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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
نَحْمَدُهُ وَنُصَلِّي عَلَى رَسُولِهِ الْكَرِيمِ

The Purity of the Text of the Holy Quran.

7. Differences of Readings.

Alleged differences of readings are said to interfere with the purity of the Quranic text in two ways. Certain readings which had been permitted by the Holy Prophet were suppressed by Othman and thus with their loss a portion of the original text was lost. This is one objection, and the other is that the variety of readings existing at the present time makes it difficult to decide with any degree of certainty as to which is the original or the authentic reading. These objections arise really out of a misconception of the significance of the word "readings" when used with regard to the Quranic text, and out of a confusion between the meanings of *harf* and *qiraat* when used to denote "reading," and accordingly it is necessary to enquire first into the true nature of the "differences of readings."

In the first place it is important to bear in mind that the Arabic word used in the traditions to denote reading is *حرف* *harf*. This word means "a dialect, an idiom or a mode of expression, peculiar to certain of the Arabs" according to Lane's Lexicon which is based on the best Arabic authorities. It is this meaning which the word conveys in the traditions speaking of the variety of readings, as Lane himself adds: "So in the saying of Muhammad, (TA), *نزل القرآن على سبعة أحرف* *The Kurán has been revealed according to seven dialects*, of the dialects of the Arabs: (A' Obeyd, Az,

Ith, K :) or this means, according to seven modes or manners, (Mgh, Msh,) of reading: whence *فلان يقرأ بحرف ابن مسعود* such a one reads in the manner of reading of Ibn Masood." These quotations would show that the differences spoken of in certain traditions were only differences arising from the differences of dialects which necessitated the reading or expressing of certain words in a different manner by different tribes.

Let us now turn to traditions and see how far this conclusion is supported by them. The following traditions bear on this subject:—

(1). Bukharee reports from Ibn 'Abbas: The Holy Prophet, may peace and the blessings of God be upon him, said, "Gabriel taught me to read the Quran according to one *harf* only; I addressed him repeatedly and asked him to read it in other dialects also and this I continued to do until he read it to me in seven dialects." Muslim reports the same tradition in the same words through a different chain of narrators, the original narrator being still Ibn 'Abbas, but the following words are added: Ibn Shahab said, "It has been brought to my knowledge that the seven *harfs* (dialects) are in a matter which remains the same (that is to say, reading in any one of these dialects does not change the meaning) and they give rise to no difference as to what is lawful and what is forbidden."

(2). Bukharee reports from Ibn Mas'ud: "I heard a man recite the Quran, and I had heard the Holy Prophet, may peace and the blessings of God be upon him, read it differently. So I brought him to the Holy Prophet, may peace and the blessings of God be upon him. When I informed him of what had happened, I perceived displeasure in his countenance, and he said, 'Both of you read correctly, therefore, do not differ, for verily there were those before you who differed and they perished'."

(3). Bukharee and Muslim report from Omar bin Khattáb: "I heard Hishám bin Hakím bin Hizám read the chapter entitled Furqán in a manner different from that in which I read it, and it was the Holy Prophet himself, may peace and the blessings of God be upon him, who had taught me to read it thus. So I was about to stop him hastily but I waited and let him read until he had finished. Then I threw my mantle

round his neck, and, brought him to the Messenger of God, may peace and the blessings of God be upon him, and I said, 'O Messenger of God, I have heard this man recite the chapter entitled *Al-furqān* in a manner different from that in which you taught me to read it.' The Messenger of God, may peace and the blessings of God be upon him, ordered me to release Hishām and then ordered him to recite the chapter. He read it in the manner in which I had heard him read it. The Messenger of God, may peace and the blessings of God be upon him, said, 'Thus has it been revealed.' Then he ordered me to read it and when I read it, he said, 'Thus has it been revealed. Verily this Quran has been revealed in seven dialects, therefore, recite it in the manner in which you find it easy to do so.' "

(4.) According to another tradition reported by Muslim, Ubayy bin K'ab heard two persons read the Quran in a manner different from that in which he had been taught to read it. On his having brought the matter to the notice of the Holy Prophet, the latter approved of their reading. This perplexed Ubayy whom the Holy Prophet satisfied by the following explanation of which Ubayy himself is the reporter: "O Ubayy, the Holy Quran was sent down to me to be read in one dialect only. I asked for permission to read it in other dialects so that it might be easy for my people to recite it. Thereupon I was permitted to read it in two dialects, and again I asked for permission of more so that it might be easy for my people, and I was permitted to read it in seven dialects."

(5.) Muslim reports another tradition from Ubayy bin K'ab to the following effect: The Prophet of God, may peace and the blessings of God be upon him, was near the place, known as the pool of the Bani-Ghafar when Gabriel came to him and said, "Verily God commands thee to make thy people read the Quran in one dialect only." The Holy Prophet replied, "I crave the pardon of God and His forgiveness, for my people cannot bear this." The tradition tells us that the Holy Prophet continued to ask for permission of reading the Quran in other dialects until he was permitted to read it in seven dialects.

(6.) Abu Daood makes Jābir narrate the following words: The Holy Prophet came to us and we were reading the Quran,

among us being Arabians as well as foreigners, and he said, "Keep on reading for every one's reading is good. And there will come crowds of men who will read the Quran straight, on (that is to say, with good voices) like as an arrow is made straight and they will hasten their reward in this life and will not look for it in the next"

(7.) Tirmazi reports the following tradition from Ubayy bin K'ab: The Messenger of God, may peace and the blessings of God be upon him, was visited by Gabriel and he said to him, "O Gabriel, verily I have been sent to a people who are without learning; among them is the old woman and the old man and the boy and the girl and the man who has never read a book." Gabriel said, 'O Muhammad, verily the Quran has been revealed in seven dialects."

These are the only important traditions dealing with the subject of various readings as permitted by the Holy Prophet. The one conclusion upon which they all agree is that the alleged differences were not differences of text, but differences in the manner of reading or pronouncing certain words. To make this point clearer, we would discuss the several points mentioned in them at some length. The first question is, can the time to which these traditions relate be fixed with any degree of certainty? In other words, was the permission to read the Quran in seven dialects granted contemporaneously with the commencement of the revelation or at a later time, and in the latter case what was the probable date. This circumstance will serve to throw much light on the question of the nature of the differences as I will show later on. It would also settle the question of the text. One inference as to time can be drawn from the fifth tradition related above which tells us that at the time when the permission was granted the Holy Prophet was near the place known as the "pool of Beni Ghafâr." This place as is well-known is situated at Medina, and consequently one thing of which we are certain as regards the time of the permission is that it was after the flight of the Holy Prophet to Medina. No variety of readings was therefore permitted at least during the first thirteen years at Mecca when Islam was properly limited to the Meccans. There is another point however which shows that the permission to read in different dialects was not granted until after the conquest of Mecca, that is to say, about the ninth year of Hejira. In one of the traditions

reported by Bukharee, Hishám bin Hakím bin Hizám is mentioned as the person who surprised Omar by reading the Quran in a manner or dialect different from that in which Omar read it. Now Hishám did not become a convert to Islam until after the conquest of Mecca which event took place in the eighth year of Hejira or nearly two years before the death of the Holy Prophet. The inference which can be drawn from this circumstance is that the permission as to reading in various dialects was granted about this time, for if it had been granted before, a man like Omar could not have remained ignorant of it. Omar was the man who had made arrangements with another companion to remain alternately in the company of the Holy Prophet in order to be kept informed of every new revelation and every new circumstance, and with the close relation which he had with the Holy Prophet, it is inconsistent that he should have remained ignorant of the permission to read the Quran in dialects other than the pure idiom of the Quresh for any very long time, say a year or several months. None of the traditions, moreover names any of the earlier converts who should have read the Quran in a dialect different from the pure idiom of the Quresh in which it was revealed originally.

