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Bismillah.

By J. Rendel Harris, Litt.D., LL.D., D.D., Birmingham.

To the ordinary reader the title of this Essay will suggest, if indeed it convey any meaning at all, an Oriental ejaculation, supposed of Turk or Arab, an expression of surprise, or it may be of fatalistic submission to Destiny; others better informed as to the meaning of the term, and its equivalence with the English formula, 'In the Name of God,' will perhaps regard it as the prelude to an action, not necessarily divine in itself, but more often diabolical when employed by Turks, yet so far bordered on religion as to contain in itself not only conduct but the warrant for conduct, not only devotion but the faith which is the mainspring of devotion. Then the scholars will come to our aid and tell us, removing the expression still further from the region of ejaculation or of accidental emotion, that the Bismillah is in reality an abbreviation and should be understood as such, having for its longer form the expression *Bismillah er-raḥmana er-raḥim*, with which every Sura or chapter of the Ḳoran opens, with a single omission; and even in the case of the omission, it was probably merely a piece of carelessness on the part of Gabriel in transcribing the sacred pages from the celestial autographs, so that we may, without impiety, restore the formula within brackets, as the Christians do with words or phrases in their Ingil about which they are not quite certain of the authority or satisfied as to the accurate transmission.

This statement, with its possible expansion as to the existence of the Bismillah as a basic element in the Ḳoran, is far from exhausting the instruction of the sacred book or the sacred formula. It is not only the preface to the chapters, it is also by special emphasis the prelude to all Islamic prayer; for it constitutes the sanctity and is the charter of the great prayer at the beginning of the Ḳoran, known as the *Opener*, whether of prayer-book or of prayer itself, a prayer which contains in itself the very essence, the height and the depth of Moslem divinity, valuable even to outsiders, who can see from its terms that it is not a prayer addressed to an Unknown God, as on Athenian altars. The Agnostic, whether of the East or the West, would stop short at the words

> 'the Compassionate, the Merciful,'

and the true believer would make a stepping-stone for his further definitions, or, using them as the foundation, erect upon them a tower of ninety-nine strata of sacred and beneficent names, with which to punctuate his rosary. He would, however, recognize that all the beads on the chain were involved in the first; if he missed one point through insufficient attention or imperfect memory, there is one term which the humblest believer will never forget or ignore, so let us say it over once again:

> 'In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful';

and with those words carry on the speculations of our article.

We shall be more at home with our theme, which is far from being merely controversial, or limited in its outlook, if we remind ourselves that Christianity also has a Bismillah of its own and a Bismillah prayer, as well as a sufficiency of Bismillah directions for personal or collective conduct. Suppose, for example, we were to set down side by side what is called the Lord's Prayer of the Christians and the Bismillah Prayer of the Arabs, we should recognize at once that there was common ground and a certain similarity of ideas between the two compositions. There is an emphasis on the Name at the beginning of each, there is a culmination, a sacred climax in the final words of the prayer for personal and general guidance. Certainly there are fundamental differences, and the differences make all the difference; but all we were saying was that there was enough similarity to enable us to attach the title Bismillah to either of the prayers. They are united beneath the surface. We are not so surprised at such a statement as our ancestors would have been who had converted Mohammed into a Mawmet or bogey, with the alternative of a Mammet or rag doll to play with (a proceeding which Hotspur denounces). There are some points in the Christian way of putting things which require Oriental colouring for their explanation. Take, for example, the strata in which we find the Pater Noster embedded, a sequence of thought-deposits for the religious explorer, in which Jesus instructs His disciples not to pray thus, not to fast thus, nor to be charitable on this wise. By a happy stroke of religious fortune in the shape of a scrap of Egyptian paper, forming what, for want of more knowledge, we call a fragment of a Lost Gospel, we find the disciples asking the Lord a series of

questions, including apparently this very sequence, How shall we pray, or fast, or give alms? Oriental religion naturally falls into such categories; without more knowledge as to date and material we might imagine that the papyrus contained questions addressed by Omar or Ali to the Prophet. The only difference would be that the Moslem summary of duty has an added term; it says, Prayer, Fast, Alms, and Pilgrimage; but against the latter Jesus sets His face resolutely, as one who knew all about the malefic influence of Pilgrimages, when He said that 'Neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem shall ye worship the Father,' and the sentence falls naturally under the head of Bismillah, as the context shows. With the Pilgrimage excluded as a means of grace, the Christian religion is as thoroughly Oriental in its stratification as Islam itself. Nor are there wanting other parallelisms to which we can appeal.

