scientific discovery, that we can say with confidence that the Western world began to pull ahead of China again. Under the Tang rule, her greatest period, and then again under the artistic but rather decadent Sung dynasty (960-1279), and again during the period of the cultured Mings (1368-1644), China presented a spectacle of prosperity, happiness, and artistic activity far in front of any contemporary state. And seeing that she achieved so much, why did she not achieve more? Chinese shipping was upon the seas, and there was a considerable overseas trade during that time. Why did the Chinese never discover America or Australia?

There are old Bushmen rock paintings which may show that isolated Chinese ships reached South Africa at some unknown date, and there are said to be traces of Chinese visitors in Mexico, but if so, neither of these casual explorations seems to have been followed up any more than the circumnavigation of Africa by the Carthaginians or the early visits of the Northmen to America were followed up. There are also, says Mr. Vogan, Chinese rock carvings in New Zealand and New Caledonia. It needs something more than individual genius and unsupported enterprise for a discovery to be secured for the community and to fructify into established and usable knowledge. The community itself must be ready.

There was, indeed, as much isolated observation, ingenuity, and invention in China as in any part of the world. The Chinese knew of gunpowder in the sixth century, they used coal and gas heating locally centuries before these things were used in Europe; their bridge-building, their hydraulic engineering were admirable; the knowledge of materials shown in their enamel and lacquer ware is very great. Why did they never organize

the system of record and co-operation in inquiry that has given the world modern science? And why, in spite of their general training in good manners and self-restraint, did intellectual education never soak down into the general mass of the population? Why are the masses of China to-day, and why have they always been, in spite of an exceptionally high level of natural intelligence, illiterate?

It is customary to meet such questions with rather platitudinous answers. We are told that the Chinaman is the most conservative of human beings, that, in contrast with the European races, his mind is twisted round towards the past, that he is the willing slave of etiquette and precedent to a degree inconceivable to Western minds. He is represented as having a mentality so distinct that one might almost expect to find a difference in brain structure to explain it. The appeals of Confucius to the wisdom of the ancients are always quoted to clinch this suggestion.

If, however, we examine this generalization more closely, it dissolves into thin air. The superior intellectual initiative, the liberal enterprise, the experimental disposition that is supposed to characterize the Western mind, is manifest in the history of that mind only during certain phases and under exceptional circumstances. For the rest, the Western world displays itself as traditional and conservative as China. And, on the other hand, the Chinese mind has, under conditions of stimulus, shown itself quite as inventive and versatile as the European, and the very kindred Japanese mind even more so. For, take the case of the Greeks, the whole swing of their mental vigour falls into the period between the sixth century B.C. and the decay of the Alexandrian Museum under the late Ptolemies in the second century B.C. There were Greeks before that time and Greeks since, but a history of a thousand years of the Byzantine Empire showed the Hellenic world at least as intellectually stagnant as China. Then we have already drawn attention to the comparative sterility of the Italian mind during the Roman period, and its abundant fertility since the Renaissance of learning. The English mind again had a phase of brightness in the seventh and eight centuries, and it did not shine again until the fifteenth. Again, the mind of the Arabs, as we shall presently tell, blazed out like a star for half a dozen generations after the appearance of Islam, having never achieved anything of importance before or since. On the other hand, there was always a great deal of scattered inventiveness in China, and the progress of Chinese art witnesses to new move-

ments and vigorous innovations. We exaggerate the reverence of the Chinese for their fathers; parricide was a far commoner crime among the Chinese emperors than it was even among the rulers of Persia. Moreover, there have been several liberalizing movements in China, several recorded struggles against the "ancient ways."

It has already been suggested that phases of real intellectual progress in any community seem to be connected with the existence of a detached class of men, sufficiently free not to be obliged to toil or worry exhaustively about mundane needs, and not rich and powerful enough to be tempted into extravagances of lust, display, or cruelty. They must have a sense of security, but not a conceit of superiority. This class, we have further insinuated, must be able to talk freely and communicate easily. It must not be watched for heresy or persecuted for any ideas it may express. Such a happy state of affairs certainly prevailed in Greece during its best days. A class of intelligent, free gentlefolk is, indeed, evident in history whenever there is a record of bold philosophy or effective scientific advances.

In the days of Tang and Sung and Ming there must have been an abundance of pleasantly circumstanced people in China of just the class that supplied most of the young men of the Academy at Athens, or the bright intelligences of Renaissance Italy, or the members of the London Royal Society, that mother-society of modern science; and yet China did not produce in these periods of opportunity any such large beginnings of recorded and analysed fact.

If we reject the idea that there is some profound racial difference between China and the West which makes the Chinese by nature conservative and the West by nature progressive, then we are forced to look for the operating cause of this difference in progressiveness in some other direction. Many people are disposed to find that operating cause, which has, in spite of her original advantages, retarded China so greatly during the last four or five centuries, in the imprisonment of the Chinese mind in a script and in an idiom of thought so elaborate and so difficult that the mental energy of the country has been largely consumed in acquiring it. This view deserves examination.