Considerations such as the above show that the permission to read the Quran in other dialects was granted when many of the Arabian tribes had embraced Islam, *i.e.*, towards the close of the Holy Prophet's ministry. This shows that the permission was meant originally for such other tribes, and this point settles conclusively that the text of the Holy Quran was that in which it was revealed originally. The differences of readings were only such as were naturally necessitated by the flux into Islam of unlearned tribes who spoke an idiom which was Arabic to all practical purposes, but which in the pronunciation of certain words differed slightly from the pure idiom of the Quresh. Examples of these differences have already been given. The Quresh say *hatta* (meaning *until*) while the Huzail pronounce the same word as *atta*, there being no difference in the significance of the two words. (See Lane's *Lexicon* which explains عَتَى '*atta* as being "a dial. var. of حَتَى of the dial. of Hudheyl and Thakeef"). Other variations of the same kind are *tilamun* instead of *Ta'lamun* as the tribe of Asad read it, يَاسِينَ *yasin* instead of *asin* in xlvi: 15, the reading of *hamza* (one of the letters of alphabet) by the Tamím where the Quresh did not read it and so on.

In support of the above are certain anecdotes left by early authorities. Thus Abu Sháma reported from one of the earlier authorities (*vide* Fath-ul-Bari, vol ix, p. 24) that "the Holy Quran was first revealed in the language of the Quresh and such of the Arabs who were in their neighbourhood and spoke chaste Arabic idiom, then it was permitted to the other Arab tribes to read it in their own idioms to whose use they were habituated from their childhood and they differed (from the pure idiom) in (the pronunciation of) certain words and the vowel-points. Therefore none of them was compelled to leave his own idiom for that of another because of the difficulty which they would have perceived in doing so, and because of their great regard for their own idioms so that they might easily understand the significance of what they read. All this was subject to the condition that there should be no change in the significance."

Most of the traditions quoted above point out the reason for which the permission was granted and in each case we find the reason to be in accordance with the view of the differences as advanced above. For instance, according to one of the traditions the Holy Prophet asked the angel to "make it easy" for his people showing that they experienced a difficulty in reading it otherwise. According to another he is made to say that his people "could not bear it," in other words, all the Arab tribes could not read in one dialect. According to a third he pleads for his people saying that they were unlearned and among them were the old woman and the old man and the boy and the girl and the man who had never learned to read a book. Of course if they had been educated, they could have easily spoken the literary and chaste idiom of the Quresh, but as most of them were unlearned, it was very hard for them to utter every word in the manner of the Quresh. Hence they were permitted to read certain words according to their own dialect. We have also one tradition ending with the words, "therefore read it in the manner in which you find it easy to do so," which shows that the permission to read the Quran in dialects other than that of the Quresh was meant to afford facility to certain people.

Another remarkable circumstance is that among the earlier converts to Islam, no such differences can be shown to have existed, nor were there any differences of readings among such eminent and learned companions as for instance Abu Bakr and Omar or Abu Bakr and

Ali. This leads to the same conclusion that we have arrived at above, viz., that the different readings were not different texts, but only different modes of pronouncing the same word in different dialects. It was as we have seen an actual need. It was very hard for the uneducated Arab tribes, whose dialects slightly varied from the standard dialect of the Quresh whose idiom was regarded as the purest and most chaste of all Arabic idioms, to speak every word exactly as the Quresh spoke it. It was necessary for every person who embraced Islam to know and to be able to recite a certain portion of the Holy Quran, and they were allowed the facility, with Divine permission, to express a word according to their own idiom when they found it hard to express or utter it in accordance with the chaste idiom of the Quresh.

To what extent the various dialects in which the recital of the Quran was permitted differed from each other is not a question of much importance, but there seems to be no doubt, as many instances preserved in traditions show, that the variations were very slight and generally very unimportant. But while holding this on the basis of historical evidence so far as access can be had to it, we have no reason for denying that in certain cases a word of one dialect may have been allowed to be expressed by its equivalent in another dialect where the latter dialect did not possess the original word. This is what is meant when it is said in certain traditions that the expression of meaning by a synonymous word was allowed in certain cases. Such a case is exemplified in one tradition by the use of any of the words *تعال* (*ta'al*), *هلم* (*halumma*) and *اقبل* (*aqbil*) meaning "come thou." This is not an actual case of variation of reading in the Holy Quran according to different dialects, but the example is only given to show the nature of the variation in such cases. This example shows that it was only in cases where the idea expressed by a word was so plain as not to be mistaken by a man of even ordinary understanding that the use of one word for an equivalent one of a different dialect was permitted. Other varieties of reading in these dialects were of a much more insignificant nature and related to certain changes in vowel-points. Thus the meaning was in no case altered. There were differences in the utterance of certain words, but there was no difference at all in the significance conveyed. This is attested

by the tradition which tells us that by reading the Quran in any one of the seven dialects, no difference was caused as to the things allowed and the things prohibited.

It has been objected that if the differences had been so slight as should have naturally arisen in the utterance of certain words by an illiterate people speaking different dialects, the companions would not have dealt so harshly with each other. Omar was about to stop Hishám in his prayers as the tradition tells us and at last brought him before the Holy Prophet with his mantle thrown round his neck as if he had been guilty of some great offence. Such an incident, it is alleged, could not have taken place unless Hishám were reading a text totally differing from the text as known to Omar. This is, of course, a mere conjecture. We have produced above the strongest historical evidence showing that the differences of readings among the companions of the Holy Prophet arose only from the differences of dialects. But the companions were so scrupulous about every word and every letter of the Divine revelation that the slightest change in any word or letter of the Holy Quran was to them the greatest of sins. This is a fact which every right-minded critic must bear witness to. Hence it was that Omar was so impatient when he heard Hishám reading.

Another objection against the variety of readings being only a dialectal variety is that Hishám and Omar both belonged to the tribe of the Quresh and that hence the dialect of Hishám could not be different from that of Omar whereas tradition shows that there was difference between them. To understand this point it must be borne in mind that once the necessity of dialectal variation was recognised and permission was granted, that permission could not be limited to a particular tribe. The Holy Quran was taught by the companions to each other and hence to a certain extent the peculiarities of one dialect or tribe found their way into another. Moreover, it was not necessary that if one tribe was unable to utter a certain word according to the dialect of another tribe, the latter should also be unable to utter the equivalent word of the former. To give an example, the tribe of Huzail spoke *attá* for *hattá* (meaning until), the latter pronunciation being that of the Quresh, but the Quresh could pronounce it in both ways and they had no aversion to either form of the word

Though they ordinarily spoke *hatta*, but they could also pronounce the word as *attā* as the case of Ibn Mas'ud shows who read *attā heen* instead of *hattā heen*. The Quresh seem to have had in fact the aptitude to speak freely in the dialects of the other Arabian tribes, the reason of this probably being that thousands of men from every corner of the country flocked every year to the *Ka'ba* when, besides paying a visit to the Holy Temple, they had also literary assemblies and commercial transactions in which the Quresh took part. On account of their being guardians of the *Ka'ba*, the Quresh had to come into contact with every tribe and this intercourse had become more permanent by establishment of commercial relations. This intercourse had facilitated for them the utterance of certain words according to the peculiar modes of other tribes. Now Hishām became a Musalman after the conquest of Mecca, and this was the time when many Arabian tribes were embracing Islam. It is, therefore, probable that Hishām learned the chapter *Alfurqān*, which gave rise to the difference, from the Holy Prophet when the latter was teaching the same to some other tribe, and thus certain dialectic variations found their way into the recital of Hishām.

It must not be thought that every word of the Holy Quran was pronounced in seven different ways. What is meant is only this that the varieties of readings permitted belonged to one or other of the seven dialects. These varieties were very few, for had there been a greater number of varieties, authentic traditions would no doubt have preserved them in large numbers. The confusing of these dialectic varieties, with the readings which are mentioned in certain commentaries is a blunder of which none but an ignorant person can be guilty. The nature of these readings I will describe later on. But so far as the dialectic varieties permitted by the Holy Prophet, the *sab'at-i-ahruf* of the tradition, are concerned there are wonderfully few traces of them in traditions, showing that these varieties were actually very few. For if there had been a large number of them, there is no reason that tradition should not have preserved a good many of them. Othman's action in not allowing the writing of these varieties in copies of the Holy Quran could not bring about their entire extinction, for the numerous sayings of the Holy Prophet were never written, yet the minutest details have come down to us in reliable traditions. Indeed, as I have shown above, the

regular intercourse of the Arab tribes with the Quresh and their commercial relations had left no difference of importance in their dialects, and the variations that existed were very few and unimportant. Hence the dialectic variations permitted in the readings of the Quran were also very few. The seven dialects in which the readings were permitted were those which were considered as the most chaste by the Arabs, and some authorities have named them, while according to others the number seven is not meant to convey a definite numerical significance, but to express only that some dialectic variations were permitted.

