

THE PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED REVIEW

No. 51—July, 1902.

I.

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT FOR THEISM.

IT is not difficult to understand the influence exerted by the Kantian philosophy during the last few decades. To an individual or a generation, engrossed in the study of science and indisposed to metaphysical speculation, averse to materialism and skepticism and moving in the direction of faith, the standpoint of Kant offers much attraction. It combines two signal advantages. It authenticates the concepts employed in science; it provides an independent basis for religion. In both these respects its superiority as a working philosophic theory to positivism is obvious. The late Professor Huxley enthusiastically extolled Hume as of all philosophers the most satisfactory to a scientific mind. But Hume deprives science of its metaphysical foundations; he denies philosophical validity to the idea of causation, and resolves the universe into unrelated atoms. It seems infelicitous that a speculation which invalidates the notions indispensable to scientific reasoning should be regarded with approval by men devoted to the interpretation of nature. The Kantian doctrine is preferable in that it expressly vindicates the concepts which underlie our mathematical and our inductive science.

The other advantage mentioned is of even greater consequence. "Our most holy religion," says Hume, in the *Essay on Miracles*, "is founded on faith, not on reason." Kant uses similar language: "I must abolish knowledge, to make room for belief." His meaning, however, is entirely different. To Hume, religion is a superstition, a product of custom and imagination; to Kant,

THE ATONING SAVIOR OF THE SHIAHS.

ORTHODOX Mohammedanism has no doctrine of vicarious atonement. Though ostensibly confirming the Scriptures as previous revelations, it repudiates the fundamental truth of the law of Moses and of the Christian system, that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission." Notwithstanding this Islam retains animal sacrifices and gives them a definite place in its ritual. The sect of Shiah in Persia and India have, however, engrafted on Islam a well-developed doctrine of vicarious atonement in which Imam Husain, the sacrifice of Kerbala, is the savior of sinners. The Shiah belief on this subject has, I believe, never been presented in detail, so that I trust the charm of novelty will give interest to the subject.

I. First, let us consider the original doctrine of Islam with regard to sacrifices. Mohammedans offer sacrifices on two special occasions. One is the Qurban Bayram, or Id-ul-Azha, the Festival of Sacrifice; the other is the Aqiqah, on the birth of a child.

The Festival of Sacrifice was first instituted in imitation of the great Day of Atonement. During the first year of the Hegira, Mohammed at Medina, in his efforts to conciliate the Jews, kept this fast, and was undoubtedly familiar with its expiatory significance. Afterward, when he broke with the Jews and changed the Kebla from Jerusalem to Mecca, he substituted the Festival of Sacrifice on the tenth day of the twelfth month—Zul Haja—the time at which the heathen Arabs were sacrificing animals at their pilgrimage. Mohammed took two rams and went forth before his people at Medina. Sacrificing one of them, he said: "O Lord, I sacrifice this for my whole people, all those who bear witness to Thy unity and my mission." Then sacrificing the other ram, he said: "O Lord, this is for Mohammed and the family of Mohammed."* This is an evident imitation of the Jewish high priest sacrificing "first for his own sins and then for the people's." On his last pilgrimage to Mecca, Mohammed sacrificed sixty-three camels in the valley of Mina—one for every year of his life. The victim on the Festival may be a camel, cow, sheep,

* See Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*.

goat or buffalo, and it is offered not only at Mecca during the Hajj but in every place, and is the special obligation of every free Mussulman when he arrives at the age of maturity. In all cases the sacrifice is eaten; one-third may be given to the poor, one-third to friends, and one-third reserved for the family. The camel sacrificed by the Crown Prince of Persia at Tabriz is divided by the attendants.

The *Aqiqah* is a usage of the Sunnis, but does not appear to be customary among Shiahs. It is described by Hughes as a sacrifice made for a child when it is from one to five weeks old. It consists of one goat for a girl and two for a boy. The head of the child is first shaved and rubbed with saffron. The weight of the hair in silver is given to the poor, and while the friends eat the goat the following prayer is offered: "O God! I offer to thee, instead of my own offspring, life for life, blood for blood, head for head, bone for bone, hair for hair, skin for skin. In the name of the great God I sacrifice this goat." Finally, the bones are carefully burnt.

Some other occasions for sacrifices will come to view in considering the significance of Mohammedan sacrifices, to which we now pass. The meaning of this rite is not explained fully in the Koran.

(1) Sacrifices are regarded as a memorial of the willingness of Abraham to offer his son, who is generally supposed to be Ishmael. The *Hyat-ul-Kalob*,* translated by Rev. James L. Merrick, a former missionary in Tabriz, says: "When Ibrahim was about to sacrifice Ismael, the Most High made a black and white sheep his substitute, which had been pasturing for forty years in Paradise, and was created not in the course of nature but by the direct power of God, to be offered instead of him on whose life such important events depended. Now every sheep sacrificed at Mina, till the day of judgment, is a substitute or commemorative of the substitute for Ismael."