When the document known as the *Teaching of the Apostles* was first recovered, there were occasional traits in it which suggested that it had not come down to us without some contamination from the worshipper or some manipulation from his director. There was the Lord's Prayer indeed, but with an injunction to pray this way *three times in the day*. That was surely not evangelical, and came near to the vain repetition of the Pater Noster which has prevailed in all the great churches, from which, either in this prayer or in the related Kyrie Eleison, the Anglican Church has never succeeded in shaking itself loose. It is very near to the Moslem practice of prayer five times in the day, and at other suitable intervals, and as often as may be in a single exercise: and this raises at once another question (for in the waters in which we fish, when one fish bites, there is always another looking on), may it not be that there was a conscious relation between the Bismillah of Islam and what we have ventured, without offence to our Moslem friends, to call Our Bismillah. There is evidence forthcoming that the Lord's Prayer was probably known to Mohammed and was one of the broken fragments of Christianity that can be detached from his history and the traditions about him. To make this clear I think the best way will be to quote what I said on the point in an article in THE EXPOSITORY TIMES for May 1923:

> 'In the *Mohammedan Studies* of the late Professor Goldziher there is an important section on the influence of the New Testament which can be traced in the Ḥadith or Moslem traditions; amongst these traditions, known under various titles and ascribed to various authors, the most important is the Ḥadīth Qudsī, much of which is of the highest value for the reconstruction of the history of the Islamic movement, and of the relations between the Prophet and his Companions.
>
> 'Goldziher points out (vol. i. p. 386) that, amongst the various loans from the teaching and the text of the Gospel, the most important is the use of the Lord's Prayer, which use is attributed to the Prophet himself. The following statement is made on the faith of Abu-l-Dardā[1] that the Prophet once said, "If any one suffers, or his brother is suffering, he may say: Our Lord God, thou who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy Kingdom is in Heaven and on Earth; as thy mercy [is] in Heaven, so practise thy mercy also on Earth; forgive us our debt and our sins (*ḥaubanā wa-ḫaṭājāna*): thou art the Lord God of the good, send down mercy from thy mercy and healing from thy healing upon this pain, in order that he may again be well."
>
> 'Here, then, we have the use of the Lord's Prayer, in a somewhat mutilated and shortened form, employed as a spell to be used over sick people, and the authority for such use is the Prophet himself. The prayer is Islamized by the substitution of "Our Lord God" for "Our Father," for as the Moslems would say, "He neither begets nor is begotten," and "God forbid that God should have a son"; but no one can doubt that this is the Lord's Prayer, nor that it was used as a magical spell in the earliest days of Islam.
>
> 'We come now to a most important detail, which Goldziher has overlooked, namely, that the prayer must have come into Moslem use, and probably into the hands of the Prophet himself, from a Syriac source, and this source the *Diatessaron* of Tatian.
>
> 'Observe, in the first place, the expression used for forgiveness, "our debt and our sins"—the first term is almost exactly the language of Luke, the second that of Matthew in the Syriac Gospels; the combination of them into a single formula is suggestive at once of Tatian and the *Diatessaron*. Any doubt that might remain, after noting the linguistic agreement and the harmonization, would be swept away by the observation (as Dr. Mingana reminds me) that to this day all branches of the Syrian Church use the composite form ("debts and sins") in the Lord's Prayer. We cannot doubt that this consent in liturgical usage is primitive, and that it is due to Tatian himself. Muḥammad, then, was under Syriac influence, learnt the Lord's Prayer in Syriac, and advised its use as a magical spell for healing. . . .'