The above considerations clearly show that the variations did at no time form a part of the text of the Holy Quran, nor were they ever meant for permanent retention. The necessity which had given rise to them was purely of a local and a temporary nature. Almost the whole of the Quran had been revealed before the time that these variations were permitted. The more we ponder over them, the more are we convinced that these variations were only allowed for the facility of certain tribes and they did not in any way alter the text of the Holy Quran as it was originally revealed. The Holy Prophet himself never recited in his public prayers any portion of the Holy Quran in any dialect other than that of the Quresh, for if he had done so, men like Omar and Ubayy who said their five daily prayers with the Holy Prophet would not have found fault with dialectic variations as they are reported to have done. The practice of the Holy Prophet, therefore, shows that the permission to use certain dialectic variations did not alter the original text of the Holy Quran in the slightest degree. This was the text which Holy Prophet used in his public recitals and public prayers. Another evidence that the Holy Prophet intended only the dialect of the Quresh to be retained for permanent use and permitted the variations only for a temporary need is to be met with in the circumstance that the writing of the Quran even after the permission as to dialectic variations witnessed no change. The text as it was written was still the same, *i.e.*, in conformity with the dialect of the Quresh. These two points, *viz.*, the writing of the Quran and the Holy Prophet's own recital, conclusively show that the dialectic variations permitted towards the close of the Holy Prophet's ministry did not in any way affect the original text. Perhaps one of the reasons, why Zaid was ordered by Abu Bakr and Omar to

collect the Quran from the the original writings made in the presence of the Holy Prophet and not to trust to memory alone was that they knew that the original writings were all free from dialectic variations, and therefore to avoid them and secure the pure text the safest course was to search those writings and copy them.

We are now in a position to consider the first of the objections stated in the beginning of this article. We have shown the true nature of the variations which were permitted by the Holy Prophet himself. We have also shown that these variations were meant to answer only a temporary need and that the Holy Prophet did not order them to be written nor did he ever use them when leading the public prayers. Nor do we find any trace of any scribe having ever been directed by the Holy Prophet to note any of the variations. And in spite of the permission to use in oral recitation of the Holy Quran certain dialectal variations, the Quran was generally spoken of as having been revealed in the dialect of the Quresh only. We find Omar writing during his caliphate to Ibn-i-Mas'ud who then taught at Kufa not to teach the Quran according to the dialect of the Huzail for it was revealed in the dialect of the Quresh. This order was given by Omar on having heard that Ibn-i-Mas'ud taught the people to read *attâ*, a dialectic variation, as used by the Huzail, of the word *hattâ*. Again when Othman ordered copies to be made from the collection of Zaid, he gave the express direction that when there was any difference as to the mode of writing a word it should be written according to the dialect of the Quresh, for the Quran was revealed in that dialect. Thus it appears that neither the Holy Prophet himself nor his eminent companions ever gave any importance to the dialectic variations nor did they ever consider them to have the effect of altering the text of the Holy Quran. Just as before the permission so after it the text was regarded only as one which remained unaltered during the whole ministry of the Holy Prophet and has remained pure and unaffected to this day.

From the above it becomes clear that Othman did not suppress any part of the text of the Holy Quran by disallowing the writing of the dialectal varieties, for these were never a part of the text. Whatever may be said of Othman's action, he cannot be said to have suppressed a part of the text of the Holy Quran by disallowing

certain dialectical varieties. The text of the Holy Quran could not suffer any thing by losing that which never formed a part of it. Othman only followed the example of the Holy Prophet and his two predecessors in caliphate. The Holy Prophet had never ordered the variations to be written, nor did he ever use them in his public prayers. In the time of Abu Bakr when the necessity of having a complete copy of the Quran was felt, that Caliph gave orders for the search of original writings, so that no variation should find its way into the authentic copy. Coming to Omar we find him writing to Ibn Mas'ud not to teach the people the dialectal varieties of the Huzail. Othman, therefore, only followed the footsteps of his eminent and worthy predecessors. The circumstances which obliged him to take this step have been narrated elsewhere. Islam had spread far and wide beyond Arabia and people whose mother tongue was not Arabic were embracing Islam in large numbers. To teach the Quran to these people was a task different from teaching it to the Arabian tribes. The latter when they embraced Islam had special facilities for learning the Quran for it was in their language. But they had their special difficulties. They were accustomed to a particular idiom and particular way of pronouncing certain words from their childhood, and it was very hard for them to give up so soon their own idioms. The people of other countries had however to learn Arabic before learning the Holy Quran and hence it was as easy for them to read the original text as the dialectal varieties. It was however brought to the knowledge of Othman that some people were teaching these dialectic variations to the new converts and as these new converts could not easily understand the true nature and significance of such varieties, differences and quarrels were the result. Othman's object was to put a stop to such quarrels. The tradition which mentions these circumstances has been quoted under the sub-head of "The Collection of the Quran." It was for this reason that Othman ordered copies of the Quran to be made from the collection of Zaid as made in the time of Abu Bakar and all other copies to be destroyed. He knew that the collection made in the time of Abu Bakar was made with the utmost care and the original writings made in the presence of the Holy Prophet had all been gathered together after diligent search and that, therefore, that was the only copy which contained

the pure and original text of the Holy Quran. Individuals teaching in distant centres were not so careful and had probably put into writing in their private copies certain dialectal varieties which in the life-time of the Holy Prophet they were permitted to recite orally. Hence it was to secure the purity of the text of the Holy Quran that other copies were ordered by Othman to be destroyed. It was a most judicious and most necessary step. Before his time even Omar had been obliged to prevent the unnecessary circulation of certain dialectic variations as in the case of Ibn Mas'ud. At all events Othman only prevented the writing of the dialectal variations, and we know it for a fact that even the Holy Prophet did not order their writing. Othman's action was, therefore, entirely in accordance with the wishes of the Holy Prophet. By the suppression of the writings containing dialectal varieties the text of the Holy Quran did not lose any thing but had its purity firmly established.

We may now consider the second objection referred to in the beginning of this article. It is alleged that the existence of certain readings which are to be met with in certain traditions and commentaries makes it uncertain which is the original and the revealed text and that thus the purity of the text of the Holy Quran is destroyed. Now whatever the nature of the readings referred to above, the one consideration which settles the absolute purity of the text of the Holy Quran as in our copies of the Holy Book is that no different text is met with in any copy of the Holy Quran anywhere in the world. During all the ages and in all the countries with all differences there has been only one text. Not a single one of the alleged various readings has ever replaced any word of the current text anywhere in the Muslim world. There are Muhammadans in countries situated farthest off from each other, there are Muhammadan people who have been separated from each other for long ages, there are Muhammadan sects bearing the utmost enmity towards each other, yet they have always followed the same text of the Holy Quran and not a single copy can be produced with a varying text. All that is claimed for the other readings is that some great man used to recite certain words in that manner. Even supposing such reports to be true, it does not follow that these readings were a divine revelation, not even that the reciters themself-

ves considered their readings to be the Divine revelation. For if the reciters had actually recited them and considered them to be parts of the Divine revelation, there was nothing to hinder them from writing their copies of the Quran in the same manner. If temporal authority could not or did not interfere with their peculiar recitals, there is no reason to believe that it could or did interfere with these peculiar copies, and to-day we would have had many such copies in circulation in the Muslim world. But strangely enough there does not exist a single copy varying from the received edition in the slightest degree. The text is in all cases the same and thus the variety of readings in no way detracts from the value of the purity of the Quranic text.