(2) Sacrifice signifies personal dedication to God, with the idea of approaching near to Him. This accords with the root meaning of the word *Qurban*. So Sheikh Abdul Haqq, in his Commentary on the *Mishkat*,† says, "The sacrifice is that which is slaughtered with the object of obtaining nearness to God." The idea of dedication is brought out in Surah, xxii, 36, 38: "Unto the professors of every religion have we appointed certain rites, that they may commemorate the name of God on slaying the brute cattle which he hath provided for them. Your God is one God,

* *The Life and Religion of Mohammed*, by Merrick, p. 23.

† Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*, p. 552.

wherefore *resign* yourselves wholly unto him." This idea is forcibly stated in the words used by the offerer when he sacrifices the victim. Turning its head toward Mecca, he says: "In the name of the great God! Verily, my prayers, my sacrifice, my life, my death, belong to God, the Lord of the worlds: for I am the first of those who are *Muslim*" (*i. e.*, resigned). Dedication seems also to be implied in the service of sacrifice on the birth of a child.

(3) Sacrifice is regarded as a thank-offering, as in Surah, xxii, 38, 39: "Wherefore commemorate the name of God over them. Thus we have given you dominion over them, that ye may return us thanks." Such also are the frequent sacrifices made for recovery from sickness or for the birth of a son, which are often offered in fulfillment of a vow. Not seldom they are presented at the local shrines. Peace-offerings are sacrificed in the highway by the friends of pilgrims returning from the Hajj, in gratitude for their safe arrival.

(4) Other sacrifices are of a precatory nature. In case of serious sickness a sheep is brought into the house and led around the patient. It is then taken out and sacrificed, in the hope that its life may be accepted in his stead. In some cases the number of victims is multiplied. A sacrifice of this nature is yearly offered at the village of Ispanjan, near Tabriz. When the severe spring wind prevails which is destructive of crops and fruits, an ox is taken to a neighboring mountain and slain. Its blood flows into a well which has been devoted to that purpose. The villagers believe that the wind is propitiated. A scene in the Miracle or Passion Play of Muharram depicts the bringing of victims to avert calamity.* In the plain of Kerbala Imam Husain is met by Zahir and other chiefs, bringing some lambs. They say: "Peace be unto thee, thou King of the empire of faith, thou offspring of the chosen of God, and rose-bush of the meadows of truth! May Zahir and his party be a sacrifice for thee! O ye chiefs, slay your lambs as offerings to Husain, the priest of the universe!" The chiefs laying down their sheep for slaughter, Husain says: "Withhold your hands, all of you, O ye Arabs. What is the reason that each of you intend to slay a lamb?" Zahir: "May I be a ransom for thee, O thou enlightener of heaven and earth, thou fresh plant of the orchard of her ladyship Zahrah (Fatima)! They intend to shed the blood of these animals at the dust of thy sacred feet, to *avert misfortunes and calamities* and accidents." Husain orders the lambs to be numbered. They are found to be

* Col. Pelly's translation of *The Miracle Passion Play of Hasan and Husain*, p. 244.

seventy-two, just the number of his party. He forbids the sacrifice, saying that he and his retinue are the willing victims.

(5) Another idea in sacrifices is that of merit, rendering a service to God which will put Him under obligation. Every good work is regarded as *suab* or merit. Surah, xxii, 38, says of sacrifices: "Ye receive advantage from them." Zaid Ibn Arqam relates* that the companions said: "O prophet, what are the rewards for the sacrifices of camels and sheep that have wool?" He said: "There is a good reward also for every hair of their wool." A Khutbah quoted by Sell† says, "If you sacrifice a fat animal, it will serve you well and carry you across the *sirat*," or bridge to Paradise.

(6) Sacrifices are made to men as tokens of respect and honor. When the Shah makes public entrance to a city, each Kand-khuda, as well as the heads of the Sayids, Dervishes, etc., sacrifices a sheep before him. The original purpose in this custom may have been thanksgiving for his propitious arrival, but now the sole thought appears to be to honor the king. Similar honor is given to any dignitary only in a less measure. It is even customary for a shepherd by the wayside to bring one of his flock into the road before any passing foreigner, with knife in hand ready to slay the victim if protest is not made, and if *bakhshish* is forthcoming to remunerate him.

(7) The idea which seems to be excluded by Mohammed from the doctrine of sacrifices is that of expiation. It is agreed by all students of Islam that the Koran does not contain the doctrine of atonement; the shedding of blood is nowhere said to be for remission of sins. In Surah, xxii, 39, it is said, "Their flesh is not accepted of God, neither their blood, but your piety is accepted of him." The piety is explained by the Arabic commentator Al Baizawi to mean "the sincerity and intention of your heart."

It is true that a good deal is said in the Koran concerning expiation. The same terms are used as in the Hebrew,—*e. g.*, "Kafara" (to cover), "fidyah," a ransom,—and with the meaning of expiation for sin. For example, "O Lord, forgive us therefore our sins and expiate our evil deeds for us" (Surah, iii, 194). But they are never used with reference to the shedding of blood in sacrifices.‡ The expiatory act according to the Koran, is some work of charity or religious observance or penance. For a false oath, the "expiation shall be to feed ten poor persons with such mid-dling food as ye feed your own families with, or to clothe them,

* Hughes, *Dictionary*, p. 552.