It is not unworthy of note that this magical use of the Lord's Prayer in its Syriac form (or

[1] Quoted in *Abû Dawûd*, i. 101.

at least in a form dependent upon the Syriac) as a healing medicament appears to have been imitated in later days by the Moslems in their use of the Fatiḥah with a similar intention. For among the many names with which this prayer is honoured and described, we find that it has the title of 'the Healer.' If that means the same kind of medicine as that attributed to Mohammed, then we have another indication that the Christian Bismillah lies behind the Moslem and may even furnish the key to its composition and the stimulus for its later use.

It is not unimportant to lay stress upon the foregoing evidence: for it relates to what seems at first to be a fatal omission in the great Opening Prayer. There is no prayer for forgiveness; it may be implied indirectly in the terms by which the Lord is described, the Compassionate, the Clement, or whatever may be. Still one would feel like handing the prayer-book back to Gabriel, and asking whether this matter of Forgiveness was not a little clearer, somewhat more definite, in the original text. Gabriel, however, shakes his head and says he had it correct from the Source. Is it possible that the prayer for forgiveness of sins and debts was wrecked by its attached statement that 'we also forgive, have forgiven'? The true worship should have excluded even the vestige of a vendetta. The prayer for guidance does not come in kindly as the sequel to such a possible or implied vendetta. These are preliminary ideas, expressed with the intention of finding common ground in overlapping faiths. We are willing to call our Lord's Prayer a Bismillah and to use the formula for all it is worth. The New Testament says very nearly the same thing: 'Whatsoever ye do, do it all in the name of our Lord Jesus.' The Bismillah is the preliminary prayer and the continuous action. As such, the Christian form has its own ejaculatory use, and its own useless repetition, as we just now pointed out.

Shakespeare, who loved to insert little play-scenes in the heart of his greater dramas, once amused himself and us, in the *First Part of King Henry the Fourth*, by making Prince Hal and Falstaff turn into actors at the Boar's Head in Eastcheap. The rest of the stage is delighted, and Mistress Quickly exclaims, 'Oh, the Father! he doth it like one of these harlotry players.' What she meant to say was 'Our Father.' It was the religion of the good woman, reduced to an ejaculatory basis.

As for repetition, every one who is familiar with Oriental hostelries knows how often a deficiency in the preparation of an egg has to be combated with an injunction to 'Take it away, and say another Pater Noster over it.'

Now let us leave these trivialities and turn to something of much greater importance, the meaning of the leading terms in the Opening Prayer itself. What was it that was Opened with regard to the nature of God, when Mohammed recalled the Arab from the polytheism of Mecca to the worship of the Unity? In order to answer this question, we must consult the Arabic scholars, and perhaps the native interpreters of the term. They must tell us what is meant by describing God as *Er-raḥmana, Er-raḥim*.

Suppose we turn to the translation of the Ḳoran by Sale, a book which, in spite of its antiquity, is still of the highest value, both for the text and the notes; we shall find that he renders as follows:

> 'In the name of the most merciful God, Praise be to God, the Lord of all creatures, the most merciful, the King of the Day of Judgment,' etc.

In this translation it will be seen that Sale holds the two terms *Er-raḥmana* and *Er-raḥim* to be equivalent, and the combination of them to express the superlative sense of either of the words, supposed to be equivalent or nearly so.

In the notes, Sale says that the Moslems 'esteem it (the Opening Prayer) as the quintessence of the whole Ḳoran, and often repeat it in their devotions, as the Christians do the Lord's Prayer. The Bismillah . . . is otherwise rendered as "In the Name of the merciful and compassionate God," and "In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful."' In which note Sale has drawn the parallel which we made ourselves with the Lord's Prayer, and has quoted alternative renderings which imply that there is no difference between *Er-raḥmana* and *Er-raḥim*.