We have already given an account of the peculiarities of Chinese writing and of the Chinese language. The Japanese writing is derived from the Chinese, and consists of a more rapidly written system of forms. A great number of these forms are ideograms taken over from the Chinese and used exactly as the Chinese ideograms are used, but also a number

of signs are used to express syllables; there is a Japanese syllabary after the fashion of the Sumerian syllabary we have described in an earlier chapter. The Japanese writing remains a clumsy system, as clumsy as cuneiform, though not so clumsy as Chinese; and there has been a movement in Japan to adopt a Western alphabet. Korea long ago went a step farther and developed an alphabet, independently or from the same Chinese origins.

With these exceptions all the great writing systems now in use in the world are based on the Mediterranean alphabets, and are beyond comparison more easily learnt and mastered than the Chinese. This means that while other peoples learn merely a comparatively simple, straightforward method of setting down the language with which they are familiar, the Chinaman has to master a great multitude of complex word-signs and word-groups. He must not simply learn the signs, but the established grouping of those signs, to present various meanings. He must familiarize himself, therefore, with a number of exemplary classical works. Consequently, in China, while you will find great numbers of people who know the significance of certain frequent and familiar characters, you discover only a few whose knowledge is sufficiently extensive to grasp the meaning of a newspaper paragraph, and still fewer who can read any subtlety of intention or fine shades of meaning. In a lesser degree this is true also of Japan. No doubt European readers, especially of such word-rich unsystematic languages as English or Russian, vary greatly among themselves in regard to the extent of books they can understand and how far they understand them; their power varies according to their vocabularies; but the corresponding levels of understanding among the Chinese represent a far greater expenditure of time and labour upon their attainment. A mandarin's education in China was, mainly, learning to read.

And it may be that the consequent preoccupation of the educated class during its most susceptible years upon the Chinese classics gave it a bias in favour of this traditional learning upon which it had spent so much time and energy. Few men who have toiled to build up any system of knowledge in their minds will willingly scrap it in favour of something strange and new. This disposition is as characteristic of the West as of the East, it is shown as markedly by the scholars of the British and American universities as by any Chinese mandarins; and the British at the present time, in spite of the great and manifest advantages in popular education and national propaganda the change would give them, refuse to make any move from their present barbaric orthography towards a phonetic alphabet and

spelling. The peculiarities of the Chinese script, and the educational system arising out of that script, must have acted age after age as an invincible filter that favoured the plastic and scholarly mind as against the restive and originating type, and kept the latter out of positions of influence and authority. There is much that is plausible in this explanation.

It was not, however, until the comparatively recent Ming dynasty that the classical examination system was established in its full severity. The Ming dynasty (1368-1644) was a patriotic and conservative dynasty, resuming possession of China after the rule of the Mongols. The first of the Ming emperors, says Mr. L. Y. Chen, when he reorganized the examination system upon more exacting lines, said: "This will bring all the intellectuals of the world into my trap." The "Five Classics and the Four Books" have imprisoned the mind of China. By the time a man has toiled through these his system of values is as rigid and incurable as that of a classical scholar at Oxford.

There have been several attempts to simplify the Chinese writing and to adopt an alphabetical system. In the early days of Buddhism in China, when there was a considerable amount of translation from Sanscrit, Indian influences came near to achieving this end; two Chinese alphabets were, indeed, invented, and each had some little use. But what hindered the general adoption of these, and what stands in the way of any phonetic system of Chinese writing to-day, is this, that while the literary script and phraseology is the same from one end of China to the other, the spoken language of the common people, both in pronunciation and in its familiar idioms, varies so widely that men from one province may be incomprehensible to men from another. There is, however, a "standard Chinese," a rather bookish spoken idiom, which is generally understood by educated people; and it is upon the possibility of applying an alphabetical system of writing to this standard Chinese that the hopes of many modern educational reformers in China are based at the present time. A Chinese alphabet has been formed; it is taught in the common schools, and newspapers and pamphlets are issued in it. And the rigid examination system that killed all intellectual initiatives has been destroyed.

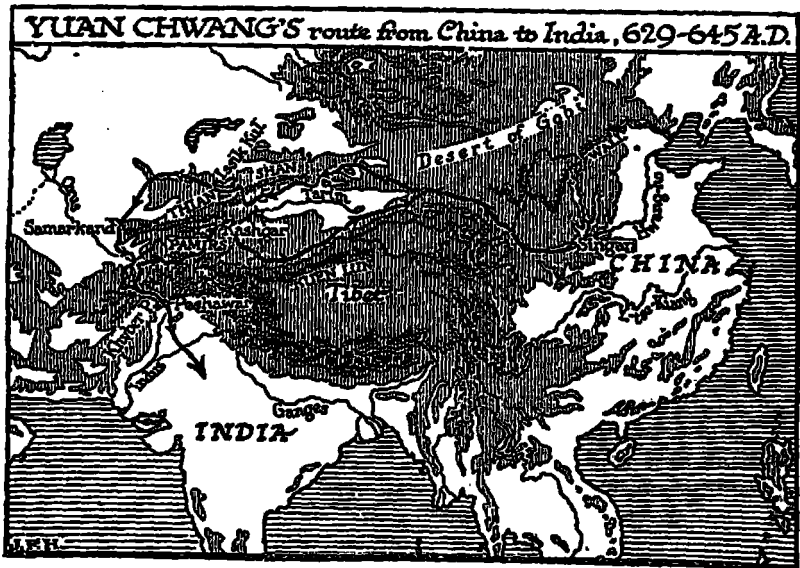
There has also been a considerable simplification in the direction of introducing spoken idioms into written Chinese. This makes for ease and lucidity; even in the old characters, such Chinese is more easily read and written, and it is far better adapted than classical Chinese to the needs of modern literary expression.

