

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for the *Journal of Theological Studies* (old series) can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jts-os_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[1st page of article]

THE BELIEFS OF EARLY MOHAMMEDANS RESPECTING A FUTURE EXISTENCE.

THIS subject has attracted a considerable amount of attention in Europe, but though it has so often been discussed I venture to think that it is very little understood. If we open any ordinary manual of history produced in our part of the world, we shall probably find—no matter whether the author be a Christian or a sceptic—that the success of Mohammed is represented as largely due to the hope of Paradise and the fear of Hell wherewith he impressed the minds of his contemporaries. And most European writers are careful to add, not without a certain pleasure, that the Paradise promised by Mohammed differs essentially from the Paradise expected by Christians. In all this, as in most popular views of history, there is some admixture of truth, but the more closely we examine the facts the more clearly do we perceive that the question is by no means so simple as is commonly supposed. In reality, Mohammed's teaching on the subject of the future life, far from supplying an easy explanation of his success, is proved to have been a great stumbling-block to his contemporaries and was never fully accepted by his followers in subsequent ages.

Europeans who have written on this question usually fall into the mistake of assuming that the doctrine of a future state of retribution can have presented no more difficulty to the Arabs in the time of Mohammed than it presents to most Christians of to-day. In Europe these beliefs have so long formed an essential part, perhaps the most important part, of popular religion that we find it hard to imagine a religion without them. Yet it is quite clear that the religion of the heathen Arabs, whatever else it may have included, did not include any belief in a Paradise or a Hell. The ancient Arabian poets are never weary of repeating that after death man has nothing more to hope or to fear. So

general was this sentiment among the Arabs that even the Christians of Arabia seem to have been more or less affected by it. The most celebrated of the Christian poets, 'Adī ibn Zaid, who lived at al-Hīra on the Euphrates shortly before the public appearance of Mohammed, speaks of death in language which does not differ at all from that of his heathen fellow countrymen. Alluding to the kings and heroes of former times, he says—

'After all their prosperity, their royal estate and their dominion, they vanished into the graves yonder :

'Then they became like dry leaves, which are swept away by the east wind and by the west.'

Together with utterances such as these, which doubtless express the prevailing belief of the time, we find many traces of a more primitive conception, namely the idea that in the grave itself, or in the neighbourhood of the grave, the soul of the dead man still exists, at least for a while, retaining a kind of half-consciousness. The most usual terms applied to the souls of the dead are *ṣadā*, which properly means 'echo', and *hāma*, which also means 'head' or 'skull'. Probably 'soul' is the original meaning of the latter word, and the head is called *hāma* as being the abode of the soul, according to the idea expressed in a well-known verse of the poet ash-Shanfarā, 'in my head is the greater part of myself'¹. Hence the *hāma* is represented in poetry as a kind of bird, resembling an owl (*būma*), which flies out of the head of the dead man and hovers about near the grave. It is curious that almost the only feeling ascribed to the *hāma* is the feeling of 'thirst'. Thus in poems composed on the death of a relative we often find such phrases as, 'may he be refreshed with drink!' In later times this was little more than a poetical figure, the 'drink' referring to the rain which falls upon the grave and keeps it green, but there are many indications that the phrase was originally used in a literal sense². It is not to be supposed, however, that these crude beliefs amounted to any thing like a doctrine of a future life; the *hāma* of the ancient Arabs was

¹ So also heads are called *hillat-al-hām* or *maskin-al-hām*, 'the abode of souls' (Yakūt's *Mu'jam*, ed. Wüstenfeld, iv 422 line 10 = *Aghāni* xv 77 line 23).

² The evidence is given by Wellhausen in his *Reste arabischen Heidenthums* 2nd ed. (1897) p. 182 seq.

a mere wraith, a shadowy representation of the feelings which had belonged to the man when alive; it was not in any sense a moral personality. The clearest proof of this is that the Bedouins of the present day have similar beliefs as to the shades of the departed, and even offer sacrifices to them; yet, as we learn from no less an authority than Mr Charles Doughty, 'with difficulty they imagine any future life'—if they pray and fast, they do so in hope of some temporal blessing¹. In this respect the modern Bedouin is the true representative of the ancient Semites.