In Palmer's translation in the *Sacred Books of the East*, we find no attempt at a superlative sense. He translates simply, 'In the Name of the Merciful and Compassionate God. Praise belongs to God, the Lord of the Worlds, the Ruler of the Day of Judgment.'

Dr. Mingana, one of the first of our modern Arabists, translates the Fatiḥah as follows:

> 'In the name of Allah, the gracious (and) the merciful. Praise be to Allah the master of the worlds, the gracious, the merciful (and) the King of the Day of Judgment.
>
> 'It is Thee that we serve and Thy help that we

solicit. Direct us to the right path, the path of those to whom Thou hast given Thy grace and who are not under (Thy) wrath nor astray.'

Here we have another translation of the apparent synonyms, in which the tautology is got rid of. There seems to be no definite reason for preferring the translation 'the gracious, the merciful,' to that of 'the merciful, the gracious.' That is to say, there is still an unexplained redundance in the language.

Others will render by 'The Merciful, the Clement,' with variations in the order, but none in the sense, nor does there seem to be any real difference, according to the versions which scholars propound. Indeed it is difficult to believe that synonyms were in order in such simple and stately language as the Ḳoran offers us at this point. The suggestion arises that we have missed the original form or lost the original sense of the words. Palmer seems to have had some feeling of this, for he suggests that the Bismillah, instead of coming direct from heaven to the prophet, may have been mediated through a Persian Zoroastrian phrase, 'In the name of God, the merciful, the just.' While this does not at first seem likely, there is something to be said for it. If we could use the Persian formula, we should have a good sequence in the words 'The Lord of the Day of Judgment.' The Zoroastrian appeal would then be to the Justice of the Just, and then Mohammed would be entitled to say that

'in the course of Justice none of us
Should see Salvation; we do pray for mercy.'

We should then explain that Mohammed, familiar with a Persian formula of worship, a supposition not in itself impossible in view of his frequent loans upon those of earlier faiths whom he met in his travels, corrected the formula by writing Mercy over Justice. I admit that this is not an impossible solution of the perplexing synonyms. The change would make the Bismillah easier to repeat. The comparison of the two forms would be altogether in favour of Islam.

At the same time I think that there must be a simpler explanation of the two words which lie before us, side by side, in an apparent equivalence. If I put my solution forward, I do it with a due sense that Arabic scholars will at once put it on one side as impossible, and as a venture on my part into philological regions which are not my proper province. My criticism of the language of the Ḳoran would be this, that the terms involved are not Arabic at all, but have been taken over from some cognate Semitic language, with a consequent loss of meaning in the transfer. To begin with, the word *Raḥim* is not Arabic: it is the Syriac passive participle (*rḥim*) of the verb 'to love': and it describes God as 'the Beloved'; that being assumed, and it will not be easy to contradict it, the companion term of the formula is not a repetition of the passive participle, but a noun-agent, and means 'the Lover'; the combination of the two avoids all synonymity and needs no explanation of superlativeness; it defines God as the Lover and the Beloved. The language is precisely that of the Sufis or Persian Mystics, who restored to Islam, often at the risk of their own orthodoxy (though their chief doctor, Al Ghazzali, is not suspect in that direction), the spiritual sense which the Christian acquires from the doctrine that 'God is Love' and that 'we love him because he first loved us.' Now this will seem impossible both to the linguist and to the theologian. Let us see if we can find anything in the way of parallel.

It was my great happiness to discover on 4th January 1909 a slightly imperfect copy of the lost Odes of Solomon, which I was able to relate to the Christian Church of the first century, and possibly to the Church of Antioch in particular. The Odes were themselves of an experimental character, impregnated with a mysticism not very remote from that of the Sufi, though guiltless of actual pantheism; they were amatory to a degree which at once surprised and delighted us. They had their own way of saying 'I love' and 'I am loved,' but they were a splendid illustration of the way in which the love between the Creator and the Creature breaks through the language of theology (especially of theology in process of hardening), and, using terms of its own, attains to the goal of the experience of the Saints.