† Compare Hughes, *Dictionary*, p. 113.

‡ *The Faith of Islam*, by Rev. Edward Sell.

or to set free a captive. But he who cannot find means shall fast three days" (Surah, v, 91). "For the killing of game on the pilgrimage, in expiation thereof he shall feed the poor, or as the equivalent of this he shall fast, that he may taste the ill consequence of his deed. God forgiveth what is past." In brief, according to Mussulman theology, the atonement for sins is made by the works of the law, the performance of worship, fasting, almsgiving and pilgrimage. For example, it is said that if any one repeats on a festival five selected Surahs of the Koran, God will pardon the sins of fifty years that are past and of fifty years to come. A tradition narrates that Mohammed said he hoped that the Fast of Ashura would cover the sins of the coming year. From another point of view, no atonement by rites is necessary. Repentance and faith obtain pardon. "If they repent and amend, then let them be. Verily God relenteth. He is merciful" (Surah, iv, 20). A tradition says,* "An incessant sinner has not sinned who has asked pardon, although he may have sinned seventy times a day, because asking pardon is the coverer of sin."

It is evident that Mohammed rejected the doctrine of sacrificial atonement from his system. Not only so, but in his representations of the Mosaic dispensation he eliminates the doctrine. In enumerating the duties under the covenant of the children of Israel (Surah, ii, 82), he omits all reference to the sin or trespass offerings. In the account of the red cow, so strangely perverted from the Scripture account (Num. xix; Surah, ii, 66-70), the idea of expiation for sin is not included. The atoning death of Christ is repudiated. His death is denied. "They slew him not and they crucified him not, but they had only his likeness. They did not really slay him, but God took him up to Himself" (Surah, iv, 157). Though another Surah (iii, 47, 48) says, "God said, O Jesus, I will cause thee to die and will take thee up to myself," leaving the matter somewhat in doubt, yet most commentators and received traditions maintain that Jesus did not die. Instead of Him one of His disciples or one of His enemies was crucified by mistake, God having transferred Christ's appearance to that person. This person is called Titian, or Judas, who allowed himself to be taken, or Simon of Cyrene.† The crucifixion of Jesus was a fiction to Mohammed, as to the Basilidians and Carpocratians. The cross was an abhorrence to him. It is said that he destroyed everything brought into his house with that figure upon it. According to the Mishkat, the prophet said: "I swear by heaven, it is near, when Jesus, the son of Mary, will descend

* *Dictionary of Islam*, p. 451.

† See Sales' *Notes on Koran*.

from heaven upon your people, a just king, and *he will break the cross and kill the swine.*"

The rejection by Mohammed of the doctrine of the atonement, while claiming to republish the previous revelations of Moses and Christ, especially in view of the fact that he must have known the Mosaic doctrine of expiatory sacrifice from the Jews at Medina, is strongly urged* as a signal evidence that Mohammed was a conscious impostor and deliberately omitted to testify to this cardinal doctrine, that salvation by atonement might not appear to have the divine sanction in any dispensation. Dr. Wherry gives several reasons why we may suppose Mohammed ignored this doctrine.† It contradicts Mohammed's idea of divine sovereignty. God is the compassionate, the merciful, and is all-sovereign in this attribute, so that He can forgive according to His good pleasure without the necessity of an atonement. On this point Prof. Henry Preserved Smith says:‡ "In the case of Mohammed there seems to be no consciousness that justice could conflict with mercy. There is no theory of atonement. Expiation is nowhere brought into relation to the wrath of God." Mohammed's later opposition to the Jews led him to eliminate Jewish doctrine and may have caused him to reject sacrifices for sin.

II. Notwithstanding the silence of the Koran and the apparent opposition of Mohammed to the doctrine of vicarious sacrifice, it is a remarkable fact that the idea has found a place in the system of Islam. An accepted tradition in the *Mishkat-ul-Masibih* gives an account by Ayeshah of Mohammed's conversation while sacrificing. She relates that he said:§ "Man has done nothing on the day of sacrifice more pleasing to God than the spilling of blood; for verily the animal sacrificed will come on the day of resurrection, with its horns, its hair, its hoofs, and will make the scales of his actions heavy, and verily its blood reacheth the acceptance of God before it falleth upon the ground."

But it is especially among the Shiahhs that the idea of atonement has gained a place and in reference to the death of their Imams. Often, when trying to set forth the story of the cross to the Shiahhs of Persia, they reply: "In like manner the blood of the Imam Husain avails for us as an offering to God." Sometimes, too, they bring out the idea that Christ's death was but one, whereas Husain and his retinue of the holy seed of the prophet all shed their blood for the salvation of their people. Extending the application still further, the sufferings and violent deaths of the

* Dr. Wherry's *Commentary on the Koran*, Vols. I, p. 319, II, 61, III, 165.

