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THE KORAN

Translated by J. M. Rodwell

THE KORAN

[I.]

SURA¹ XCVI.—THICK BLOOD, OR CLOTS OF BLOOD

MECCA.—19 Verses

*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*²

RECITE³ thou, in the name of thy Lord who created;—
Created man from CLOTS OF BLOOD:—

Recite thou! For thy Lord is the most Beneficent,

¹ The word Sura occurs nine times in the Koran, viz. Sur. ix. 65, 87, 125, 128; xxiv. 1; xlvii. 22 (twice); ii. 21; x. 39; but it is not easy to determine whether it means a whole chapter, or part only of a chapter, or is used in the sense of "revelation." See Weil's Mohammed der Prophet, pp. 361-363. It is understood by the Muhammadan commentators to have a primary reference to the succession of subjects or parts, like the rows of bricks in a wall. The titles of the Suras are generally taken from some word occurring in each, which is printed in large type throughout, where practicable.

² This formula—*Bismillāhi 'rrahmani 'rrahim*—is of Jewish origin. It was in the first instance taught to the Koreisch by Omayyah of Taief, the poet, who was a contemporary with, but somewhat older than, Muhammad; and who, during his mercantile journeys into Arabia Petræa and Syria, had made himself acquainted with the sacred books and doctrines of Jews and Christians. (Kitab al-Aghāni, 16. Delhi.) Muhammad adopted and constantly used it, and it is prefixed to each Sura except the ninth. The former of the two epithets implies that the mercy of God is exercised as occasions arise, towards all his creatures; the latter that the quality of mercy is inherent in God and permanent,—so that there is only a shade of difference between the two words. Maracci well renders, *In Nomine Dei Miseratoris, Misericordis*. The rendering I have adopted is that of Mr. Lane in his extracts from the Koran. See also Freytag's Lex. ii. p. 133. Perhaps, *In the name of Allah, the God of Mercy, the Merciful*, would more fully express the original Arabic. The first five verses of this Sura are, in the opinion of nearly all commentators, ancient and modern, the earliest revelations made to Muhammad, in the 40th year of his life, and the starting point of El-Islam. (See the authorities quoted in detail in Nöldeke's Geschichte des Qorāns, p. 62, n.)

³ The usual rendering is *read*. But the word *qaraa*, which is the root of the word Koran, analogous to the Rabbinic *mikra*, rather means *to address, recite*; and with regard to its etymology and use in the kindred dialects

Who hath taught the use of the pen;—
 Hath taught Man that which he knoweth not.
 Nay, verily,¹ Man is insolent,
 Because he seeth himself possessed of riches.
 Verily, to thy Lord is the return of all.
 What thinkest thou of him that holdeth back

10 A servant² of God when he prayeth?

What thinkest thou?³ Hath he followed the *true* Guidance,
 or enjoined Piety?

What thinkest thou? Hath he treated the truth as a lie
 and turned his back?

What! doth he not know how that God seeth?

Nay, verily, if he desist not, We shall seize him by the fore-
 lock,

The lying sinful forelock!

Then let him summon his associates;⁴

We too will summon the guards of Hell:

Nay! obey him not; but adore, and draw nigh to God.⁵

to call, cry aloud, proclaim. Compare Isai. lviii. 1; 1 Kings xviii. 37; and Gesen. Thesaur. on the Hebrew root. I understand this passage to mean, "Preach to thy fellow men what thou believest to be true of thy Lord who has created man from the meanest materials, and can in like manner prosper the truth which thou proclaimest. He has taught man the art of writing—(recently introduced at Mecca)—and in this thou wilt find a powerful help for propagating the knowledge of the divine Unity." The speaker in this, as in all the Suras, is Gabriel, of whom Muhammad had, as he believed, a vision on the mountain Hirâ, near Mecca. See note 1 on the next page. The details of the vision are quite unhistorical.

¹ This, and the following verses, may have been added at a later period, though previous to the Flight, and with special reference, if we are to believe the commentators Beidhawi, etc., to the opposition which Muhammad experienced at the hands of his opponent, Abu Jahl, who had threatened to set his foot on the Prophet's neck when prostrate in prayer. But the whole passage admits of application to mankind in general.