But there may be other causes, also, that kept China from pushing forward to the definite leadership of mankind. The very success and early prosperity and general contentment of China in the past must have worked to justify in that land all the natural self-complacency and conservatism of our species. No animal need change when its conditions are "good enough" for present survival. And in this matter man is still an animal. Until the nineteenth century, for more than two thousand years, there was little in the history of China that could cause any serious doubts in the mind of a Chinaman of the general superiority of his own civilization to that of the rest of the world, and there was no reason apparent, therefore, for any alteration. China produced a profusion of beautiful art, some delightful poetry, astonishing cookery, and thousands of millions of glowingly pleasant lives generation after generation. It was always a country of small properties; all hands are wanted, and can be absorbed in old ancestral agricultural jobs. Moreover, there are outlets for expansive forces. To the north and west there is still great room for settlement. Nothing has occurred, therefore, no intense internal tension, to break up the patriarchal Chinese family clan which marries its sons at an early age and retains them at home before they achieve economic independence. So that China went on for century after century without any such general boredom, servitude, indignity, and misery as underlay the rule of the rich in the Roman Empire, and led at last to its collapse. There was much poverty, much discontent, but it was not massed uprooted poverty, it was not a necessary popular discontent. After every convulsion, after every disaster, population recovered; the wounds healed. For a thousand years the Chinese system though it creaked and swayed at times, seemed proof against decay. Dynastic changes there were, rebellions, phases of disorder, famines, pestilences; two great invasions that set foreign dynasties upon the throne of the Son of Heaven; but no such shock as to revolutionize the order of the daily round. The emperors and dynasties might come and go; the mandarins, the examinations, the classics, and the traditions and habitual life remained. From the days of the Tang dynasty onward, though Chinese civilization spread slowly and steadily into Annam, into Cambodia, into Siam, into Tibet, into Nepal, Korea, Mongolia and Manchuria, there is little more than geographical progress to record. The Chinese of the seventh century A.D. were in all essentials as civilized a people as they were a thousand years later.

§ 9

Early Chinese Art.

Here we may, perhaps, make a remark or so about the art and architecture of China during this period of the Han and Tang and the intervening dynasties. For reasons that we are quite unable to analyse the Chinese have always preferred the use of timber and brick to that of stone in building. Yet there is plentiful good building-stone to be found in China. Hardly any ruins, and no buildings apart from the Great Wall, earlier than the eleventh century A.D. are known to history. But



pictures and records testify to a long tradition going back to the Ts'in dynasty or earlier.

The earliest forms of building derived directly from the Mongol tent. The main feature is the great roof, which may be double or triple and with carved and lacquered woodwork. The roof itself may be covered with glazed and brilliantly coloured tiles. Generally, buildings are of one story, spreading horizontally. A frequent feature in Chinese design is the honorific archway. Bridges of stone abound, and some are very beautiful. The heaven-pointing pagoda is a third type of erection, and these and terraces and balustradings complete the general scheme of Chinese buildings. This was the architectural land-

scape of China at the beginning of the Christian era, and so it remains to this day. The pagoda is said, perhaps incorrectly, to be due to Indian Buddhist initiatives, and to be the Chinese equivalent of the Indian monumental *stupa*.

The same indifference to enduring materials affects our knowledge of Chinese plastic art before the Han dynasty. Almost the only exception is bronze. We know of bronze jars and figures of the Chow and even the Shang dynasties. They are so skilfully and beautifully done that they imply the contemporary existence of a whole world of sympathetic productions that have now perished. It is only with the Han dynasty and after the commencement of the Christian era that we come to a phase of Chinese life that has left many vestiges in any other material.

Painting, we are told, was the essential art of China, and very beautiful work was already being done in the Han period. Ku-Kai-Chih (fourth century A.D.) is named as one of the great Chinese masters of the brush. Some of his work survives, and it shows a maturity and mastery that indicate an already well-established school. The Chinese painting is invariably water-colour; in the place of great frescoes we find pictures on silk and paper, and it differs from Western work in displaying a positive dislike for the representation of relief. It is flat, atmospheric, delicate, and it deals far more with landscape and less with the close representation of the human body. The Tang dynasty marks what many critics consider to be the supreme period of Chinese painting.

Chinese sculpture by no means kept pace with Chinese pictorial art, and is hardly to be mentioned beside European work, but on the other hand Chinese pottery is pre-eminent. The Chinese fired their pottery at much higher temperatures than the Western world, and produced porcelain and unequalled glazes by the end of the Tang period. The Han pottery was already very hard and fine. Great numbers of glazed earthenware figures of attendants, horses, camels and so forth, dating from the Tang period, are now in European homes and collections. They came out of graves, and they were put into these graves in lieu of the butchered slaves and animals of a more barbaric past. These graveside massacres, to provide the departed Mongol chieftain with service and beasts of burden in the land of shades, went on in China until the seventh or sixth century B.C. Then images were substituted. The Huns in the time of Attila still observed the ancient custom of a real slaughter, but it had been extinct in Egypt before the earliest dynasties and had already given place there to the funeral images.