If we take these facts into consideration, we shall be able to realize, in some measure, how utterly the teaching of Mohammed, on the subject of the future life, was opposed to the habits of thought which prevailed among his fellow countrymen. In speaking of the future, Mohammed emphasized, above all things, the idea of the resurrection of the body, and the idea of retribution. How these ideas shaped themselves in the Prophet's mind and to what influences they were due, is a matter about which we have no trustworthy information. No one can suppose that he arrived at them independently, but how much he borrowed from Judaism, how much from Christianity, and how much from other sources, we can scarcely hope to determine.

Let us first consider the idea of the resurrection. This doctrine appears distinctly in some chapters of the Koran which admittedly belong to the earliest period of Mohammed's prophetic career. Now at that time, near the beginning of the seventh century of our era, the idea of the resurrection was familiar, not only to Christians, but also to Jews and Zoroastrians, and accordingly it cannot be denied that Mohammed may possibly have derived the doctrine in question from any one of these three religions. But there are reasons which seem, on the whole, to indicate that the prophet's doctrine of the resurrection was mainly based upon Christian beliefs. In the first place, it is to be observed that the ordinary word for the resurrection (*kiyāma*), which occurs no less than seventy times in the Koran, is evidently of Christian origin, since it is identical with the Syriac *ḵēyāmtā*, the usual word for the resurrection in the writings of the Syrian Christians. The

¹ C. M. Doughty *Arabia Deserta* vol. i p. 240.

Jews, on the other hand, do not seem to have used this term, but employed some other phrase, especially *t̄h̄iyyath hamm̄ethim* 'the quickening of the dead', or simply *t̄h̄iyyāh* 'quickenings'. It is also to be considered that the doctrine of the resurrection, for obvious reasons, occupied a much more important place in the theology of the Christians than it did in that of the Jews. As Mohammed's acquaintance both with Christianity and Judaism was extremely superficial, it is in itself more likely that he borrowed his notions of the resurrection from the religion in which this subject was most prominent. Of Zoroastrianism Mohammed knew even less than he knew of Judaism and Christianity. In the H̄ijāz, the part of Arabia where Mohammed spent his life, there were many Jews and some Christians, but, so far as we are aware, no Zoroastrians. Whatever Mohammed heard of Zoroastrianism, at least during the earlier part of his career, he must have heard indirectly. We know, for example, that one of Mohammed's fellow townsmen, an-Naḍr ibn al-H̄ārith, who had visited the Persian provinces on the Euphrates, used to entertain the people of Mecca with tales about the ancient Persian heroes. But it is scarcely probable that an-Naḍr, or other travellers of the same kind, had any clear ideas about Zoroastrian theology. And when we come to examine the passages in the Koran which relate to the resurrection, it is impossible to discover in them any trace of the very peculiar ideas with which the resurrection is associated in Zoroastrian writings. According to the Zoroastrian theologians, the resurrection is not to be brought about by the direct action of God; it is to be 'produced', as they say, by certain holy men, some of whom lived in the remote past, while others are to appear in the future. The virtuous acts performed by these men gradually effect an improvement in the religious and physical condition of the world, so that finally the resurrection of the dead will become 'possible'. Thus we read, in the Zoroastrian treatise known as the *Mainyō-i-Khard*, that unless Kai-Khusrau had destroyed the idol-temples the power of evil would have increased to such an extent that 'it would not have been possible to produce the resurrection of the dead and the final body'. Of these strange notions the Koran contains nothing. Mohammed, like the Christian theologians, always represents the resurrection as due to the direct and sudden intervention of God,