Let us now consider the nature of the readings. It should be borne in mind that the readings of which traces are met with in certain reports and commentaries are not identical with the dialectal variations permitted by the Holy Prophet though they may contain some of the latter. It is a great error to confuse the two. But this error has been committed by some owing to the confusion arising from the circumstance that the various readings were considered to be seven which number corresponded with the seven dialectal varieties. So far as I have pondered over this subject, the various readings may be dealt with under the following heads. Firstly, there are the dialectal variations. Othman could not stop their recitation. Though, therefore, these varieties ceased to affect a wider circle, they could not at once come to an end. Some of these must have been preserved in reports by the admirers of those who used them and by others for the sake of curiosity. With a few exceptions it is difficult to say now which of the readings now existing belong to this class. It has been pointed out by some that those readings which do not agree with the writing of the Quran belong, if authentic, to this class. but this is a mere conjecture. Indeed it does not concern us to know which readings may be brought under this head, for as we have seen they have never been considered parts of the text of the Quran. Secondly, there are differences in the number of *wāos* , (meaning 'and') and some other such unimportant differences in the number of one or two other letters not affecting the meaning in the slightest degree. Thirdly, apart from the necessity of dialectal variations there may have been some revelations in whose case an optional reading differing from the text which has been safely preserved to us may

have been permitted. Readings belonging to this class can be accepted only on the highest authority and the trustworthiness of the tradition must be clearly established. There can be no objection to the existence of such readings, but neither is it necessary for a reader of the Quran to know them, for the text is complete even without them. Such readings, if traced with certainty to the Holy Prophet, are considered to have the value of an authentic tradition in explaining the meaning of the text. Fourthly, a number of readings has been introduced by misapprehension of an expository word or phrase as part of the text of the Holy Quran. Some companion might have explained a word when reading the Quran by some other word or phrase or he might have noted it on the margin of his copy of the Holy Quran which some hearer of his words or reader of his copy mistook for a part of the text of the Holy Quran. The copies of the Quran we possess are free from all such mistakes as has been shown above, for the greatest care was taken by Abu Bakr and Othman in the collection and copying of the Holy volume and with them were associated all the other companions. Fifthly, there are said to be certain readings introduced after Othman had sent the official copies to various directions. The original writings are said to have been without dots and without vowel-points, and this is stated to be the reason of certain differences in readings having arisen in different centres. It is further asserted that these different readings were actually followed in reciting the Quran by reciters in different centres, each one thinking his reading to be the only true reading. There are two very strong objections to this theory which do not permit us to believe in its truth. In the first place if the Quran was publicly recited in different ways in the different centres, and at each centre a peculiar reading was considered to be the only right reading and as such actually the true text of the Holy Quran, why were not these readings made to supplant at that centre the text of the Quran as we now have it? Why were not these readings introduced into the copies of the Quran? Is it not strange that the copies of the Quran made and circulated at a particular centre continued to follow the original text while their text was not followed in reciting or teaching or learning the Quran? What use did the writing serve in such a case, and why did not those very men make their copies of the Quran tally with their recital? Certainly they had

nothing to fear from the authorities, for the authorities according to the supposition, did not interfere with their public recital of the Quran and their publicly teaching it in a different manner. Hence there was no reason that persons who believed a certain reading to be the true reading and followed the same in their prayers or in teaching the Quran to others should not introduce these readings into their copies of the Quran. But as no copy of the Quran with a text differing from ours is ever known to have existed, we may be sure that no such readings were ever publicly promulgated.

The second objection to the above theory is that if at different centres different readings of the Quran had been followed and taught, these differences should have at least in oral recitation become permanent, and we would have had to-day a different version followed, not only in every different country, but also in every important city of even a single country, and thus we would have to-day no two persons belonging to two different countries or towns agreeing in the same reading. But do we find this to be the case as a matter of fact? Not at all. On the contrary take any two Muslims who can recite the Quran from the most distant places and they will be found to be following the same one text, the text that we have in our copies. Hence we cannot believe that at some earlier time different readings were followed by different reciters in different centres. If such differences had existed, their scope would have widened day by day and they could not have vanished all of a sudden. But their utter absence to-day shows that different readings of this class never existed, or if they existed, they were never considered even by those who favoured them to be part of the Divine revelation to supersede the text, but only as possible alternatives by adopting which the meaning was not changed.

It should also be borne in mind that writing was not the only means to preserve the text, so that the possible want of dots and vowel-points in the copies of Othman should have left the text undecided. Memory was another safe repository in which the text of the Holy Quran was preserved with the utmost care, and when recited from memory, no uncertainty or doubt of any kind was left. Therefore, side by side with writing, memory also

guarded the text, and the combined evidence of the two could not leave the least doubt. There were even in the life-time of the Holy Prophet many reciters of the Quran, that is to say, men who could repeat the whole of the Quran from memory, and their number fast increased with the spread and progress of Islam. At every centre of learning there were hundreds of the reciters and thus there were ample means to decide any moot point concerning the text if a doubt ever arose.

It should also be noted that the number of readings alleged to have been reported by earlier authorities was very small, and the great mass of readings like the great mass of traditions developed later. This is a very significant circumstance, as it shows that the number of authentic readings must be insignificantly small. The number of companions and *tabi'in* (immediate followers of the companions) who are mentioned to have reported readings is very small, but after them came a generation who made recitation their profession and multiplied the number of readings. Therefore it is only on the highest and most trustworthy authority that any reading can be accepted and it would then have to be seen to which class that reading belongs. The mere circumstance that a reading can be traced with certainty to a companion or an earlier authority does not show that it is part of the Divine revelation. But the one point which is certain and which is the only point which is practically needed to be settled is that whatever the nature of a reading the purity of the text of the Holy Quran remains unassailed.

As regards the readings of the last class, so far as I have pondered over the circumstances, I think that they were put forward as possible alternatives which did not substantially affect the meaning of the text. This appears to be the only reasonable conclusion when all the circumstances are considered and especially when it is borne in mind that these readings never supplanted the text which was always followed when the Holy Quran was recited on any important occasion, as for instance in public prayers, or when by transcribing copies of it permanence was meant to be given to it. An example would better serve my purpose. The *Fatiha* is one of the chapters which is repeated by every Muslim at least thirty-two times a day in his five daily prayers. It is a short chapter of seven very short verses,

and there is no doubt, that the companions had heard it so often repeated by the Holy Prophet that not the least doubt as to any word or letter of it could be entertained. But even in this chapter a number of readings is given. For instance, take the word *málik* in the phrase *Malik-i-Yaum-id-dín* (Lord of the Day of Judgment.) Other readings of this word are said to be *Malik* and *Malaka*, the first meaning 'King,' and the second, 'he became the Lord.' If we adopt the first reading the meaning would be King of the Day of Judgment which is the same as the Lord of the Day of Judgment. By adopting the second reading the meaning becomes, 'He became the Lord of the day of judgment.' Thus the varieties of readings are only possible alternatives as suggested by this or that authority by adopting which no change was caused in the significance. No sensible person would hold that in such a short chapter repeated so often every day, the Muslims had at any time any doubt as to how the Holy Prophet himself read this or that word or as to what was the text. This example would serve to show that the large number of alleged readings has nothing at all to do with the text of the Holy Quran.

The above discussion conclusively settles the true significance of the word "readings" when applied to the Holy Quran and the true nature of such readings. The term reading does by no means imply here what it generally implies. The existence of a reading generally makes the text uncertain but not so in the case of the Holy Quran. No differences, no error or imperfection exists in the manuscripts of the Quran and they are all unanimous as to the text of the Holy Book. The readings arose from circumstances which did not affect the text in the slightest degree and that text remains as pure and unaltered to this day as if not a single reading existed. In fact the term reading in this case has a significance totally different from that which it conveys when applied to other codices, as for instance to the codices of the Jewish or the Christian scriptures. The copies of the Quran throughout the world are free from all differences, errors, imperfections, interpolations or wilful corruption, and they have ever remained free from all these defects during the thirteen centuries that have elapsed since the first promulgation of Islam.

The Plague and Prophecy.

(By M. Sher Ali, B.A.)

The havoc which the plague is working in India, especially in the Punjab, is appalling. Every attempt to cope with the epidemic has proved an utter failure. The people are now at the mercy of the pestilence, it may rage or abate at its will, it fears no human interference. But one thing which strikes me most is that the people in spite of being scourged with bitter severity are still indifferent as to the real cause of this visitation. This indifference of theirs is not due to the fact that there are no means to ascertain its cause. There are sufficient means to know the cause of the prevalence of the disease and they lie within every body's reach, but the world is so apathetic that it does not even care to know the secret of the prevalence of the epidemic.

My object in writing this is to draw the attention of the public to the real cause of the plague, a cause which is not far to seek. I must state at the outset that I am not going to discuss the physical causes of the disease for that is the work of the doctors. My object here is to draw the attention of the public to the cause that lies behind the physical causes. I am going to discuss why God brought about the disease.