In the third of the Odes to which we refer we have a Hymn of Divine Union, in which the following terms occur:

'I love the Beloved, and my soul loves Him,
And where His rest is, there also am I.

And I shall be no stranger there;
For with the Lord Most High and Merciful, there is no grudging;
I have been united to Him, for the Lover has found the Beloved.'

This was the Ode which my friend, Professor Bacon, described as 'a song in the vein of Canticles,' a very apt description. It will find a ready parallel in the Solomonic Canticles, and those mystics who interpret the same. It is, however, eminently the

language of the Sufi. Here is a comment which may help the reader to understand the Ode:

> '"I fancied that I loved Him," said Bāyazīd (the Sufi), "but on consideration I saw that His love preceded mine." Junayd (another Sufi) defined love as the substitution of the qualities of the Beloved for the qualities of the lover' (Nicholson, *Mystics of Islam*, p. 112).

There can be no hesitation in affirming that in the *Odes of Solomon*, and in the third Ode especially, the intercourse between God and the soul is expressed as being between the Lover and the Beloved.

Now when we turn to the actual text of the Ode from which the foregoing translation is taken, remarking also that the Syriac is probably the original of the Ode, we find the writer using in his language of love the very root form (*rḥm*) which we have in the Ḳoran: when he says that 'I love the Beloved,' he uses the form *rḥima*, for which the Arabic is *er-raḥim*; with the article transferred from the termination of the Syriac to the beginning of the Arabic word, we are entitled to say that the language of the Ḳoran at this point is Syriac and not Arabic.

Now what of the noun-agent? The Odist says, 'with the Lord Most High and *Merciful* there is no grudging.' The word is again almost exactly the same as in the Arabic, *M raḥmana* of the former answering to the *er-raḥmana* of the latter; but it is clear, from the constant use of the word for 'love' in the Ode, that the rendering 'merciful' is too weak; it should be the 'Loving': our text now says:

'The Most High and Loving':

and the Ḳoran says the very same thing, if, without changing the text, we may modify the current commentary. In that case, too, we shall be entitled to infer that

LOVE IS THE LORD OF THE DAY OF JUDGEMENT.

'The very God! think, Abib, dost thou think?
So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too.'

'We always are thinking of it,' said the disciples of Junayd. 'We are beginning to think of it,' responded the devout Moslem.

In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

Suffer and Serve.

BY ARTHUR J. MEE, M.A., B.Sc., NEWPORT, ESSEX.

'Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.'—Mt 20^{27}.

I WONDER how many of you boys and girls have mottoes. Not many, I suppose. Now, if you had been living a few hundred years ago I expect you would have had a motto, especially if you came from an old family, for in those days almost every one had some phrase or other which they associated with their family arms. Many of these are still to be found on the coats-of-arms of ladies and gentlemen, and with the crests of schools and other institutions.

I was very much struck by the motto of a school that I visited recently. In the hall of the school there was a beautiful war memorial screen upon which appeared the names of the old boys of the school who lost their lives in that terrible war about which you probably remember nothing. Above the screen were the school arms, very nicely painted, with the motto underneath, and the motto was this, just the three words, 'Suffer and Serve.' This seemed to be just the very thing to put above that memorial screen, for had not the boys there mentioned suffered in the service of their country? Then I began to wonder how it was that the school got this motto. I found on inquiry that the school was a very old one. It was, in fact, founded over three hundred years ago, and it still bears the name of its foundress, Dame Joyce Frankland. The story of the founding of the school is bound up with the story of the motto, so in telling you the one I shall be telling you the other.

The school is on the road from London to Cambridge. Now, in the olden days, when students wanted to go to Cambridge, they had only one way of getting there. There were no trains, or motor-cars, and the only way of travelling a distance was to cover it on horseback. One day the son of Dame Joyce Frankland started out from London to Cambridge, but when he came to the spot where the school now stands, he met with a very serious accident. His horse stumbled, and the