and he never holds out any hope of a gradual improvement in the state of the world, such as that which the optimistic disciples of Zoroaster so confidently expected. But if we are justified in concluding that Mohammed's doctrine of the resurrection was mainly derived from Christianity, it does not, of course, follow that he derived it from the orthodox Christianity of the period, or from any official source whatsoever. His Christian informants were, so far as we can judge, wandering ascetics who belonged to no church in particular, or else belonged to small sects of whom we know next to nothing. Hence it comes about that in one very important point the resurrection described in the Koran differs from the resurrection in which the great majority of Christians have always believed. According to the New Testament and the teaching of the various Christian churches, the future resurrection of the dead is the consequence of the past Resurrection of Christ, 'the first-fruits of them that slept', in other words, the resurrection to eternal life is represented as a process which has already begun. According to the Koran, on the other hand, Christ never rose from the dead, for the simple reason that He never died; when the Jews sought to slay Him, God removed Him from the earth, and a phantom was crucified in His stead (Koran iii 48, iv 156). It is true that in one passage of the Koran (xix 34) Christ is represented as speaking of His Death and Resurrection, but this seems to mean only that He will die and come to life again at the end of the world. Unlike the New Testament, which teaches that 'we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,' the Koran repeatedly declares that 'every soul is to taste death' (ix 182; xxi 36; xxix 57). That every one, whether he be righteous or wicked, is to be raised to life, appears from many passages, and it is clearly implied that the resurrection of all classes will be simultaneous. A distinction between a first and a second resurrection, such as we find in the New Testament Apocalypse, is an idea foreign to Islam.

We now pass on to Mohammed's doctrine of retribution. In the Koran, as in most Christian systems of theology, the resurrection is inseparably connected with the judgement; 'the day of the resurrection' 'and the day of judgement' are used by Mohammed as terms virtually synonymous. The phrase 'the

day of judgement' (*yaum-ad-dīn*) was evidently borrowed either from the Jews or from the Christians, for *dīn* 'judgement' is not an Arabic but an Aramaic word¹. Another name for the day of judgement is *as-Sā'a* 'the hour', which at once recalls to us the phrase in the New Testament 'that day and hour'. But the use of 'the hour' absolutely, in this technical sense, seems to be peculiar to Islam; the frequency with which it occurs in the Koran is especially remarkable. Of the other terms applied to the day of judgement and of the manner in which it is described in the Koran, there is no need to speak here in detail, since the Koran is one of the few Arabic books which are easily accessible to European readers. My object is rather to investigate the relation in which Mohammed's doctrine of retribution stands to previous and to subsequent beliefs.

The first thing to be noticed is that the elaborate descriptions of the judgement, of Paradise and of Hell, which we find in the Koran, are almost entirely confined to the older portions of the book, to those chapters which Mohammed produced at Mecca, while his disciples were as yet few in number and generally regarded with contempt. To the great mass of his fellow townsmen, the prophet's teaching, and in particular his doctrine of the future judgement, appeared not only incredible but ludicrous. Over and over again we find him complaining of the derision with which his announcements on this subject were received. 'When we are dead', said the Meccans, 'and when we have become dust and bones, shall we then be called to judgement?' (Koran xxxvii 51). If Mohammed's object was to gain disciples, it is strange that he should have put forward so frequently and so emphatically ideas which brought upon him nothing but ridicule. But it is clear that the very fact of his isolation and the apparent impossibility of bringing about the triumph of his cause by worldly means made the idea of a sudden divine interposition all the more attractive to him. How near he supposed the day of judgement to be we cannot say, for when questioned on this

¹ It happens that in Persian there is a word *dīn* meaning 'religion', which has no connexion with the Aramaic *dīn*; as the Persian *dīn* was also borrowed by the Arabs at an early period, Mohammedan theologians naturally confused the two expressions, and sometimes explain *yaum-ad-dīn* as meaning 'the day of religion'. This is merely one of the numerous cases in which ignorance of Hebrew and Aramaic has affected Mohammedan exegesis.