The Quran on the Plague.—To come abruptly to my subject, I must tell the reader that in the Holy Quran we find the cause of the plague stated in plain words. In the chapter entitled the Naml (Ant) we read the following prophecy with reference to the latter days:

إِذَا وَقَعَ الْقَوْلُ عَلَيْهِمْ أَخْرَجْنَا لَهُمْ دَابَّةً مِّنَ الْأَرْضِ تُكَلِّمُهُمْ أَنَّهَا الْقَوْلُ
 كَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا لَا يُوقِنُونَ “When we will bring out for them an animal from the earth which shall wound them, for the people did not believe in our signs.” Here three things are mentioned; firstly, that a punishment shall be inflicted on the people; secondly, that the punishment shall be brought about by means of an animal that shall be produced from the earth and that shall wound the people, and thirdly, that the cause of the punishment shall be the rejection of the signs of God. The same prophecy is made in another verse of the Holy Quran which runs as follows: وَإِنْ مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ أَلا نَحْنُ مُهْلِكُوهَا

قبل يوم القيمة او معذبوها عذبا شديدا كان ذالك في الكتب مسطورا
 (بنی اسرائیل) "There is no habitation, but We will either totally
 destroy it before the Day of Resurrection comes, or will inflict on it
 a painful torment; it is written in the Book" (Beni Israil). But
 verse foretells a general disaster which shall visit this earth in the
 latter days and which shall spare no human habitation, totally
 destroying some and inflicting a painful torment on others. This
 it does not necessarily mean that every human dwelling on the
 face of the earth shall be visited with punishment, for according to
 the Quranic idiom it may refer only to all places in a certain part of
 the world. But it is not improbable that every place on the face of
 the earth should be visited with Divine vengeance. This is a grand
 prophecy which is being fulfilled in these latter days through the
 instrumentality of plague germs which come out of earth and are
 wounding men. What is meant by the rejection of the signs of
 God other verses of the Holy Quran make perfectly clear.
 وما كنا مهلكي القرى حتى نبعث في امها رسولا يتلو عليهم آيتنا وما كنا
 (القصاص) "We are not going to des-
 troy habitations until We raise in one of them, which may be
 regarded as their mother, a Messenger who should recite to them
 Our signs and We are not going to destroy habitations, but when
 the habitants thereof are transgressors" (Al-Qasas). In this verse
 we are told that no general punishment is sent down on earth until
 a Messenger is raised to invite men to God and to show them
 heavenly signs. But when the world rejects those signs and persists
 in its evil courses, the Divine wrath overtakes the transgressors.
 This clearly shows that the general havoc which it is said will be
 brought about by means of the plague in the latter days shall not take
 place until a Messenger is raised to show heavenly signs to the people,
 and that the signs, the rejection of which it is said shall bring down the
 disaster on the people, shall be shown by that Messenger. There are
 also other verses of the Holy Quran which corroborate the foregoing
 conclusions. For instance we have in Beni-Israil ما كنا
 معذبين حتى "We are not going to send down punishment until We
 raise a Messenger." Again لاخذنا اهلها "We never sent in
 any habitation a prophet, but seized the people thereof with disease
 and famine so that they might turn to God in humility" (Al-Araf).

All these verses clearly show that God never sends down a general havoc until he first raises a Warner. Thus the conclusion to which these verses lead us is that the punishment, which, it is said, will be inflicted on the world in the latter days through the instrumentality of plague germs that shall come out of the earth and wound men for their rejection of the signs of God, must be preceded by the appearance of a Warner who should show heavenly signs to that generation on whom the punishment is to be inflicted. As to who that Messenger is to be we are not left in the darkness. The Holy Prophet told us in plain words that in the latter days when the earth shall be filled with iniquity and transgression, God shall raise a Messenger from among his followers whom He shall call Messiah inasmuch as he shall be the last link of the chain of his successors, as Jesus, the Messiah of the Jews, formed the last link in the chain of the successors of Moses, the great Israelite Law-giver. Thus as on the one hand we infer from the verses of the Holy Quran that a Messenger must appear in the latter days to warn a generation on whom a general punishment is to be inflicted, so we learn from the words of the Holy Prophet that a Messenger will be raised in the latter days and that he shall be called the Messiah and Mahdi.

The Holy Prophet on the Plague.—The Holy Prophet told us not only that a Messenger would be raised in the latter days to warn the world, but we also learn from his words that in the days of that Messenger there shall appear a plague which will spread over a great part of the world, if not over the whole of it, and we also learn from the words uttered by him that God will create a worm in the necks of men as a punishment for the people in answer to the prayers of that Messenger and his followers. The words of the Holy Prophet, may peace and blessings of God be upon him, run as follows:—

1.—“There are angels on the gates of Medina; the plague and the *dajjāl* shall not enter it” (Mishkat, Chapter on Medina). Here the plague and the *dajjāl* are mentioned side by side, showing their contemporaneousness. But the *dajjāl* is to be a contemporary of the Messiah, for it is the latter who will destroy the power of the *dajjāl*. This shows that the plague also shall appear in the days of the Promised Messiah. The tradition also shows that the plague, like

the *dajjāl*, shall spread over a great part of the world, if not over the whole of it.

2.—“Then the Prophet of God, Messiah, and his companions shall pray, so God will send on them (the persecutors of the Messiah) a worm in their necks and they will become dead like the death of a single man. Then the Prophet of God, Messiah, and his companions shall go to the land and shall not find in the land even a span of ground, but it shall be filled with their bad odour and foul smell” (Mishkat, chapter on the signs of the approach of the Day of Judgment.) Here a severe epidemic causing speedy death is clearly prophesied as a sign of the second advent of Christ. The *worm in the neck of men* contains a clear reference to the present plague and besides serves as an explanation of the word دابة (animal) occurring in the Quranic prophecy. The words of the Holy Prophet establish one fact beyond all doubt, viz., that the general disaster predicted by the Holy Quran as taking place in the latter days through the instrumentality of دابة الارض (an animal to be produced from the earth) which according to the Holy Quran must be preceded by the appearance of a Messenger is identical with the plague which, the Holy Prophet said, would prevail on earth, and as the plague is caused by certain germs which take their birth in the earth and wound men, there is no doubt left as to the fact that the animal referred to in the Holy Quran and the insect spoken of by the Holy Prophet are identical with the plague bacilli. The Holy Quran says that in the latter days there shall be sent down on the world a general punishment and that the earth shall give to a birth دابة من الارض which shall wound the people for denying the signs of God and that at such general punishments are not sent until a warner is raised, and the Holy Prophet told us that a Warner would be raised in the latter days and that the world would be visited with plague and that a disease shall be sent down on them as a punishment. If we compare the words of the Quran with those of the Holy Prophet, no doubt is left as to the identity of the subject. Thus in the Holy Quran we find a prophecy which is corroborated by the Holy Prophet and which is fulfilled in these days.

One may ask here what proof there is that Ahmad is the Messenger of the latter days. I would say in reply that there is every

proof of his being the Promised Messenger. He has come with his signs and has proved his claims with the most cogent arguments. But I need not detail here the arguments and the signs of his truth, for this sign which forms the subject of my article, *viz.*, the appearance of the plague, is alone sufficient to establish his truth. This was a great sign which was to appear after the advent of the Promised Messenger and what was said thirteen hundred years ago has come to pass exactly as foretold. There was no sign of plague when Ahmad first announced his claim as Promised Messiah. But the plague, which was to serve as a sign of his advent and the bringing about of which was beyond the power of the claimant for whose truth it was to serve as a sign, made its appearance in due time. Is this not a sufficient evidence for the truth of Ahmad's claims? But if a sceptic is not satisfied with this much, I have still more shafts in my quiver and I believe he will be soon convinced, if he has the slightest regard for truth.