§ 10

The Travels of Yuan Chwang.

In 629, the year after the arrival of Muhammad's envoys at Canton and thirty odd years after the landing of Pope Gregory's missionaries in England, a certain learned and devout Buddhist named Yuan Chwang, or as some authorities prefer to spell it, Hiuen-Tsiang, started out from Sian-fu (Signan), Tai-tsung's capital, upon a great journey to India. He was away sixteen years; he returned in 645, and he wrote an account of his travels which is treasured as a Chinese classic. One or two points about his experience are to be noted here because they contribute to our general review of the state of the world in the seventh century A.D.

Yuan Chwang was as eager for marvels and as credulous as Herodotus, and without the latter writer's fine sense of history; he could never pass a monument or ruin without learning some fabulous story about it. Chinese ideas of the dignity of literature perhaps prevented him from telling us much detail of how he travelled, who were his attendants, how he was lodged, or what he ate and how he paid his expenses—details precious to the historian; nevertheless, he gives us a series of illuminating flashes upon China, Central Asia, and India in the period now under consideration.

His journey was an enormous one. He went and came back by way of the Pamirs. He went by the northern route, crossing the Desert of Gobi, passing along the southern slopes of the Thien Shan, skirting the great deep blue lake of Issik Kul, and so to Tashkend and Samarkand, and then more or less in the footsteps of Alexander the Great southward to the Khyber Pass and Peshawar. He returned by the southern route, crossing the Pamirs from Afghanistan to Kashgar, and so along the line of retreat the Yueh-Chi had followed in the reverse direction seven centuries before, and by Yarkand, along the slopes of the Kuen Lun, to rejoin his former route near the desert end of the Great Wall. Each route involved some hard mountaineering. His journeyings in India are untraceable; he was there fourteen years, and he went all over the peninsula from Nepal to Ceylon.

At that time there was an imperial edict forbidding foreign travel, so that Yuan Chwang started from Sian-fu like an escaping criminal. There was a pursuit to prevent him carrying out his project. How he bought from a strange greybeard a lean red-coloured horse that knew the desert paths, how he dodged a frontier guard-house with the help of a "foreign person" who

made him a bridge of brushwood lower down the river, how he crossed the desert guided by the bones of men and cattle, how he saw a mirage, and how twice he narrowly escaped being shot by arrows when he was getting water near the watch-towers on the desert track, the reader will find in the *Life*. He lost his way in the Desert of Gobi, and for four nights and five days he had no water; when he was in the mountains among the glaciers, twelve of his party were frozen to death. All this is in the *Life*; he tells little of it in his own account of his travels.

He shows us the Turks, this new development of the Hun tradition, in possession not only of what is now Turkestan, but all along the northern route. He mentions many cities and considerable cultivation. He is entertained by various rulers, allies of or more or less nominally tributaries to China, and among others by the Khan of the Turks, a magnificent person in green satin, with his long hair tied with silk.

"The gold embroidery of this grand tent shone with a dazzling splendour; the ministers of the presence in attendance sat on mats in long rows on either side, all dressed in magnificent brocade robes, while the rest of the retinue on duty stood behind. You saw that although it was a case of a frontier ruler, yet there was an air of distinction and elegance. The Khan came out from his tent about thirty paces to meet Yuan Chwang, who, after a courteous greeting, entered the tent. . . . After a short interval envoys from China and Kao-chang were admitted and presented their despatches and credentials, which the Khan perused. He was much elated, and caused the envoys to be seated; then he ordered wine and music for himself and them and grape-syrup for the pilgrim. Hereupon all pledged each other, and the filling and draining of the winecups made a din and bustle, while the mingled music of various instruments rose loud: although the airs were the popular strains of foreigners, yet they pleased the senses and exhilarated the mental faculties. After a little, piles of roasted beef and mutton were served for the others, and lawful food, such as cakes, milk, candy, honey, and grapes, for the pilgrim. After the entertainment, grape-syrup was again served, and the Khan invited Yuan Chwang to improve the occasion, whereupon the pilgrim expounded the doctrines of the 'ten virtues,' compassion for animal life, and the paramitas and emancipation. The Khan, raising his hands, bowed, and gladly believed and accepted the teaching."

Yuan Chwang's account of Samarkand is of a large and prosperous city, "a great commercial entrepôt, the country about it very fertile, abounding in trees and flowers and yield-

ing many fine horses. Its inhabitants were skilful craftsmen, smart and energetic." At that time, we must remember, there was hardly such a thing as a town in Anglo-Saxon England.

As his narrative approached his experiences in India, however, the pious and learned pilgrim in Yuan Chwang got the better of the traveller, and the book becomes congested with monstrous stories of incredible miracles. Nevertheless, we get an impression of houses, clothing and the like, closely resembling those of the India of to-day. Then, as now, the kaleidoscopic variety of an Indian crowd contrasted with the blue uniformity of the multitude in China. In the time of Buddha it is doubtful if there were reading and writing in India; now reading and writing were quite common accomplishments. Yuan Chwang gives an interesting account of a great Buddhist university at Nalanda, where ruins have quite recently been discovered and excavated. Nalanda and Taxilla seem to have been considerable educational centres as early as the opening of the schools of Athens. He also visited the caves at Ajanta of which we have told. The caste system Yuan Chwang found fully established in spite of Buddha, and the Brahmins were now altogether in the ascendant. He names the four main castes we have mentioned, but his account of their functions is rather different. The Sudras, he says, were the tillers of the soil. Indian writers say that their function was to wait upon the "twice-born" castes above them.