† Vol. II, p. 60.

‡ *The Bible and Islam*, pp 122-125.

§ *Dictionary of Islam*, p. 552.

Imams Ali, Hasan, etc., are made to have expiatory efficacy. The Mujtihids of the Sheikhi sect especially exalt the Imams to the highest point of dignity and attribute to their actions the greatest efficiency.

This doctrine has an historical origin which demands brief consideration. Ali became Khalifa in succession to Abu Bekr, Omar and Osman. Shiah claim that he had been appointed by Mohammed as his successor and should have been the first Khalifa, the rightful Imam, and have been succeeded by Hasan and Husain, his sons by Fatima, the daughter of the prophet. Ali was assassinated at Kufa by the sword of Mulzam, and Hasan was poisoned by his seventieth wife, at the instigation, as is alleged, of Muavia, the supplanting Khalifa at Damascus. Husain was led by the promises of the fickle people of Kufa to march from Medina to receive the Khalifate. He was left without assistance by the Kufans and with his company of seventy-two soldiers was surrounded by the army of Yezid, son of Muavia, under Umar and Shamr, and slain on the plain of Kerbela. Among those who perished was his brother Abbas, his sons Ali Akbar and Ali Asghar, and Kazim, the son of Hasan, while the sister and wife of Husain were led away captive to Damascus. The martyred seed of the prophet became the centre of a devotion and veneration which has increased and developed through the centuries. Their adherents formed the Shiah sect. Its most characteristic feature is the commemoration of the events of Kerbela in the month of Muharram—in the Passion Play, the Lamentations of the Mar-seyakhans, the self-tortures of the mourner-gangs and the bloody procession of Ashura, with its wild and frenzied devotees cutting themselves with swords and pouring out their blood even unto death.

The unsuccessful attempt of Husain to attain to the Khalifate has been transformed into a voluntary martyrdom, nay more into a sacrificial and vicarious offering of his life and that of his family for the sins of his followers, bringing into Mohammedanism the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. It does not seem certain that the Shiah by their older traditions claimed for the deaths of the Imams any expiatory efficacy. For example, in the *Hayat-ul-Quloob*,* written in 1676, it is said that Mohammed foretold the death of Husain and his family, and gave Umm Salmah some of the dust of Kerbela, which he said would become blood when the massacre occurred. He said, also, "A sect of my religion will visit your graves in reverence of me, and I will give them salvation on the day of judgment."

* *Life of Mohammed*, by Merrick, p. 181.

This merely predicts the death, but a tradition found in Sell* is to the effect that Mohammed said of Husain: "He will die for the sake of my people." Now popular tradition and invention have embellished the facts with a thousand additions. These can be well ascertained in the tragedies of the Passion Play, which are acted with impassioned fervor in the first ten days of Muharram. The plays are not to be regarded as historical nor even as representing approximately the events. They may, however, be relied upon as setting forth the doctrinal beliefs of the Shiahhs at the present day. Let us examine these Passion Plays, to ascertain their doctrine concerning the deaths of the Imams.

Tradition and imagination have developed the subject so as to cover the course of time from the eternal counsels of God to the final judgment. When† God, before the creation of heaven and earth, and 2000 years before Adam was formed, created Mohammed, Fatima, Ali, Hasan and Husain, he showed them a standard and asked, Who will bear it? The others declined. Husain took it up. God said, The conditions are that you should be beheaded and your family chained and thirsty and persecuted. Husain accepted the conditions. Then God said, "For this cause all mediation and atonement will be by you."

When Hasan and Husain were children they came to Mohammed, on Qurban Bayram, and said, "O grandfather, the Arab children have put on good clothes, we have none; therefore we are sorrowful." Then the prophet was sad because he could not buy them clothes. At that time Gabriel came down, and said, "O prophet, God sends you greeting. Why are you sad? Take these two suits of clothes, one for Hasan and one for Husain. I have brought them from heaven." Their color was white, and the children did not admire them. Then Gabriel brought a pan of water from Paradise, and said, "Whatever color you wish they will become." The prophet asked Hasan, "What color do you want?" He chose green, and Husain red. Gabriel, pouring out the water, wept. The prophet said, "Why do you weep?" Gabriel answered: "Because Hasan will die of poison and Husain will be red in his own blood at Kerbala."‡

Mohammed is declared to have consecrated Husain as a sacrifice from his childhood. Gabriel visited him and said:§ "O messenger of the gracious God, consider the sinful state of thy poor people and make Husain a propitiation for their sins, that the Lord of all beings may, in the Day of Judgment, have mercy on all of them for Husain's sake." Mohammed is willing, saying:

* *Faith of Islam*, p. 94.

† Tradition's source unknown.

‡ Tradition's source unknown.

§ *The Miracle Play*, by Col. Pelly, p. 23.