Ahmad's Prophecies of the Plague.—It is not only in the Holy Quran and in the words of the Holy Prophet that we find a prophecy for the appearance of plague as a sign of the messenger of the latter days. But we find the messenger himself prophesying to that effect long before there was any sign of plague in this country. In his famous work entitled the *Barahin-i-Ahmadiyya*, published more than a quarter of a century ago, he published many of his revelations which contained prophecies of great events which were to take place in time to come. Among these revelations from God, we find one on page 519 which runs thus: *انت مبارك في الدنيا والاخرة* : *i.e.*, "Thou art blessed in this world and in the next ; diseases among the people and His blessings, verily thy Lord does what He wills." This revelation not only predicts the prevalence of disease among the people, but also makes the prophecy emphatic by adding that God shall carry out His will, thus pointing to God's determination to bring about the fulfilment of the prophecy. What the words 'his blessings' signify I will explain further on. On page 568 of the same work we find another revelation bearing on this subject. It runs thus, *من دخله* : *He who will enter it, shall come under protection and shall be safe.*" This revelation refers to a mosque which forms a

part of his house and it predicts a great peril which impended over the country from which, it was prophesied, his house would afford shelter. That this revelation referred to the appearance of plague will become clear when I come to another revelation of the Messiah later on.

In 1888 he published a manifesto inviting the world to enter into his *baiat* and swear repentance on his hands. The manifesto contains a revelation from God which commanded him to invite men to accept his *baiat*. That revelation is very important. It predicts a great deluge, like the deluge of Noah, which would over-run the country and commands him to build an Ark. It was on the basis of this revelation that he issued the manifesto inviting men to accept his *baiat*. The deluge has actually come and has swept over the country, and how an entrance into his *baiat* serves as an Ark I will discuss later on. It is needless to point out that the revelation did not mean that the country was about to be deluged with water, for it was not a boat consisting of planks and boards that the Messenger was ordered to build, and, therefore, the deluge prophesied in the revelation could not mean a deluge of water, but a great calamity which was about to smite the country and which might be compared to Noah's deluge. That the plague now raging in the country is nothing short of Noah's deluge, no body can question. Hence we must admit that this prophecy which spoke of a deluge has come out to be true. The original words of the revelation are as follows ا صنع ا لفلک با عیننا و ا و جینا و لا تخا طبنی فی الذین ظلموا انهم مغرقون "Build an Ark before Our eyes and in accordance with Our revelation. Do not address us with regard to those who have transgressed, for they are to be drowned."

Again when in 1311 A.H. or 1894 A.D. in the month of Ramazan both the moon and the sun were eclipsed on the dates fixed in a prophecy of the Holy Prophet and thus a great sign was shown on the heavens in support of the claims of the Promised Messiah, he published a work called the Noor-ul-Haq, Part II. On page 38 of that book we find a plain prediction of the plague now prevailing in the country. Speaking of the solar and the lunar eclipse in the month of Ramazan, which took place on the dates fixed in the Muslim prophecies and which served as a sign of his advent, the author writes:—

فما صل الكلام ان الكسوف والخسوف آيتان مخوفتان وان ذال اجتماعا
فهو تهديد شديد من الرحمن واشارة ان العذاب قد تقرر واكد
i.e., "The sum and substance of what I have
said above is that the solar and the lunar eclipses are two signs
of warning and their taking place in one and the same month is a
severe admonition from God and a sign that the torment has been
settled and fixed by God for the transgressors." In these lines a
torment is plainly predicted and it is added that God is determined
on sending down this torment and that nothing can now prevent it
from being sent down. Thus we find in these words a clear and
emphatic prophecy for a torment, which, it is said, is in store
for the people and which cannot be averted.

Again in his work called the *Hamamatul Bushra*, published in
1894 A.D., we find the following lines on page 97 of the book :—

فلما طغى الفسق لمبيد بسيله
تمنيت لو كان الرباء المتبر
فان هلاك الناس عند اولى النهى
احب واولى من ضلال يخسر

i. e., "When I saw the land deluged with sin, I prayed that there
might appear a destructive plague, for the death of the people is in
the eyes of the wise, far better than, and preferable to, a sinful life."
This prayer was published long before there was any sign of the
plague in the country. This is interesting for two reasons. These
lines not only contain a prayer for a *destructive plague* in the country,
but also remind us of the words of the Holy Prophet who said that
God shall send down a plague on men in response to a prayer of
the Promised Messiah. Now we have here exactly what the Holy
Prophet said. The Promised Messiah prayed for destructive plague
and Almighty God has afflicted the country with a destructive
plague in response to his prayer. This makes a person, no matter
which creed he professes, exclaim involuntarily 'Great must be the
Prophet who made this prophecy 1,300 years ago and great must be
the man whose prayer has been so readily responded to by God.'
These facts not only prove the truth of both the Holy Prophet and
the Promised Messiah, but they also prove beyond all doubt the
existence of God. Who told the Holy Prophet of Arabia, 1300 years
hence, that the Promised Messiah would pray for the appearance of a
destructive plague and that his prayer would be heard and who is it

who has brought a destructive plague into existence in response to the prayer of the Promised Messiah. Everybody must admit that none but God could do this. No other argument is needed to convince an atheist of the existence of God. If there is an atheist, first lay before him the words of the Holy Prophet that were uttered more than thirteen hundred years ago, then confront him with the two lines that I have quoted above from the Hamamatul Bushra and lastly draw his attention to the destructive plague that is now raging in the country in fulfilment of these prophecies and ask him 'who else but God could bring about all this?' These are facts which none can deny and I cannot see how an atheist can deny God in spite of the convincing proof of the existence of God which the above prophecies and their fulfilment afford. There is something more. The words of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم even dispose the cause, I mean, the physical cause of the plague. Certain germs are said to be the cause of the plague and modern science has proved the truth of these words of the Holy Prophet. How could the Holy Prophet know this unless he had been told by a Supreme Being from whom nothing is hidden. In short, even if the Promised Messiah had made no other prophecy except the one contained in the two pairs of lines quoted above, these lines alone were sufficient to show that the present plague was a sign of the truth of his claims. It must be remembered that acceptance of prayer is one of the signs which he offers to the world as a proof of his claims and in this case we have a very remarkable instance of acceptance of prayer and a clear sign of his truth.

Again in his work entitled the *Sir'aj-i-Muneer*, published in 1897, we find him predicting the prevalence of plague in the country in clear words. Speaking of the murder of Lekh Ram which took place in exact accordance with a prophecy published five years previously, and referring to the undeserved honour which the Arya Samajists bestowed upon the victim of the prophecy and to the fact that in his revelation Lekh Ram was called a calf in allusion to the fact that he would be honoured and, as it were, worshipped by his admirers as the calf was worshipped by the Israelites, the Promised Messiah writes on page 59 of the book above named:—

"God says in *Sura Ardf* 'verily those who have taken the calf (as their idol) will be smitten with the wrath of God and will be dis-

graced in this very world and *similarly* *We reward the liars,*' the last sentence contains a reference to the calf-worshippers of to-day, viz, those who so extol the new calf, Lekh Ram, as if he was an idol of theirs and have gone so far as to make up their minds to injure and even murder others. There is nothing hidden from God. He knew that the Hindus too will so extol Lekh Ram as to treat him as a calf (idol) and therefore he used the word *similarly*, to denote that a similar punishment is to be meted out to every one who sets up a calf for worship like the calf-worshippers of the house of Israel. From Exodus, xxxii, 35, it appears that God plagued those who had made the calf. I also received a revelation from God which bears upon this very subject and which says يا مسيح الخلق عدونا 'O the Messiah of the world, pray to God for the removal of this pestilence.' A prophecy relating to the outbreak of plague is also recorded in my work, the Barāhin-i-Ahmadiyya." The foregoing lines contain a plain prophecy of the prevalence of plague in this country. The Promised Messiah not only infers this from the words of the Holy Quran, but also quotes his own revelation which speaks of the outbreak of plague and the ultimate turning of the people to him, begging him to pray for the removal of the plague.