subject by his opponents he invariably disclaimed all definite knowledge, but it would seem that during the earlier part of his prophetic career he had no notion of founding a religion, still less of founding a political organization ; he was, as he repeatedly said, merely a warner, sent to announce the great catastrophe which might take place at any moment and put an end to all earthly institutions. In this respect, it cannot be denied, the convictions of Mohammed bore a great resemblance to those of the early Christians. How then are we to account for the profound difference between the Koran and early Christian literature, as regards the manner in which the future retribution is described ? The minute and, to our minds, grotesque accounts of Paradise and Hell, which abound in the older parts of the Koran, are commonly explained by Europeans as due to the idiosyncrasies of the prophet's mind, or else to the coarseness of the Arabian national character. This theory seems to me inadequate, since it ignores the fact that the later chapters of the Koran offer, in this respect, a marked contrast to the older ones ; after Mohammed established himself at Medina, the allusions to this subject in the Koran become much rarer and seldom differ from those which are found in popular Christian writings. The real explanation seems to be that at first the idea of a future retribution was absolutely new, both to Mohammed himself and to the public which he addressed. Paradise and Hell had no traditional associations, and the Arabic language furnished no religious terminology for the expression of such ideas ; if they were to be made comprehensible at all, it could only be done by means of precise descriptions, of imagery borrowed from earthly affairs. At Medina, on the contrary, where there was a large and powerful Jewish colony, the notion of a future state of rewards and punishments was evidently not unfamiliar, and accordingly the prophet could content himself with general references to the subject.

As to how far the descriptions of the judgement, of Paradise and of Hell, are intended to be taken literally, there has been much controversy among Mohammedans, as we shall presently see. But nowhere in the Koran itself is there anything to suggest that the language used on these subjects is allegorical. Many of the details are common to the Koran and the New Testament ; all

these resemblances must be due to oral information, for Mohammed never cites any Christian writing *verbatim*. Many other details are borrowed from the heathen Arabian poets, and this is all the more remarkable, since Mohammed professed a great contempt for poets and poetry. But the prophet was not possessed of a creative imagination, and, as he had no literary models except the poets of his own people, he could not fail to be influenced by them, however much he might disapprove of their general spirit. It has lately been remarked by a well-known Orientalist, Dr. Georg Jacob¹, that the descriptions of Paradise in the Koran bear a startling resemblance to the descriptions of drinking-parties, which occur repeatedly in the heathen poets. The reason is not far to seek. It must be remembered that in Mohammed's country the conditions of life were extremely simple; art and luxury of any kind were things of which the Arabs caught only occasional glimpses, when the foreign wine-merchant—the wine-merchant is always a foreigner in old Arabian poetry—came across the desert with his wares, and pitched his gaily decorated tents in some sheltered spot, on the bank of a stream or under the shade of a grove of palm-trees. Thither all the neighbouring tribes would repair, to taste the foreign drink and listen to the foreign musicians. That such scenes furnished much of the imagery employed to describe the joys of Paradise can hardly be doubted when we compare the following passage of the Koran with some verses which I will quote from a heathen poet.

In the Koran (xxxvii 40 seq.) we read:—

‘They [i. e. the righteous] shall enjoy a stated provision,
 Fruits shall they have, and they shall dwell in honour
 Among the gardens of delight,
 Upon couches, face to face,
 A cup shall be passed round to them from a fountain,
 Clear, delicious to them that drink,
 It shall not overwhelm them, nor shall they be robbed of their
 strength,
 And with them shall be consorts with bashful glances, large of
 eyes,
 Fair as eggs hidden in a nest.’

¹ *Altarabisches Beduinenleben* 2nd ed. 1897 p. 107.

A little before the time of Mohammed, the poet al-Aswad ibn Ya'fur composed an ode, in which he says ¹ :—

'There was a time when I would betake me in the evening to the wine-merchants, with my hair well combed, lavish of my substance, before my neck had been stiffened by age :

'And there I delighted myself—for youth is keen to enjoy—with choicest wine mingled with water that fell from the morning clouds,

'Wine furnished by one adorned with ear-rings, sweet-voiced, and wearing a girdle, wine which he brought for silver coins :

'It is carried round by an attendant having a pearl on each ear, clad in a tunic, the tips of his fingers stained with red dye :

'And the fair women walk past, resembling full moons or graven images, while gentle maidens bear the goblets :

'And the hearts are smitten by the fair ones, who are even as the eggs of the ostrich ² lying between a belt of sand and a stony ridge.'