“ Alas, O Gabriel ! for the misery of my people. Though Husain is the light of my eyes, I will, in order to save my people from the wrath to come, make Husain a propitiation for their sins.” Gabriel : “ Well done ; for such generosity, since thou makest Husain a man of sorrow on behalf of thy people, no doubt God will forgive all of them in that day, for the Imam’s meritorious blood’s sake.” Later, Mohammed tells Husain of this divine purpose, saying : * “ O Husain, come hither, all the inhabitants of the two worlds, whether men or Jinns, are sunk in sin and have only one, Husain, to save them.” Husain : “ What is thy order, grandfather ? I am quite ready to obey it.” The Prophet : “ Dear child, I am going to tell you the story of Kerbala. Wilt thou go submissively, wilt thou suffer troubles or not ?” Husain : “ What do you mean ?” The Prophet : “ O Husain, thou must voluntarily give thy head to the dagger.” Husain : “ With all my heart. I will give my own head for the salvation of my people. Nay, I will even make the throat of my infant son Asghar a target to the arrow of God’s decree for them.” The Prophet : “ Thou must give up the two hands of Abbas, thy brother. Though it grieve thee much, thou must offer thy son, Ali Akbar, also.” Husain : “ For the sake of God, I will most readily do so.” Husain’s foreknowledge of the events is set forth. On his departure from Medina he narrates in detail the approaching calamities.† When the time draws near his willingness for the appointed work is emphasized. He says : “ Oh ! How blessed the morn when I shall joyfully behold myself surrounded on all sides by the army of Yezid in the plain of Kerbala ! For a long time I have been anxiously wishing for that day.” “ Husain’s throat longs to meet the cutting dagger of the inhabitants of Kufa. How glad am I to become a sacrifice for mankind !” “ I will stretch my throat before the dagger, seeing it is the will of the friend that I should obey his voice.”

The purpose of the sacrifice is continually set forth to be “ the salvation of our sinful followers.” Fatima says to Husain, “ He who wishes to save men from everlasting flames must undergo the troubles of Kerbala.” Husain says, “ It is not grievous that I and all my companions should be slain, since the thing is done for the salvation of the people.” “ The crown of intercession is fitted for our heads only.”

Husain sets himself forth as the substitute and expiation. He says : ‡ “ The helpless people of the prophet of God have no rock of salvation to fly to for a refuge except Husain. They have no advocate with God on the Day of Judgment except Husain. The

* *The Miracle Play*, by Col. Pelly, p. 88.

† P. 210.

‡ Pp. 210-211.

way of salvation is shut up against them on account of their manifold sins ; and, except Husain, none can make a proper atonement or propitiation for transgression. Who can save the people of God from the wrath to come, seeing the empire of faith has no other king but Husain?" "I am willing to be killed for the sake of God's people, that I may intercede for all in the great plain of last account." "The treasure of eternal happiness shall be at my disposal as a consequent reward."

As if this redemption was actually accomplished and ready to be applied, Hurr, a warrior sent by Yezid, who, like the dying thief, turned to the side of Husain and fought for him like a valiant champion, says as he rushes to death: "I have letter-patents sealed with Husain's seal that I am saved in both worlds."

To guard against the thought that Husain was overpowered by thirst or by his enemies, two incidents are related. A dervish appears with a cup of water, drawn by the piteous cries of Sukainah, Husain's little daughter. Husain says to him: * "Know, O young man, that we are never in need of the water of this life. If I will, I can make the moon or any other celestial orb fall down on the earth ; how much more can I get water for my children. Look at the hollow made in the ground with my spear ; water would gush out of it if I were to desire it. I die parched and offer myself a sacrifice for the sins of my people, that they should be saved from the wrath to come."

Besides this, Jafar, the king of the Jinns, with his troops, comes to Husain's assistance after the death of his followers, saying: "O king of men and Jinns, O Husain, peace be on thee! O judge of corporeal and spiritual beings, behold I have come out with troops of Jinns to lend thee help." Husain rejects the offer, saying: "Return thou, Jafar, to thy home." "What have I to do with the empire of the world or its tempting glories." "I have washed my hands of life, I have guided myself to do the will of God."

When Husain came before his enemies he said to them: † "Do not think that I am at a loss ; with a sweep of my hand I could turn 5000 of you into hell." "When he was sitting near his tent and the opposing force came up to him, he waved his hand and 500 of them were instantly killed."

In the death scene Husain, already wounded, cries out: "O God, have mercy in the Day of Judgment on my people for my sake." He prays for the presence of the prophet. Mohammed appears and says: "Sorrow not, dear grandchild, thou shalt be a

* *Passion Play*, Vol. II, p. 81, *seq.*

† Oral tradition.

mediator, too, in that day." Husain answers: "I would offer my soul not once or twice, but a thousand times for the salvation of thy people."* In the climax the shameless Shamr stands over the fallen Imam, and addresses him: "See how the dagger waves over thee. It is time to cut thy throat." Husain dies, uttering the following prayer: "O Lord, for the merit of me, the dear child of the prophet; O Lord, for the sad groanings of my miserable sister; O Lord, for the sake of young Abbas, rolling in his blood; I pray thee, in the Day of Judgment, forgive, O merciful Lord, the sins of my grandfather's people, and grant me, bountifully, the key of the treasure of intercession."