Again on 6th February, 1898, on the even of the outbreak of the plague in the Punjab, he issued a manifesto, seriously warning the people against the impending plague. This manifesto bore the heading of plague and contained the following prophecy based on a vision as well as a revelation of his. "There is an important matter to which my sympathy has prompted me to draw the attention of the public and for which, I am sure, I will be ridiculed by the thoughtless. But it is my duty to disclose it to the people beforehand. To-night (6th February 1898) I saw in a vision that the angels of God were planting dark plants in the various places in the Punjab. The trees were very ugly, black, hideous and stunted. I asked some of the planters what kind of trees they were. They replied that they were the trees of plague which was about to break out in the Punjab. I do not well remember whether he said the plague would break out in the next winter or after it, but what I saw was a very fearful sight. I have already received a revelation from God which bears upon the plague and which runs thus ان الله لا يغير ما بقوم حتى

القرية i.e., "God is not going to remove the external plague until the people purge their minds of the internal plague of sins." The manifesto ends with a few Persian verses in which the impending plague is depicted in its true colour. I give below the translation of some of these lines:—"If my dear friends had seen what I see, they would have repented with eyes shedding tears of blood. The brilliant sun is darkened on account of the wickedness of the people (reference is to the sign of solar eclipse spoken of above) and the earth brings forth plague to warn the people. The coming tribulation resembles the tribulation of the day of judgment and there is no remedy for it but righteous deeds. I have told you out of sympathy and you should take care of yourselves. This is the time to profit by wisdom, O ye that are wise and prudent." This warning was published in the Punjab at a time when the whole of the province was free from the plague, with the exception of a very few villages, where the plague had only sprung up and where it could be stamped out by resorting to proper measures. But in fulfilment of the prophecy contained in the foregoing lines, the plague spread throughout the Punjab with unparalleled virulence.

There are other prophecies of the Promised Messiah which bear upon the outbreak of the plague, but those which I have given above are sufficient to convince a man that the Promised Messiah published plain and clear prophecies of the outbreak of the plague long before there was any sign of the plague in India or anywhere in the world. Thus not only the Holy Quran and the Holy Prophet spoke of the prevalence of a general and continued epidemic in the time of the Messenger of the latter days, but even that Messenger himself foretold the appearance of the pestilence in clear words and thus there is no doubt that the plague has appeared as a sign of the Promised Messiah. The books and notices I have referred to are available and every body can satisfy himself as to the correctness of my references and quotations.

The Bible on the Plague.—I may also refer here to a prophecy in the New Testament with reference to plague. When the disciples asked Jesus: 'what shall be the signs of thy coming,' he replied: 'nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there shall be famines and pestilences and earthquakes in divers places.'

Not only there are pestilences, but also every other sign mentioned by Jesus is fulfilled in so remarkable a manner that no body can deny its fulfilment. But whenever a reference is made to these signs, the Christian missionaries in India, notably one Akbar Masih of Banda, grow hot and begin to foam with rage. These, it is asserted, are only premonitory signs and Christ must appear after these things come to pass and not before their fulfilment. These gentlemen seem to think that this prophecy of Jesus is the sole support for the mission of Ahmad, and that if it is deprived of this support, it will fall to the ground and hence it is that they fall foul with every man who refers to that prophecy as a sign of the truth of Ahmad. They must know that we do not at all depend on this prophecy. I have given the New Testament the last place in order to show to the Christian missionaries that it is not on Matthew that we depend for a prophecy of plague. The prophecy is given in the Quran, it is repeated in the words of the Holy Prophet and it is proclaimed in the works of the Promised Messiah, so that we do not at all depend on Matthew or any other Gospel writer. The existence of this prophecy in Matthew does not add any thing to the strength of our position, nor will it detract aught from it, if we suppose the prophecy as non-existing in the Christian Scriptures. We thank God that we are not left to depend on Matthew, Mark or Luke for the prophecies referring to the signs of the second coming of the Messiah. If we refer to these books, the Christians should feel thankful that we give them the credit of certain true prophecies that are fulfilled in these days. As to the prophecy of plague, it should be borne in mind that the prophecy occurs not only in Matthew, but also in the Holy Quran, and the sayings of the Holy Prophet and the writings of Ahmad. In the three last named sources the plague is represented as breaking out after the advent of the claimant to Promised Messiahship, and if there is anything in the source first named to show that it was to break out before the appearance of the Messiah, we must call it an *error* of the reporters. The prophecies of the Holy Quran, of the Holy Prophet and of the Promised Messiah have been fulfilled, and, therefore, we are bound to declare them as true, and if there is anything in Matthew which goes against these, it must be condemned as error, for facts falsify it. The past sacred history also supports the Holy Quran, the Holy Prophet and the Promised Messiah, for

it proves that such chastisements are always inflicted after a warner has made his appearance and warned the people. Occasional epidemics may appear as a punishment for the sins of the people without a warner being sent to them but such continued, terrible and varied disasters cannot inflict the human race unless there appears first a messenger to warn the people. Which among the Christians can declare that the tribulation that is depicted in the New Testament as marking the second advent of the Messiah can take place without a Holy Messenger being raised by God to admonish the people? Do the laws of God as revealed in the past support this? Does common sense justify this? Do the Christian missionaries mean to say that Christ would make his appearance after the human race has been all but totally destroyed by pestilences, earthquakes, wars and famines, for the tribulation described in the New Testament is nothing short of this. Would Christ come to tread over ruined cities, and heaps of rotten bodies and to wade through rivers of human blood? Would he come to sound his trumpet on a deserted Earth. In short, nothing is more foolish than to suppose that Christ will appear after all these things shall have taken place. The only safe course for the Christians to adopt is that if Matthew said anything showing that these disasters shall have ruined the world before Christ comes, they must call it an error on the part of Matthew. If they do not do so, the time is not very far when they shall have to reject the whole prophecy as false. No body can deny that the prophecy of Jesus concerning pestilences, earthquakes, famines and wars is being fulfilled in a very remarkable manner. Even if we take the view of Matthew, Christ must appear shortly, he must be at the doors. But if Christ does not make his appearance now, if years roll on and centuries pass away but no trumpet is sounded in the heavens, no host of angels is seen descending with the prince of glory at their head, the Christians shall have to cry in despair 'Oh,' foolish fellows we have been! Our Lord came in disguise as a thief comes in the night, but only the watchful recognised him, those who had oil in their lamps and were awake saw him, Matthew deceived us, we saw the signs, but we kept our gaze fixed on the heaven, expecting every moment that our prince would soon appear with hosts of angels. He did come with hosts of angels, but his hosts were not visible to our eyes and his music was not audible to our ears. In short we do a favour to Christianity when we

include the Gospel prophecy among true prophecies and we do Christ an honour when we mention his words along with those of our Holy Prophet and our Holy Ahmad, but if the Christian missionaries do not like this, we quite willingly throw away his prophecy as worthless, but the Christians must remember that they themselves shall have to reject it as false, if they insist on saying that all these things must precede the advent of Jesus.

They know that the words of Jesus were not recorded at the time when they were uttered and that they were committed to writing years after their utterance and there was every possibility of some error creeping into the prophecy.

I have quoted enough to show that the Holy Quran, the sayings of the Holy Prophet and the works of Ahmad contain prophecies concerning the outbreak of plague as a sign of the Promised Messiah, and there is no doubt as to the fact that the prophecies have been clearly fulfilled and that their fulfilment is a sign of the truth of Ahmad's claims to Promised Messiahship. I will now proceed to show that there are other considerations also which prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that the appearance of the plague is a sign of the Promised Messiah.

Ahmad's prophecy regarding his house.—The first of these considerations which lead to the conclusion that the plague has appeared as a sign of Ahmad's truth is his prophecy concerning himself and his house. He has more than once announced the fact that not only he himself but every one that lives in the four walls of his house will be safe from plague. He says that this promise of protection for all that live in his house is a sign for the people to show that it is for his sake and in answer to his prayers that God has sent down the plague. This announcement of his is based on a revelation which runs thus: *انى ا جا فظ كل من فى الدار* "I will protect every one that is in the house." We are seeing the fulfilment of this prophecy every day. The plague has appeared at Qadian more than once and even the houses adjacent to his house have been affected with plague, but no one in his house died of it. His house is always overcrowded for it is not his own family only that lives in the house, but even the families of many of his followers and servants have taken up their

abode in his house to seek protection from plague. He never quits his house during the prevalence of plague, but even invites as many of his followers as his house can hold to come and live in his house. Besides, when plague breaks out in the neighbouring villages, the mosque that forms a part of his house daily receives large crowds of people from the plague-infected villages who come to him to shake hands with him and to beg him to pray for them. But in spite of all this his house has always been free from infection. He says, if it is possible thus to predict protection for one's self and for one's house, let any body else publish a similar prediction concerning himself and his house, and God will surely destroy that house in order to bear testimony to his truth. Many houses may be spared by plague, but no body can predict such a protection for himself as well as for his house. Merely to be spared is a thing quite different from being spared in conformity with a prophecy published beforehand; there is a sign in the latter case, while there is no sign in the former case. It was to this protection that the revelation *من دخله* "whoever enters it shall be safe," published in the Barahin-i-Ahmadiyya referred.