Another point of interest, in this connexion, is that the word *hūr* ³, which occurs several times in the Koran as an epithet of the female inhabitants of Paradise, is one of the ordinary epithets of women in the old poets. Many other instances might be cited to show how largely Mohammed's conception of the future life was affected by the poetry of the heathen Arabs. But it must be remembered that these resemblances are confined to matters of detail ; the idea of the future life itself, as a state of retribution, was essentially non-Arabian, and hence it must always be regarded as one of the most astonishing facts in religious history that so large a proportion of the Arabs should have been led, in the course of a few years, to adopt a belief which at first appeared to them the height of absurdity.

When we consider the conditions under which the Prophet lived, his total ignorance of philosophy and of systematic theological speculation, we cannot wonder that his teaching on the subject of the future existence remained to the last somewhat vague and incoherent. There are two principal questions to which the Koran gives no definite answer, namely the question of the state of the departed between the moment of death and the Resurrection, and the question whether the sentence pro-

¹ *Al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* ed. Thorbecke, No. 37, verse 20 seq.

² Women are compared to eggs on account of the whiteness of their skin.

³ Hence the European *hourri*, which is used as a singular, although the Arabic form is a plural.

nounced on the day of Judgement is in all cases to be final. With regard to the former question, Mohammed seems to have held that the state of the departed, until the Resurrection, was something resembling unconsciousness, for in the Koran it is placed on a level with sleep (xxxix 43). 'God receives to Himself the souls when they die, and those which have not died (He receives) in their sleep; so He retains those on whom He has pronounced sentence of death, and sends forth the others for an appointed time.' That this passage leaves many points unsettled is obvious. A similar uncertainty exists as to the much more important question of the finality of the Judgement. It is true that the Koran often says of those who enter Paradise or Hell, as the case may be, 'They shall abide therein' (*hum fiḥā khālidūn*). But though this phrase suggests the idea of eternal blessedness or misery, it can scarcely be said to affirm it in a definite form¹. Moreover, it requires very little ingenuity to prove that besides those who 'abide' in Hell there may be some who remain there only for a short time, in other words, that repentance and pardon are possible after the Judgement. That such interpretations soon became popular even among the most orthodox Mohammedans we shall presently see.

In passing from the Koran itself to other sources of information respecting the doctrines of the Prophet, we pass into a region where there is almost boundless scope for conjecture. It is natural to suppose that of the many thousands of sayings ascribed to the Prophet by tradition some at least must be genuine. But unfortunately nothing is more difficult than to determine which are genuine, for in the early days of Islam the manufacture of false traditions was practised on an enormous scale. This has been conclusively proved by recent investigations, in particular by those of Professor Goldziher, but it is not in itself a new discovery. Some of the most learned of the Mohammedan writers on the Sacred Tradition perpetually complain of the mass of spurious traditions which were current in their time, and one of these critics, a certain Yaḥyā ibn Sa'īd, who lived in the second century after the Prophet, goes so far as

¹ The verb *khalada* and its derivatives do not convey the notion of eternity in an absolute sense, as may be seen, for instance, in the case of the passive participles *mukhallad* and *mukhlad*, 'one who still retains the vigour of youth'.

to say: 'There is nothing in which we have found respectable persons to be more mendacious than in the matter of the Sacred Tradition'¹. Thus if we wish to ascertain what the Prophet taught on any subject, such as that which we are now considering, the Sacred Tradition must be regarded as a very unsafe guide, especially when its testimony diverges in essential points from that of the Koran. But though it is seldom possible to use the books of tradition with confidence, in order to settle what was the teaching of Mohammed, there can be no doubt that these traditions are of inestimable value as records of what was believed and taught in the various sections of the Mohammedan world during the first two centuries after the Prophet. It is for this purpose that I shall now appeal to them, nor shall I attempt to decide the difficult question as to the precise origin of each tradition.