But, as we have already intimated, Yuan Chwang's account of Indian realities is swamped by his accumulation of legends and pious inventions. For these he had come, and in these he rejoiced. The rest, as we shall see, was a task that had been set him. The faith of Buddha, which in the days of Asoka, and even so late as Kanishka, was still pure enough to be a noble inspiration, we now discover absolutely lost in a wilderness of preposterous rubbish, a philosophy of endless Buddhas, tales of manifestations and marvels like a Christmas pantomime, miraculous conceptions by six-tusked elephants, charitable princes giving themselves up to be eaten by starving tigresses, temples built over a sacred nail-paring, and the like. We cannot give such stories here; if the reader likes that sort of thing, he must go to the publications of the Royal Asiatic Society or the India Society, where he will find a delirium of such imaginations. And in competition with this Buddhism, intellectually undermined as it now was and smothered in gilded decoration, Brahminism was everywhere gaining ground again, as Yuan Chwang notes with regret.

Side by side with these evidences of a vast intellectual decay in India, we may note the repeated appearance in Yuan Chwang's narrative of ruined and deserted cities. Much of the country was still suffering from the ravages of the Ephthalites and the consequent disorders. Again and again we find such passages as this: "He went north-east through a great forest, the road being a narrow, dangerous path, with wild buffalo and wild elephants, and robbers and hunters always in wait to kill travellers, and emerging from the forest he reached the country of Kou-shih-na-ka-lo (Kúsinagara). The city walls were in ruins, and the towns and villages were deserted. The brick foundations of the 'old city' (that is, the city which had been the capital) were above ten *li* in circuit; there were very few inhabitants, the interior of the city being a wild waste." This ruin was, however, by no means universal; there is at least as much mention of crowded cities and villages and busy cultivations.

The *Life* tells of many hardships upon the return journey: he fell among robbers; the great elephant that was carrying the bulk of his possessions was drowned; he had much difficulty in getting fresh transport. Here we cannot deal with these adventures.

The return of Yuan Chwang to Sian-fu, the Chinese capital, was, we gather, a triumph. Advance couriers must have told of his coming. There was a public holiday; the streets were decorated by gay banners and made glad with music. He was escorted into the city with great pomp and ceremony. Twenty horses were needed to carry the spoils of his travels; he had brought with him hundreds of Buddhist books written in Sanscrit, and made of trimmed leaves of palm and birch bark strung together in layers; he had many images great and small of Buddha, in gold, silver, crystal, and sandal-wood; he had holy pictures, and no fewer than one hundred and fifty well-authenticated true relics of Buddha. Yuan Chwang was presented to the emperor, who treated him as a personal friend, took him into the palace, and questioned him day by day about the wonders of these strange lands in which he had stayed so long. But while the emperor asked about India, the pilgrim was disposed only to talk about Buddhism.

The subsequent history of Yuan Chwang contains two incidents that throw light upon the mental workings of this great monarch, Tai-tung, who was probably quite as much a Moslem as he was a Christian or a Buddhist. The trouble about all religious specialists is that they know too much about their own religion and how it differs from others; the advantage,

or disadvantage, of such creative statesmen as Tai-tsung and Constantine the Great is that they know comparatively little of such matters. Evidently the fundamental good of all these religions seemed to Tai-tsung to be much the same fundamental good. So it was natural to him to propose that Yuan Chwang should now give up the religious life and come into his foreign office, a proposal that Yuan Chwang would not entertain for a moment. The emperor then insisted at least upon a written account of the travels, and so got this classic we treasure. And finally Tai-tsung proposed to this highly saturated Buddhist that he should now use his knowledge of Sanscrit in translating the works of the great Chinese teacher, Lao Tse, so as to make them available for Indian readers.

It seemed, no doubt, to the emperor a fair return and a useful service to the fundamental good that lies beneath all religions. On the whole, he thought Lao Tse might very well rank with or even a little above Buddha, and, therefore, that if his work was put before the Brahmins, they would receive it gladly. In much the same spirit Constantine the Great had done his utmost to make Arius and Athanasius settle down amicably together. But naturally enough this suggestion was repulsed by Yuan Chwang. He retired to a monastery, and spent the rest of his years translating as much as he could of the Buddhist literature he had brought with him into elegant Chinese writing.

CHAPTER 30

MUHAMMAD AND ISLAM

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| § 1. <i>Arabia before Muhammad.</i> | § 6. <i>The Great Days of the Omayyads.</i> |
| § 2. <i>Life of Muhammad to the Hegira.</i> | § 7. <i>The Decay of Islam under the Abbasids.</i> |
| § 3. <i>Muhammad becomes a Fighting Prophet.</i> | § 8. <i>Arabic Culture.</i> |
| § 4. <i>The Teachings of Islam.</i> | § 9. <i>Arabic Art.</i> |
| § 5. <i>The Caliphs Abu Bekr and Omar.</i> | |

§ 1

WE have already described how in A.D. 628 the courts of Heraclius, of Kavadh, and of Tai-tsung were visited by Arab envoys sent from a certain Muhammad, "The Prophet of God," at the small trading town of Medina in Arabia. We must tell now who this prophet was who had arisen among the nomads and traders of the Arabian desert.