In the above quotations not only the sufferings and death of the Imam Husain, but those of his relatives are stated to be expiatory. This appears more fully in the acts devoted to their deaths. Of Ali Akbar, Husain says: "I sacrifice him for the sake of the beloved. Intercession for sinners is the great price of his blood. Yes, Ali Akbar is a ransom for many nations." "Oh, Ali Akbar, I know I am offering thee a sacrifice for the sins of mankind." Zainab, the sister of Husain, too, is a willing sufferer. "I, the sorrowful one, have also consented to be in bonds of affliction and trial and to walk barefooted and bareheaded through the streets of Damascus for the sake of the sinners of our people, since all our sufferings tend to the happiness of our sinful people." The whole family is thus regarded as offering itself a propitiatory sacrifice. Some Mujtihids even distribute the merits of their atonement to different classes of men, saying that Husain made atonement for grown men, Abbas for men thirty years of age, Ali Akbar for youths of eighteen, Ali Asghar for children, and Zainab and Kulsum for women.

The doctrine, fully developed with regard to these martyrs, is by a natural logic carried back and applied to the deaths of the first and second Imams and the pains of the prophet and Fatima. To these all are attributed vicarious expiation. Mohammed, on his deathbed at Medina, is represented as saying to Ali: "Thy martyrdom will be the means of salvation to my people, in raising thee to the high office of intercessor for them." Ali: "O Prophet, I am ready to be afflicted with all sorts of ills for the sake of thy holy people's salvation." The Prophet: "O Fatima, thou must offer Hasan a ransom for my people." So Ali, as he dies at Kufa from the sword-stroke, makes a last prayer: "O thou beneficent Creator, the sole, the almighty God, I adjure thee by that pearl-like tooth of thy chosen and glorious prophet which was knocked out with a stone in the battle of Ohod; and by the

* *Miracle Play*, Vol. II, p. 81 *seq.*

fracture which Fatima suffered in her side; and by the tearful eyes of his distressed family;" and "for this head of mine cloven asunder with the sword of tyranny, and for the sake of my body rolling in its own blood, forgive thou mercifully the sins of my Shiahs, and in the Day of Judgment pardon thou all them that love me." *

But in this work of expiation none has the merit of Husain. For a popular tradition says, "At the last judgment Moslems will stand in tiers. The first tier God will send to heaven as righteous, *i. e.*, their good works having overbalanced their evil works. For the second and third tiers Mohammed will mediate, and will attempt it for the fourth tier. But God will refuse, saying, They deserve hell. Then Husain will point to his standard and plead by the blood of Kerbala, and God will pardon the multitude.

III. The Imam Husain Ibn Ali is thus a rival of our Lord Jesus Christ. Millions of our fellow-men attribute to his death the effects that we attribute to our Lord's. They regard his death as more memorable and important than any fact of his life, or than any truth he taught. Year by year they commemorate it with a series of unique religious ceremonies. They constantly present to the missionaries his atonement as a foundation of hope in contrast with the Gospel. They thus challenge comparison between his death and that of Christ. While we might throw aside this claim as undeserving of attention, yet since millions in Persia and India cling to such a faith, it is interesting to make a comparison between the passion of the Imam and that of the Messiah. Let it not seem superfluous to show the inferiority of the Imam of Arabia to the Prophet of Nazareth, of the sacrifice at Kerbala to the crucifixion on Calvary. I shall follow the account as found in Ockley's *History of the Saracens*, Irving's *Successors of Mohammed* and Osborne's *Islam under the Arabs*. While we cannot be sure of the facts, yet we find the history contrasts greatly with the traditional embellishments of the Passion Play.

Jesus left Galilee, for Jerusalem "to suffer many things and be killed." His definite purpose was to give His life for His sheep. He went to seek a cross. Husain left Medina bearing letters of invitation from 140,000 Kufans to come and lead a revolt against Yezid, expecting to win for himself the Khalifate, the crown of the Moslem world. He was seeking aggrandizement through human instrumentalities. Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem, going as a lamb to the slaughter. Husain crossed the desert, expecting to meet large reinforcements and conquer. The Kufans, who a short time before were ready to welcome his entrance with

* *Miracle Play*, Vol. I, pp. 87, 151, 141.