² That is Muhammad. Nöldeke, however, proposes to render "a slave." And it is certain that the doctrines of Islam were in the first instance embraced by slaves, many of whom had been carried away from Christian homes, or born of Christian parents at Mecca. "Men of this description," says Dr. Sprenger (Life of Mohammad. Allahabad. p. 159), "no doubt prepared the way for the Islam by inculcating purer notions respecting God upon their masters and their brethren. These men saw in Mohammad their liberator; and being superstitious enough to consider his fits as the consequence of an inspiration, they were among the first who acknowledged him as a prophet. Many of them suffered torture for their faith in him, and two of them died as martyrs. The excitement among the slaves when Mohammad first assumed his office was so great, that Abd Allah bin Jod'an, who had one hundred of these sufferers, found it necessary to remove them from Makkah, lest they should all turn converts." See Sura xvi. 105, 111; ii. 220.

³ Lit. *hast thou seen if he be upon the guidance.*

⁴ The principal men of the Koreisch who adhered to Abu Jahl.

⁵ During a period variously estimated from six months to three years

[II.]

SURA LXXIV.—THE ENWRAPPED¹

MECCA.—55 Verses

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

O THOU, ENWRAPPED in thy mantle!
 Arise and warn!
 Thy Lord—magnify Him!
 Thy raiment—purify it!
 The abomination—flee it!

from the revelation of this Sura, or of its earliest verses, the prophetic inspiration and the revelation of fresh Suras is said to have been suspended. This interval is called the *Fatrah* or *intermission*; and the Meccan Suras delivered at its close show that at or during this period Muhammad had gained an increasing and more intimate acquaintance with the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. "The accounts, however," says Mr. Muir (vol. ii. 86) "are throughout confused, if not contradictory; and we can only gather with certainty that there was a time during which his mind hung in suspense, and doubted the divine mission." The idea of any supernatural influence is of course to be entirely excluded; although there is no doubt that Muhammad himself had a full belief in the personality and influence of Satans and Djinn. Profound meditation, the struggles of an earnest mind anxious to attain to truth, the morbid excitability of an epileptic subject, visions seen in epileptic swoons, disgust at Meccan idolatry, and a desire to teach his countrymen the divine Unity—will sufficiently account for the period of indecision termed the *Fatrah*, and for the determination which led Muhammad, in all sincerity, but still self-deceived, to take upon himself the office and work of a Messenger from God. We may perhaps infer from such passages as Sura ii. 123, what had ever been the leading idea in Muhammad's mind.

¹ This Sura is placed by Muir in the "second stage" of Meccan Suras, and twenty-first in chronological order, in the third or fourth year of the Prophet's career. According, however, to the chronological list of Suras given by Weil (*Leben M.* p. 364) from ancient tradition, as well as from the consentient voice of traditionists and commentaries (v. Nöld. *Geschichte*, p. 69; Sprenger's *Life of Mohammad*, p. 111) it was the next revealed after the *Fatrah*, and the designation to the prophetic office. The main features of the tradition are, that Muhammad while wandering about in the hills near Mecca, distracted by doubts and by anxiety after truth, had a vision of the Angel Gabriel seated on a throne between heaven and earth, that he ran to his wife, Chadijah, in the greatest alarm, and desired her, perhaps from superstitious motives (and believing that if covered with clothes he should be shielded from the glances of evil spirits—comp. Stanley on 1 Cor. xi. 10), to envelope him in his mantle; that then Gabriel came down and addressed him as in v. 1. This vision, like that which preceded Sura xcvi., may actually have occurred during the hallucinations of one of the epileptic fits from which Muhammad from early youth appears to have suffered. Hence Muhammad in Sura lxxxi.

RELIGION/ISLAM

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As the sacred book of Islam, the Koran, or Qur'an in transliteration, is believed by devout Muslims to be the direct word of God, inscribed in Heaven and revealed by the archangel Gabriel to the prophet Muhammad before his death in A.D. 632. Written in Arabic, in rhymed prose, the text is not only regarded by believers as a guide to daily life, but is also considered to be the finest work of Arabic prose in existence and one of the most important and influential books known to mankind.

J. M. Rodwell's accessible translation restores the traditional ordering of the suras, or chapters, with early text dealing with God as creator, his greatness and authority, the role of Muhammad as God's messenger and of Islam in history. Later chapters deal with legal, social, and ethical issues. The text is divided into 114 chapters, each of which, like the Bible, is subdivided into verses.

This edition of the Koran, in a convenient size that is ideal for prayer or study, will be invaluable to students of religion, history, and politics and of interest to anyone concerned with cultures of the Middle East.

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