From time immemorial Arabia, except for the fertile strip of the Yemen to the south, had been a land of nomads, the headquarters and land of origin of the Semitic peoples. From Arabia at various times waves of these nomads had drifted north, east, and west into the early civilizations of Egypt, the Mediterranean coast and Mesopotamia. We have noted in this history how the Sumerians were swamped and overcome by such Semitic waves, how the Semitic Phœnicians and Canaanites established themselves along the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, how Semitic peoples had adopted a settled life in Babylonia and Assyria, how the Hyksos conquered Egypt, how the Arameans established themselves in Syria with Damascus as their capital, and how the Hebrews partially conquered their "Promised Land." At some unknown date the Chaldeans drifted in from Eastern Arabia and settled in the old Southern Sumerian lands. With each invasion first this and then that section of the Semitic peoples comes into history. But each of such swarmings still leaves a tribal nucleus behind to supply fresh invasions in the future.

The history of the more highly organized empire of the horse and iron period, the empires of roads and writing, shows Arabia thrust like a wedge between Egypt, Palestine, and the Euphrates-Tigris country, and still a reservoir of nomadic tribes who raid and trade and exact tribute for the immunity and protection of caravans. There are temporary and flimsy subjugations. Egypt, Persia, Macedonia, Rome, Syria, Constantinople, and again Persia, claim some unreal suzerainty in turn over Arabia, profess some unsubstantial protection. Under Trajan there was a Roman province of "Arabia," which included the then fertile region of the Hauran and extended as far as Petra. Now and then some Arab chief and his trading city rises to temporary splendour. Such was that Odenathus of Palmyra, whose brief career we have noted; and another such transitory desert city whose ruins still astonish the traveller was Baalbek.

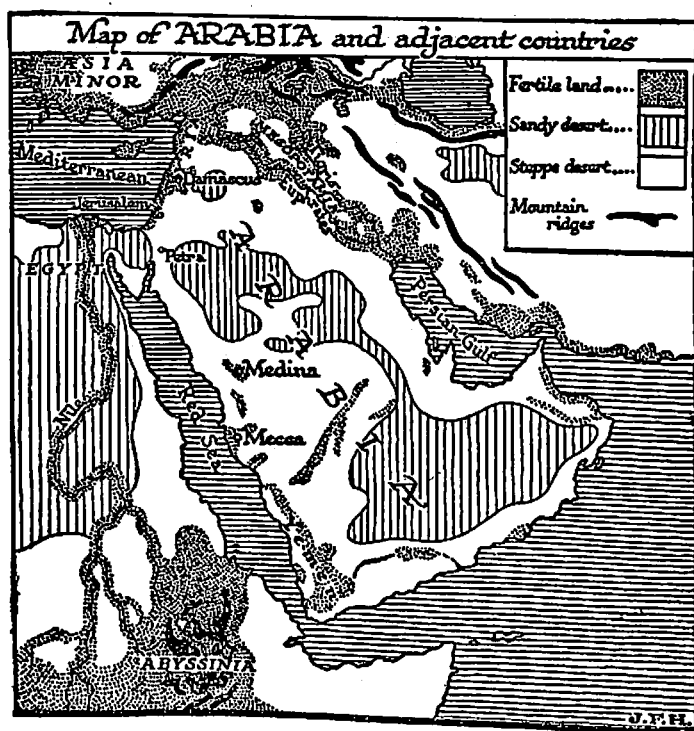
After the destruction of Palmyra, the desert Arabs began to be spoken of in the Roman and Persian records as Saracens.

In the time of Chosroes II, Persia claimed a certain ascendancy over Arabia, and maintained officials and tax collectors in the Yemen. Before that time the Yemen had been under the rule of the Abyssinian Christians for some years, and before that for seven centuries it had had native princes professing, be it noted, the Jewish faith.

Until the opening of the seventh century A.D. there were no signs of any unwonted or dangerous energy in the Arabian deserts. The life of the country was going on as it had gone on for long generations. Wherever there were fertile patches—wherever, that is, there was a spring or a well—a scanty agricultural population subsisted, living in walled towns, walled because of the Bedouin who wandered with their sheep, cattle and horses over the desert. Upon the main caravan routes the chief towns rose to a certain second-rate prosperity, and foremost among them were Medina and Mecca. In the beginning of the seventh century Medina was a town of about 15,000 inhabitants all told; Mecca may have had 20,000 or 25,000. Medina was a comparatively well-watered town, with abundant date groves; its inhabitants were Yemenites, from the fertile land to the south. Mecca was a town of a different character, built about a spring of water with a bitter taste, and inhabited by recently settled Bedouin.

Mecca was not merely nor primarily a trading centre; it was a place of pilgrimage. Among the Arab tribes there had long existed a sort of Amphictyony centring upon Mecca and certain

other sanctuaries; there were months of truce to war and blood feuds, and customs of protection and hospitality for the pilgrim. In addition there had grown up an Olympic element in these gatherings; the Arabs were discovering possibilities of beauty in their language, and there were recitations of war poetry and



love songs. The sheiks of the tribes, under a "king of the poets," sat in judgment and awarded prizes; the prize songs were sung through all Arabia.