enthusiastic hosannas and make him king, were now saying, "We have no Khalifa but Yezid." Jesus, betrayed by Judas, was met in the garden of Gethsemane by a band of soldiers and officers with swords and staves; Husain, with his armed company of thirty-two foot soldiers and forty horsemen, was surrounded on the banks of the Euphrates by 3000 horsemen. Jesus said to them, "If ye seek me, let these go their way." Husain gave his friends the privilege of departing, saying: "These troops seek no life but mine. Tarry not with me to your destruction, but leave me to my fate." Jesus' disciples all forsook him and fled; Husain's followers said: "God forbid that we should survive your fall. We have devoted our lives to you." Jesus healed the ear of Malchus, saying: "Put up again thy sword into its place, for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." "My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight." Husain permitted and encouraged all his followers to engage in murderous single combats and even bound on Ali Akbar the famous *zul-fakar*, the sword of Ali, with which Ali Akbar slew more than thirty men. Abbas fought with his sword in his mouth when his hands were cut off. Husain, "faint with thirst and wounded, fought with desperate courage and slew several of his antagonists." He preferred to live, and proposed that he be allowed to return to Mecca, be given a safe conduct to Yezid or allowed to go and fight against the idolaters. Umer wished to give opportunity to Husain to flee, but feared the vengeance of Obeidullah, as Pilate feared Caesar. During the crucifixion the dying thief turned to Jesus and said, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom," and Christ answered: "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." In the beginning of the attack Hurr, a captain, came over to the side of Husain, saying: "I desire to sacrifice myself for thee." Husain answered: "May God grant you a happy martyrdom; you will enter Paradise a free man." Jesus was anointed shortly before His death with precious ointment, and said: "She hath done it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall this also which this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her." Husain entered his tent, washed and anointed himself and perfumed himself with musk. One asked him the meaning of this action. He replied: "Alas! there is nothing between us and the black-eyed houris, but that these people came down upon us and kill us."

Jesus in His anguish cried out, "I thirst!" and was given vinegar to drink. Imagination has pictured Mohammed de-

scending from heaven to Husain with a cup of water or a Persian dervish arriving on the same errand, but the chronicler, with a more pathetic touch, shows us Husain trying to assuage Ali Akbar's thirst by inserting his tongue in his mouth; and when he attempted to reach the Euphrates, of which even the unclean beasts and the infidels freely drank, he was shot in the mouth with an arrow, and returned to the tent with the blood pouring from the wound. Jesus under His load of suffering cried out, "My God, my God, why hath thou forsaken me?" Husain said: "O God, dost thou withhold help from us?" When his infant Abdullah was killed in his arms, he said: "Lord, give me strength to bear these misfortunes." Jesus commended his sorrowing mother to the care of the beloved disciple. Husain remembered his old nurse and recommended her to Zeinab. He also said: "Sister, show to Sukainah, my daughter, always the tenderness of a mother. Be kind to my child after me." Jesus prayed for his murderers and crucifiers: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." When the enemies of Husain attempted to set fire to the tents and the women cried out in alarm, Husain said: "What! Would you burn my family? Cursed Shamr! The fire of Jehannam be thy portion!" To another he said: "May thy mother be childless." To still others: "Thy impudence exceeds all bounds; may thy mother sit in mourning for thee." "A thousand curses from God be on Obeidullah Ibn Ziyad, the unprincipled mean fellow." When Abdullah was smitten, Husain took a handful of the blood and threw it toward heaven, exclaiming: "O Lord, take vengeance on the wicked." During the fight he asked for a truce to pray at noonday. He imprecated the Kufans as follows: "Let not the dews of heaven distill upon them and withhold thou from them the blessings of the earth, for they first invited me and then deceived me."

Jesus gave up his life, saying: "It is finished. Into thy hands I commend my spirit." Husain, left alone by the death of his companions and exhausted by his wounds, fought on till, wounded on the hands and the neck, he was thrust through with a spear and fell, covered with thirty-three wounds and thirty-four bruises. The head was severed from the body and taken to Kufa and Damascus. The trunk was trampled under the horses' hoofs and crushed in the earth. The soldiers took his spear and the rest of the spoils and divided them among themselves, reminding us of how they parted Jesus' garments among them. The trunkless head of Husain was presented to Obeidullah, the governor, who smote it on the mouth with his staff, as the high priest

buffeted and smote Jesus with the palms of his hands. For three days the body of Husain remained exposed to the inclemency of the weather and the attacks of wild beasts and vultures, but preserved, as they believe, by miracle from being touched by them. Then the inhabitants of a neighboring village, ashamed that the body of a grandson of the prophet should be so exposed, buried it in the plain of Kerbala, where it remains in a shrine—a place of pilgrimage of millions of devoted followers. How striking the contrast in the case of Jesus! His body was taken and with honor and by loving hands was placed in a rock-hewn sepulchre. Three days passed and He burst the bars of the tomb and ascended to the right hand of power. In the one case there is the shrine of a dead Imam—crumbling dust—a symbol of defeat; in the other, the empty sepulchre of a risen Christ, the symbol and evidence of triumph.

These similarities and contrasts are founded on the traditional narratives of the Shiah, which are somewhat historical. Mingled with these are accounts of miraculous events that show evidence of imitation of the Gospel narratives. As at Christ's death the sun was darkened, and darkness was over all the land from the sixth to the ninth hour, the vail of the temple was rent, the earth quaked and the rocks were rent; so the Shiah declare that the sun was eclipsed so that the stars appeared at noonday, the earth was darkened three days, the sides of the heavens turned red and looked like clotted blood, the heavens rained blood, all the drinking vessels in the world were found filled with blood, and clotted blood was found under every stone that was turned up in Jerusalem. The place where the head of Husain lay was covered with emanations of light. As Judas and Pilate and Herod met with violent deaths, so those engaged in the murder of Husain met with misfortune, soon fell sick and most of them died mad.