In comparing the Koran with tradition we at once perceive that a whole series of questions, about which the Koran says nothing, or next to nothing, are treated in the books of tradition with remarkable fullness. This applies especially to the subject which we are now investigating. It is astonishing to see how much more was known about the mysteries of the future life by Mohammedan theologians of the Middle Ages than is to be found in the Koran, and nearly all this mass of additional information is traced back to the Prophet, on the authority of such august persons as 'Ā'isha, Ibn 'Abbās or Abū Huraira.

Many of these accretions are of no interest to us, since they consist only in absurd attempts to embellish the statements of the Koran by supplying names, measurements, or other details; as, for instance, when we are told precisely how long the Day of Judgement will last, how tall the various classes of mankind will be when they are raised from the dead, and how much they will perspire while sentence is being passed upon them. But these puerilities are not in any way specially characteristic of Islam, as it would be easy to find innumerable parallels for them in Jewish and Christian writings; they merely illustrate the general tendency of popular theology to conceal by means of statistics its essential poverty of thought and imagination. I will therefore confine myself to matters of more importance.

¹ Muslim *Ṣaḥīḥ* (ed. of A. H. 1290) i p. 8.

There were two principal influences which gradually modified the beliefs of the early Mohammedans respecting a future life—the influence of primitive superstition and the influence of rationalism. Both of these have left numerous traces in the Sacred Tradition.

I have already remarked that the Koran contains very little information as to the state of the departed between the moment of death and the Resurrection, and accordingly on this question many ideas wholly foreign to the teaching of the Prophet easily found their way into Mohammedan society, and soon came to be regarded as essential elements of orthodoxy. The belief that the soul of the departed dwells in or near the grave and is partly conscious of what takes place in the neighbourhood, was, as we have seen, not unknown to the heathen Arabs. In Syria and other countries which were conquered by the early Mohammedans such ideas were still more prevalent, as is proved by the literature of the Syrian Christians. No one, for example, who studies the descriptions of the cult practised at the tombs of Saints, can doubt that the Saint was supposed to be actually present on the spot. Or again, when we read such books as the *Carmina Nisibena* of Ephraim Syrus, it is impossible not to be struck by the manner in which the other world is constantly identified with the material sepulchre. We cannot therefore wonder that a few generations after the Prophet, when vast numbers of foreign converts had been admitted into the Mohammedan community, the primitive conception of the future state, as a sojourn of the soul in the grave, should have become more and more prominent in Mohammedan theology. The conception was essentially a popular one, not the product of theological speculation, but, when once it had established itself, the theologians were compelled to reconcile it, as best they could, with the doctrine of the Koran. The general term applied to this department of theology is *aḥwāl-al-kubūr* 'the states of the graves', which corresponds to the Christian phrase 'the doctrine of the intermediate state'. The simplest form which the doctrine assumed was merely that the dead are conscious of what is occurring in the place where their corpses happen to be. Thus it was related that the Prophet, after the battle of Badr, turned to some of his slain enemies and said, 'You have found that what your Lord promised was true'.

Handwritten notes in the right margin: "this point to the... of the... pos..."

Whereupon some of the bystanders exclaimed, 'Those whom you address are dead'. To which the Prophet answered, 'They can hear as well as you, but they cannot reply'¹.