The Kaaba, the sanctuary at Mecca, was of very ancient date. It was a small square temple of black stones which had for its corner-stone a meteorite. This meteorite was regarded as a god, and all the little tribal gods of Arabia were under his protection. The permanent inhabitants of Mecca were a tribe of Bedouin who had seized this temple and constituted themselves its guardians. To them there came in the months of truce a great concourse of people, who marched about the Kaaba ceremonially, bowed themselves, and kissed the stone, and also

engaged in trade and poetical recitations. The Meccans profited much from these visitors.

All of this is very reminiscent of the religious and political state of affairs in Greece fourteen centuries earlier. But the paganism of these more primitive Arabs was already being assailed from several directions. There had been a great proselytizing of Arabs during the period of the Maccabeans and Herods in Judea; and, as we have already noted, the Yemen had been in succession under the rule of Jews (Arab proselytes to Judaism, *i.e.*), Christians, and Zoroastrians. It is evident that there must have been plenty of religious discussion during the pilgrimage fairs at Mecca and the like centres. Naturally enough, Mecca was a stronghold of the old pagan cult which gave it its importance and prosperity; Medina, on the other hand, had Jewish proclivities, and there were Jewish settlements near by. It was inevitable that Mecca and Medina should be in a state of rivalry and bickering feud.

§ 2

Life of Muhammad to the Hegira.

It was in Mecca about the year A.D. 570 that Muhammad, the founder of Islam, was born. He was born in considerable poverty and even by the standards of the desert he was uneducated; it is doubtful if he ever learnt to write. He was for some years a shepherd's boy; then he became the servant of a certain Kadija the widow of a rich merchant. Probably he had to look after her camels or help in her trading operations; and he is said to have travelled with caravans to the Yemen and to Syria. He does not seem to have been a very useful trader, but he had the good fortune to find favour in the lady's eyes, and she married him, to the great annoyance of her family. He was then only twenty-five years old. It is uncertain if his wife was much older, though tradition declares she was forty. After the marriage he probably made no more long journeys. There were several children, one of whom was named Abd Manif—that is to say, the servant of the Meccan god Manif, which demonstrates that at that time Muhammad had made no religious discoveries.

Until he was forty he did, indeed, live a particularly undistinguished life in Mecca, as the husband of a prosperous wife. There may be some ground for the supposition that he became partner in a business in agricultural produce. To anyone visiting Mecca about A.D. 600 he would probably have seemed

something of a loafer, a rather shy, good-looking individual, sitting about and listening to talk, a poor poet, and an altogether second-rate man.

About his internal life we can only speculate. Imaginative writers have supposed that he had great spiritual struggles, that he went out into the desert in agonies of doubt and divine desire. "In the silence of the desert night, in the bright heat of noontide desert day, he, as do all men, had known and felt himself alone yet not in solitude, for the desert is of God, and in the desert no man may deny Him."¹ Maybe that was so, but there is no evidence of any such desert trips. Yet he was certainly thinking deeply of the things about him. Possibly he had seen Christian churches in Syria; almost certainly he knew much of the Jews and their religion, and he heard their scorn for this black stone of the Kaaba that ruled over the three hundred odd tribal gods of Arabia. He saw the pilgrimage crowds, and noted the threads of insincerity and superstition in the paganism of the town. It oppressed his mind. The Jews had, perhaps, converted him to a belief in the One True God, without his knowing what had happened to him.

At last he could keep these feelings to himself no longer. When he was forty he began to talk about the reality of God, at first apparently only to his wife and a few intimates. He produced certain verses, which he declared had been revealed to him by an angel. They involved an assertion of the unity of God and some acceptable generalizations about righteousness. He also insisted upon a future life, the fear of hell for the negligent and evil, and the reservation of paradise for the believer in the One God. Except for his claim to be a new prophet, there does not seem to have been anything very new about these doctrines at the time, but this was seditious teaching for Mecca, which partly subsisted upon its polytheistic cult, and which was therefore holding on to idols when all the rest of the world was giving them up. Like Mani, Muhammad claimed that the prophets before him, and especially Jesus and Abraham, had been divine teachers, but that he crowned and completed their teaching. Buddhism, however, he did not name, probably because he had never heard of Buddha. Desert Arabia was in a theological backwater.

For some years the new religion was the secret of a small group of simple people, Kadija, the Prophet's wife, Ali, an adopted son, Zeid, a slave, and Abu Bekr, a friend and admirer. For some years it was an obscure sect in a few households of Mecca,

¹ Sir Mark Sykes.

a mere scowl and muttering at idolatry, so obscure and unimportant that the leading men of the town did not trouble about it in the least. Then it gathered strength. Muhammad began to preach more openly, to teach the doctrine of a future life, and to threaten idolaters and unbelievers with hell fire. He seems to have preached with considerable effect. It appeared to many that he was aiming at a sort of dictatorship in Mecca, and drawing many susceptible and discontented people to his side; and an attempt was made to discourage and suppress the new movement.