We have drawn the parallel between the two narratives. We have studied the story of the death of the Shiah mediator in contrast to that of the Christ, the Saviour of the world. Let us make a *resumé* of the points. Husain sought earthly dominion; Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world." The one sought his own aggrandizement; the other to give His life a ransom for others. The one died overpowered in spite of his own and his followers' exertions; the other said: "I have power to give my life and to take it again; none of you taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself." The one died smiting to the dust his opponents, having covered the plain with their blood; the other having commanded, "Put up the sword into the sheath; they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." The one prayed God to curse his

enemies, the other for their forgiveness and salvation. The one died as a brave and courageous man, pious after his fashion; the other died with such a wonderful bearing that the centurion said, "Surely this was the Son of God." The body of the one remains in the dust; that of the other was resurrected and glorified and lives in immortal life.

But the parallel extends still further. While in most cases a birth, a coronation or a victory has been the origin of a memorial, in the case of Husain and Jesus, their deaths are the centres of religious celebrations. To the Christian the Lord's Supper is the most important ordinance, to the Shiah Mohammedan the celebrations of the month of Muharram surpass all others in the hold they have on their hearts and lives. Here we have an opportunity to contrast the religions and compare the ideals acting on the adherents of the beheaded Imam and the crucified Christ.

How is Husain's death commemorated? In the Persian Passion Play—the Takia—the whole scene of his sacrifice at Kerbala is represented by actors taking the part of each historic character. The incidents are brought vividly before the people, who are affected to tears of sorrow or cries of rage according to the changes in the scenes. Spectacles* in the streets keep the interest alive. Processions of men and women march in irregular mass through the streets and bazaars. Some bear national banners and religious emblems. At one place a band of boys chants the mournful tale of Husain's death. At another a squad of men, barefooted and naked down to the waist, follows a leader clashing cymbals. Some have chains or cat-o'-nine-tails of iron or leather tipped with steel, with which they lacerate their backs. Others use large clubs, while many pound themselves with their fists until their breasts and backs are black and blue with sores. At night they repair to the mosques. They anoint their heads, faces and beards with filthy black ointment and bare their feet and breasts. A Mollah takes the lead, and with singing of dirges and frantic intonations of the words "Shah Husain," and beating of their breasts, they continue a night-long lament. Their frenzy thus wrought up, they are prepared for the Ashura or tenth of the month. In the morning they are clothed in white, the crowns of their shaven heads are cut, the blood flows down in profusion; wild excitement takes hold of them; swords are placed in their hands; they start in procession through the street, flashing their swords in the air, ever and anon gashing their heads and raising the now wild and frenzied cry, "Shah Husain! Shah Husain!" There appears also a richly caparisoned riderless horse, eloquent

* For full descriptions see the writer's *Persian Life and Customs*.

of the absence of the fallen Husain, or perhaps a spotless white dove, perched upon a saddle, representing the plumed messenger which, dipping its wings in the blood of the slain, carried the sad news to the sacred cities. Next follows a mounted company of babes, strapped to the horses, their heads bleeding and their garments red from the cruel sword cuts. What a spectacle! A length of barbarous fanaticism which recalls the prophets of Baal—a celebration which yearly ends in the death of some participants in many of the cities of Persia. So do the devotees of Husain commemorate his death.

How solemn, simple and edifying, how much more rational and consistent with a divine institution, is the sacrament of the Lord's Supper! In it the plain emblems of our Saviour's broken body and shed blood call to remembrance Calvary and the crucifixion, drawing our souls to a new exercise of faith and love; and seal to us the benefits of Christ's sacrificial death. To the Christian the communion is a eucharist—a thanksgiving feast of divine love; the cross is a symbol of pardon, a foretaste of the Paradise in which he will sing the new song, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive glory and honor and power and blessing."

To the Shiah, notwithstanding their elaborated doctrine of propitiation through the sacrifice of the Imam, Kerbala remains an "anguish" and an "affliction."* No pean of victory closed their sad celebration, no glad resurrection anthems swell forth in notes of triumph. But mourning, wailing and lamentations, curses and bitterness, a frenzy of passionate grief are unrelieved by any consolation. The black garments worn during the month are fit symbols of their condition. They chant the dirge of disappointment. They cannot but regard Husain's death as a calamity, as a triumph of his enemies. They would rather he had succeeded in seizing the Khalifate and transmitting it in succession to his descendants. Their attempt to steal the livery of Jesus to clothe Husain in is vain. The suffering atoning Saviour of the world will convince them of his divine preëminence and draw them, as all men, unto Himself.

TABRIZ, PERSIA.

S. G. WILSON.

* Arabic words *Kerb* = anguish, and *bala* = affliction.