A further development of this doctrine is seen in what the theologians call '*adhāb-al-ḡabr* or *fitnat-al-kabr* 'the suffering which takes place in the grave', which may be illustrated by the following words ascribed to the Prophet: 'When a man has been laid in his grave and his friends take their departure, he hears the sound of their footsteps; then two angels come to him and cause him to sit up, saying to him, "What belief did you profess concerning this man (i. e. Mohammed)?" If the dead is a true believer, he answers, "I bear witness that he is the Servant and the Messenger of God". Then the two angels say, "Behold the place which you were to occupy in Hell, instead of which God has assigned to you a place in Paradise". But if the dead is a hypocrite or an unbeliever, on being asked, "What belief did you profess concerning this man?" he answers, "I know not, I used to profess what other people professed". Thereupon he is beaten with bars of iron, and utters a shriek which all beings in the neighbourhood can hear, except men and *jinn*'². If this passage stood by itself we might imagine it to imply that the soul of the true believer at least will not remain in the grave but will be transferred to Paradise, as soon as the question put by the two angels has been satisfactorily answered. This, however, does not seem to have been the general opinion of those theologians who held the doctrine of the examination in the grave, for according to another tradition the Prophet said—'Each one of you, after death, will be made to see his abode³ every morning and evening, whether he be destined to Paradise or to Hell, and he will be told, "This is thine abode", (and so thou shalt continue) until God shall raise thee up on the day of the Resurrection'⁴. Here it is evidently assumed that the souls both of the righteous and the wicked remain in the grave till the Resurrection. In later times this view was abandoned, at least as regards the righteous, by some theologians who maintained

¹ Bukhārī *Ṣaḥīḥ* (vocalized ed. of A. H. 1296) ii p. 93 (= i p. 345 in Krehl's ed.), Muslim ii p. 359.

² Bukhārī *ibid.* (= i p. 346 in Krehl's ed.).

³ Literally, 'his abode (i. e. his future abode) will be presented to him'.

⁴ Bukhārī ii p. 94 (= i p. 347 in Krehl's ed.).

that the souls of true believers would be deposited in the crops (*ḥawāṣīl*) of certain birds which were supposed to dwell in the shadow of the throne of God¹. According to another view, the birds in question perch on the trees in Paradise². But it was commonly held that neither Paradise nor Hell could be entered before the Resurrection, and hence a certain Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm argued that Paradise and Hell were not yet created, 'for', as he remarked, 'there is at present no use for them'³. It is true that this Abū Bakr was considered heretical, but his argument 'there is at present no use for them' could not have been brought forward if it had been generally thought that Paradise and Hell were inhabited by disembodied spirits. The theory that Paradise and Hell were not yet in existence seems to have been especially common among the Mu'tazila, i. e. the rationalistic theologians of early Mohammedan times.

It would be tedious to enumerate all the opinions which were current about the experiences of the dead in their graves, but one tradition on this subject deserves special notice, because it furnishes an instructive example of an ancient heathen superstition grafted upon Islam. The Prophet, we are told, passed one day by two graves and perceived—it is not said by what means—that the persons buried there were suffering for their sins. So he took a fresh palm-branch, broke it in two, and stuck a piece into each grave. When his companions asked, 'O Messenger of God, why hast thou done this?' he answered, '*Perhaps their sufferings may be relieved, so long as these sticks remain moist*'⁴. We see here the close connexion between the doctrine of the punishment of sinners in the grave and the heathen idea of the *hāma*, or thirsty ghost.

It is hardly necessary to point out that in proportion as the belief in the consciousness of disembodied spirits is developed the doctrine of the Resurrection naturally tends to fall into the background. That this was the case among Mohammedans may be seen from a saying ascribed to the Prophet by one of the

¹ Ghazālī *Iḥyā* iv p. 428, line 26.

² Ghazālī *Ad-Durrā* (ed. Gautier) p. 33 of the Arabic text. From this there was only a step to the belief that the soul itself became a bird, as the above passage shews.

³ Shahrastānī (ed. Cureton) i p. 51.

⁴ Bukhārī ii p. 90 (= i p. 342 in Krehl's ed.).

most revered of the later theological authorities, al-Ghazālī—'Death is resurrection, and when a man dies his resurrection has already taken place'¹.

