

THE TRADITION OF THE MEHDI.

Oddly enough Mohammedans are the most stubborn of adventists, looking forward with full assurance of faith to the second coming of Christ. Closely connected with this article of Moslem belief is the doctrine of the Mehdi, who is to prepare the way for the coming of Christ and is to assist him in conquering an evil world. The universal acceptance of this doctrine by all Moslems is the source of the attention now paid in the Moslem world to the claims of any adventurer who calls himself a Mehdi.

Since the fame of the rebel chief of the Soudan has extended to the ends of the earth, it may not be amiss to group together the principal traditions accepted among Moslems as to those last days of the earth, of whose approach the coming of the Mehdi is to be a sign.

The Koran forms but a small part of the basis of the Moslem faith. It is explained and extended by a vast array of reputed sayings of the Prophets. These traditional sayings are authenticated by a long chain of evidence, and have among most Moslems equal force with the Koran itself. It is in these traditions that one must look for the full details of the prophecies by which Moslems are taught to forecast the approach of the end of all things. It is true that the traditions are often conflicting and abound in wonders. A Moslem divine once said to me frankly: "I am ashamed to speak of these things; for when men set about making a religion they always forget that their work will be criticised." But the traditions are accepted by the masses in Turkey; and he who should openly reject them would be accounted as worse than a blasphemer. The traditions are the main source of the Moslem religion as expounded in Turkey.

Mohammed is reputed to have said that the world was already in its last period when he entered upon his ministry. "Comparing your

times with the times of past revelations," he said, "your epoch is the time between mid-afternoon and sunset." The Jews had the morning, the Christians the noon, and to the Moslems was given the perilous period of the decline of light. The duration of the Moslem era is fixed by tradition at more than one thousand and less than fifteen hundred years.

These signs of the end are to be of gradual development. There will be an increase of ignorance among the people. The exposition of the holy law will decline and cease. Doctors of the law will be wicked and oppressive. The people will drink wine. Ignorant men will sit in high places and be accounted wise. The fool and the son of a fool will become a ruler of the people, and men will give bribes to be delivered from his wickedness. Men will obey their wives and disobey their parents. It can easily be seen that the time of the end cannot be far off if these are its signs. New Yorkers had best look around them as they read among other tokens that "very high houses will be built, and love for musical instruments will increase," in the wicked last days!

There will be so great a scarcity of honest men that every trustworthy man will be famous far and wide, and those who are accounted wise and brilliant will not possess the smallest atom of faith in God. The people will hate, and try to destroy all who speak the truth, and missionaries of Anti-Christ will preach, in all the world, lies acceptable to men. Finally, most terrible of all, women will become rebellious, and will begin to put various sorts of curious things on their heads, and will begin to wear tight-fitting dresses. We may, perhaps, agree with the pious old Moslem who, long years ago, grouped these "signs" together – "My brethren, the most of these evil customs are already in full vigor among you."

But these lesser tokens only lead up to the greater signs, without which the end of the world will not come. Prominent among these

greater signs is the appearance of the Mehdi, or "Guide." He will be of the family of the prophet and his name will be Mohammed, son of Abdulla. He will be a perfect man, full of holy knowledge, and he will come at a time when there is no longer a Caliph. This provision, by the way, the Soudan Mehdi avoids by declaring that the Turks are not true Mohamedans, and that, therefore, their Sultan cannot be recognized as Caliph. The Mehdi will become the center about whom all true believers will be grouped. He will himself believe that which is true in the faith of all religious sects, and all true people of God will be united in him without sectarian differences. All these people he will lead to Jesus Christ. For about the same time with the coming of the Mehdi, Moslems believe that Dejjal (Anti-Christ) will appear. Some seem to regard him as a beast, but the best authorities among the Turks declare that this Dejjal will prove to be a one-eyed Jew from Khorasan. On his forehead will be written the word Kiafir (blasphemer) in letters which all true believers – and they alone – can read. Seventy thousand Jews will follow after him, and he will go through the whole world, visiting all countries, during a space of forty days. It should be remarked, however, that of these forty days the first is to be as long as a year, the second as long as a month, the third as long as a week, and the rest each twenty-four hours long. During the time of this Dejjal Moslems expect that Jesus Christ will descend from heaven for a period of forty years. He will slay Dejjal with a javelin, and then the whole earth will be filled with righteousness. Neither man nor beast will any more know hate, but everywhere happiness and equality will reign. So shall begin the last stage of the earth's existence. Then other great signs and wonders will occur. Gog and Magog will overrun the earth, and by their oppression of the people of God will usher in the last day. Then they will be miraculously destroyed, and God's true people will be translated in the twinkling of an eye, so as to escape the horrors of the age of fire.

Such is the tradition of the Mehdi and its chronological importance to Moslems. In Turkey, pious souls point out that the demoralization of the people is fully up to the mark that has been foretold. Immorality is rife. Men are crushed for speaking the truth. The one fixed rule for business is fraud. Ignorant men are put in high places. Courts of the holy law sell their decrees to the highest bidder. Women are discontented with their state of subjection, and they hate the uncouth envelopes which the law forces upon them in the place of a graceful dress. The year 1300 of the Moslem era has passed. According to the traditions, the world has less than two hundred years to live, and it is high time for the Mehdi to come. With an eagerness that arises from sincere faith in these prophecies, the Moslems of Turkey watch every obscure man who seems inclined to rise up and become a leader of the people. Any such man they are ready to hail as the Mehdi, if they can find for their faith the shadow of an excuse.

There is something pitiful in the sight of these multitudes, conscious of hopeless corruption, so enervated that they have hope of renewal only in a direct intervention of God, and yet so convinced that this intervention can only be through some visible agency that they are content mutely to drift along just as they are rather than risk taking steps which might be disapproved by him that is to come. But pitiful as the spectacle **[R619 : page 7]** is, there is in it much to stir the Christian's heart.

The followers of the false prophet are at last arriving at an epoch in their history when they are taught to expect enlightenment through Jesus Christ. Discount, because of their wrong idea of Christ, all we choose from this expectation of the Moslems; allow for their supposition that Christ will come to enforce the Koran upon the nations; remember their firm hope that Christ's first act on earth will be to put to the sword all the Christians of the present day; modify

the picture of the faith of these people by all such considerations, and still you have the fact that the waiting millions of Islam believe the time to be drawing near when Jesus shall teach them the truth. To the Christian there is something thrilling in the thought that even now the Moslem nations are anxiously watching for a "guide" to lead them to Christ.

– H. O. Dwight, of Constantinople,