Mecca was a place of pilgrimage and a sanctuary; no blood could be shed within its walls; nevertheless, things were made extremely disagreeable for the followers of the new teacher. Boycott and confiscation were used against them. Some were driven to take refuge in Christian Abyssinia. But the Prophet himself went unscathed because he was well connected, and his opponents did not want to begin a blood feud. We cannot follow the fluctuations of the struggle here, but it is necessary to note one perplexing incident in the new Prophet's career, which, says Sir Mark Sykes, "proves him to have been an Arab of the Arabs." After all his insistence upon the oneness of God, he wavered. He came into the courtyard of the Kaaba and declared that the gods and goddesses of Mecca might, after all, be real, might be a species of saints with a power of intercession.

His recantation was received with enthusiasm, but he had no sooner made it than he repented, and his repentance shows that he had indeed the fear of God in him. His lapse from honesty proves him honest. He did all he could to repair the evil he had done. He said that the devil had possessed his tongue, and he denounced idolatry again with renewed vigour. The struggle against the antiquated deities, after a brief interval of peace, was renewed again more grimly, and with no further hope of reconciliation.

For a time the old interests had the upper hand. At the end of ten years of prophesying, Muhammad found himself a man of fifty, and altogether unsuccessful in Mecca. Kadija, his first wife, was dead, and several of his chief supporters had also recently died. He sought a refuge at the neighbouring town of Tayf, but Tayf drove him out with stones and abuse. Then, when the world looked darkest to him, opportunity opened before him. He found he had been weighed and approved in an unexpected quarter. The city of Medina was much torn by internal dissension, and many of its people, during the time of

pilgrimage to Mecca, had been attracted by Muhammad's teaching. Probably the numerous Jews in Medina had shaken the ancient idolatry of the people. An invitation was sent to him to come and rule in the name of his God in Medina.

He did not go at once. He parleyed for two years, sending a disciple to preach in Medina and destroy the idols there. Then he began sending such followers as he had in Mecca to Medina to await his coming there; he did not want to trust himself to unknown adherents in a strange city. This exodus of the faithful continued, until at last only he and Abu Bekr remained.

In spite of the character of Mecca as a sanctuary, he was very nearly murdered there. The elders of the town evidently knew of what was going on in Medina, and they realized the danger to them if this seditious prophet presently found himself master of a town on their main caravan route to Syria. Custom must bow to imperative necessity, they thought; and they decided that, blood feud or no blood feud, Muhammad must die. They arranged that he should be murdered in his bed; and in order to share the guilt of this breach of sanctuary they appointed a committee to do this, representing every family in the city except Muhammad's own. But Muhammad had already prepared his flight; and when in the night they rushed into his room, they found Ali, his adopted son, sleeping, or feigning sleep, on his bed.

The flight (the Hegira) was an adventurous one, the pursuit being pressed hard. Expert desert trackers sought for the spoor to the north of the town, but Muhammad and Abu Bekr had gone south to certain caves where camels and provisions were hidden, and thence he made a great detour to Medina. There he and his faithful companion arrived, and were received with great enthusiasm on September 20, 622. It was the end of his probation and the beginning of his power.

§ 3

Muhammad becomes a Fighting Prophet.

Until the Hegira, until he was fifty-one, the character of the founder of Islam is a matter of speculation and dispute. Thereafter he is in the light. We discover a man of great imaginative power, but tortuous in the Arab fashion, and with most of the virtues and defects of the Bedouin.

• The opening of his reign was "very Bedouin." The rule of the One God of all the earth, as it was interpreted by Muhammad, began with a series of raids—which for more than a year were

invariably unsuccessful—upon the caravans of Mecca. Then came a grave scandal, the breaking of the ancient customary truce of the Arab Amphictyony in the sacred month of Rahab. A party of Moslems, in this season of profound peace, treacherously attacked a small caravan and killed a man. It was their only success, and they did it by the order of the Prophet.

Presently came a battle. A force of seven hundred men had come out from Mecca to convoy home another caravan, and they encountered a large raiding party of three hundred. There was a fight, the battle of Badr, and the Meccans got the worst of it. They lost about fifty or sixty killed and as many wounded. Muhammad returned in triumph to Medina, and was inspired by Allah and this success to order the assassination of a number of his opponents among the Jews in the town who had treated his prophetic claims with a disagreeable levity.

But Mecca resolved to avenge Badr, and at the battle of Uhud, near Medina, inflicted an indecisive defeat upon the Prophet's followers. Muhammad was knocked down and nearly killed, and there was much running away among his followers. The Meccans, however, did not push their advantage and enter Medina.

For some time all the energies of the Prophet were concentrated upon rallying his followers, who were evidently much dispirited. The Koran records the chastened feelings of those days. "The *suras* of the Koran," says Sir Mark Sykes, "which are attributed to this period, excel nearly all the others in their majesty and sublime confidence." Here, for the judgment of the reader, is an example of these majestic utterances, from the recent orthodox translation by the Maulvi Muhammad Ali.¹

"Oh, you who believe! If you obey those who disbelieve, they will turn you back upon your heels, so you will turn back losers.

"Nay! Allah is your Patron, and He is the best of the helpers.

"We will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve, because they set up with Allah that for which He has sent down no authority, and their abode is the fire; and evil is the abode of the unjust.

"And certainly Allah made good to you His promise, when you slew them by His permission, until when you became weak-hearted and disputed about the affair and disobeyed after He had shown you that which you loved; of you were some who desired this world, and of you were some who desired the here-

¹ Published by the *Islamic Review*.