The tendency indicated in this last tradition appears still more clearly in the speculations of the rationalistic theologians. Even in very early times some Mohammedans felt a repugnance to interpreting the promises and threats of the Koran in a literal sense. Hence in one tradition Mohammed is represented as saying, in the very words of St Paul, 'God has declared, I have made ready for my righteous servants what eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man'². A similar attempt to spiritualize the idea of Paradise appears in another saying, also ascribed to the Prophet. 'God will say to the inmates of Paradise, "Are ye content?" and they will answer, "How should we not be content, O Lord, seeing that Thou hast given to us what Thou hast given to none other of Thy creatures?" Then He will say, "I will give you something better than this". And they will answer, "O Lord, what can be better than this?" He will say, "I will cause my favour to rest upon you, and I will never be wroth with you again"³'.

Sentiments such as these could cause the orthodox theologians no alarm. But some of the rationalists went much further and naturally aroused violent opposition. One of the most eminent rationalists, 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, maintained that those who were condemned to Hell would not suffer eternally, but would be transformed into the nature of fire⁴. A still bolder speculator, Jahm ibn Ṣafwān, who was put to death as a heretic rather more than a century after the Prophet, taught that both Paradise and Hell would cease to exist after a while, and that all kinds of activity (*ḥarakāt*) would come to an end, giving as his reason that every kind of activity must have an end, just as it must have a beginning. The phrase of the Koran 'They shall abide therein', Jahm explained as a hyperbole⁵.

One important point, about which the later representatives of orthodoxy abandoned the original orthodox position, is the

¹ *Iḥyā* iv p. 427, line 10—*al-mautu 'l-ḥiyāmatu faman māta faḥad ḥāmat ḥiyāmatuhu*.

² Muslim ii p. 348.

⁴ Shahrastāni i p. 52.

³ *Ibid.* ii p. 349.

⁵ *Ibid.* i p. 61.

relation between works and the future recompense. In the Koran it is repeatedly stated that Paradise is the reward of good works. When the righteous enter Paradise, it will be said to them, 'Lo! this is Paradise, ye have been put in possession of it by reason of that which ye have done'¹. But, a few generations later, the controversies between the orthodox and the rationalists naturally led the former party to emphasize the importance of faith, as contrasted both with works and with reason. The more difficulty there was in defending a dogma by argument, the more meritorious it seemed to accept that dogma blindly and unreservedly. Hence it came to be maintained that works have no part in procuring entrance to Paradise, and this doctrine was, of course, put into the mouth of the Prophet himself, who had taught the precise opposite. Thus, according to a tradition, Abū Huraira related—'I heard the Messenger of God say, "No one shall enter Paradise in virtue of his works", at which they exclaimed, "Not even thou, O Messenger of God?" "Not even I", said the Prophet, "save by a special exercise of divine favour and mercy".'² The same idea, with certain modifications, appears in another tradition, of which the following is an abstract. The Prophet first describes how the Jews and the Christians are to be cast into Hell, and then goes on to explain what will be the fate of those who worship the True God, be they righteous or wicked. According to the well-known Mohammedan belief, a bridge is to be erected, which passes through the midst of Hell into Paradise. Some persons will succeed in crossing the bridge, while others are detained midway. Those who have escaped intercede with God on behalf of their less fortunate brethren—'our brethren who used to pray with us, to fast with us, and to labour with us'. Then God will say to them, 'Depart, and if ye find any one in whose heart is faith of the weight of a gold coin, fetch him out'. The righteous thereupon return into Hell, under special divine protection, and fetch out a number of sinners. The process is repeated several times, and on each occasion the quantity of faith demanded is reduced, until it amounts only to the weight of a grain of dust. Finally God stretches forth His hand, and draws out a number of persons

¹ Koran vii 41—cf. xvi 34, xliii 72.

² Bukhārī vii p. 10 (not in Krehl's ed.).

whose faith falls short even of this last standard. When they have been bathed in a river called the Water of Life, they are admitted to Paradise, and the inmates of Paradise exclaim, 'These are they whom the Merciful has set free and has brought into Paradise apart from any work that they have performed or any merit that they have acquired'¹.

A. A. BEVAN.

¹ Bukhārī viii p. 170.