Ahmad's Prophecy regarding Qadian.—Another consideration that leads to the same conclusion is Ahmad's prophecy concerning his village, Qadian. His revelations which refer to his village are as follows:—

1. *انهم اوى القرية* "Verily God will shelter the village."
2. *لو لا الاكرام اهلك المقام* "Had it not been out of regard for your honour, this place would have been totally destroyed."
3. *انى احافظ كل من في الدار* "I will protect everyone that is in the house."

The word *اوى* used in the first revelation signifies a protection afforded to one after one has actually been involved in a trouble. The usage of this word in the Quran amply supports this signification. Take for instance the verse which speaks of Jesus, his mother and runs thus *وأويناها الى ربوة ذات قرار ومعين* "And we afforded them both shelter in a lofty (mountainous) place which abounded in fountains and means of comfort." This verse

refers to Kashmir where Jesus sought shelter after the event of crucifixion. Now who does not know that Jesus was actually involved in trouble and he was given shelter after he had been nailed to the cross and subjected to a good deal of pain and torture? Thus the word **اوى** used in this verse signifies a protection which was afforded to Jesus after he had actually been afflicted with pain. This word is also used of our Holy Prophet in the following verses : **اَلَمْ يَجِدْكَ يَتِيْمًا فَاَوْى** 'Did He not find thee an orphan and protect thee? Here the word **اوى** is used to denote a protection which was afforded to the Holy Prophet after he had been made an orphan. Thus it is clear that the word **اوى** denotes a shelter which is afforded after one is actually involved in trouble. Thus the first revelation which contained the word **اوى** did not promise a total freedom from plague. On the other hand, it foretold that the village would be actually afflicted with plague, but at last God would grant it a shelter and save it from total destruction. This explanation of the word **اوى**, it should be remembered, is not an after-thought, but this signification of the word was pointed out by Ahmad in his writings before the revelation was fulfilled, *vide* the Dafi-ul-Bala, page 5. The remaining two revelations pointed to the same thing. The second revelation rays: 'Had it not been out of regard for your honour, this place would have been totally destroyed.' This revelation meant that the village deserved to be totally destroyed, but that God would save it from complete destruction because it was the abode of the Promised Messiah. From this revelation it also appears that many villages will be totally destroyed with plague. Qadian, being the residence of the bitterest foes of Ahmad and the boldest transgressors, deserved to be included in the category of villages that were to be completely ruined, but God saved it from total destruction out of regard for Ahmad's honour. The third revelation, which says 'I will protect every one that lives in thy house' also showed that the village was to be visited with plague, but the house of the Promised would be granted complete protection. One thing is worth noting. The word used to denote the protection to be granted to the Promised Messiah's house is **احفظ** while that used to signify the protection to be vouchsafed to the village is **اوى**. The use of two different words in the two revelations is significant. The word used in the

revelation referring to the village is *اوى* such means that the village will be actually afflicted but ultimately saved; while the word used to denote the protection to be granted to the Promised Messiah's house is one which denotes complete protection. Another word used with reference to the Promised Messiah's house in another revelation quoted elsewhere is *امن* which means 'peace.' Neither of these words is used with regard to the village. In accordance with this prophecy, Qadian was afflicted with plague, but it was not destructive and God at last granted shelter to the village.

The Ark — Another consideration which leads to the conclusion that the appearance of the plague is a sign of the Promised Messiah is his prophecy with regard to his followers. He has published a small book called the *Noah's Ark*. It contains the teachings of the Promised Messiah and therein it is said that such of his followers as will act upon those teachings shall be safe from the plague. His revelation which bears on this subject is *ان الذين آمنوا ولم يلبسوا ايمانهم بالظلم ابليسوا* "For those who believe and do not mix their faith with any kind of iniquity there is peace and it is they that are the guided." Another revelation bearing on this subject is *اگ سے مجھے مت ڈراؤ اگ میری غلام بلکہ غلاموں کی غلام ہے* "Do not threaten me with fire (the plague), the fire is my servant, nay, it is a servant of my servants (true followers)." Thus a protection from plague is promised to his followers, but merely a lip-belief, unaccompanied by a true following in the footsteps of Ahmad, does not make one deserving of this immunity. A question may be asked here, if every one of his followers is not to be saved from plague, if some of his followers are as liable to plague as others, how is it to be decided that the appearance of the plague is a sign of the Promised Messiah? Before I answer this question, I ask, how do you decide that a certain remedy is efficacious? Do you declare only that remedy as efficacious that proves effective in *all* cases or even that which proves effective in *most* cases? Anti-plague inoculation was introduced as the best preventive for plague, but before it was introduced as such, had it proved itself an effective remedy in *all* cases? No, certainly not. So judge this remedy as you judge other remedies. If those who submit to this spiritual inoculation enjoy a

comparative safety, you must declare the remedy as effective. It is certainly the most effective, I should say, the only effective, remedy, but in order to try it, you must take the full dose of it. If those who taste it and do not take the full dose prescribed, die of plague, the cure can not be blamed. Does a small drop of water quench one's thirst or a little bit of bread satisfy one's appetite? If you judge this remedy as you judge all other remedies, you will find that those who use or profess to use this remedy enjoy a far greater safety than other communities. The plague has appeared at Qadian more than once, but the Ahmadis have by the grace of God remained practically safe from it, while the leading Arya Samajists have been all swept away by plague—a striking contrast which should not be ignored. God could indeed save each and every follower of the Promised Messiah, but such a course was not only against His law, but was even likely to lead to many evil results. If every man who accepted or professed to accept the Promised Messiah, had been a proof against plague, then all kinds of men, out of a desire to seek protection from plague, would have entered his sect. Even the *badmashes* of the worst type would have sought this refuge, but this would have seriously interfered with the purity and integrity of this sect. This is God's beloved propaganda. He does not wish that it should be made corrupt or impure in any way in the very beginning.

Ahmad suggests another way of testing the efficacy of this remedy. The plague, he says, instead of working havoc among his followers shall only tend to greatly augment their number and at the end the world shall see with surprise that the plague, while it has greatly diminished the number of other communities has only been the instrument of swelling the ranks of the Ahmadiyya sect. If the plague does not decrease the number of the sect, but on the other hand, it is found that there has been an amazing increase in the number of the Ahmadis during the prevalence of the plague, it will be a clear proof of the fact that the plague has appeared for the good of the sect or, in other words, that it is a sign of the Promised Messiah, especially when it is seen that the pestilence has worked havoc among other communities and done an irreparable loss to their number. So this increase in the number of the Ahmadis will be a sure test that the spiritual inoculation to which they submitted has been very

effective and has proved a great blessing for the sect.

I think I have now written enough to show that the appearance of the plague is a sign of the Promised Messiah. The prophecy is found in the Holy Quran, the Holy Prophet announced it, and lastly, the Promised Messiah published prophecies one after another predicting the plague in clear words. He also boldly announced that not only he himself, but all those that lived in his house, would enjoy perfect security from plague, that his followers in general would be conspicuous for the comparative protection from plague they would enjoy, and that there would be an amazing increase in the number of his followers during the prevalence of the plague so that it might be a sign that the plague had appeared to bear testimony to the truth of his Mission. Prophecies in the Bible too give plague as one of the signs of the second advent of the Messiah. All these facts prove conclusively that the plague has appeared as a sign of the Promised Messiah. The facts I have stated are all undeniable and the proof which they afford of the plague being a sign of the Promised Messiah is conclusive.

The end of the plague.—The end of the plague is yet distant. That which is to follow, says the Promised Messiah, is to be much worse than that which has already taken place. 'Towns and cities, lying in ruins, shall draw tears from the eyes of the beholder,' says one of his recent revelations. 'There shall appear in Europe and other Christian countries a kind of plague which shall be very severe,' such are the words of another recent revelation of his. 'In the state of Kabul there shall die about 85,000 men,' says a third revelation. But the end must come, though it may be yet very distant. *يا تى على جهنم* i.e., 'There shall come on this hell (viz., the plague, a time when there shall be none in it. This revelation of the Promised Messiah gives the glad tidings of the times when the plague shall totally disappear from the earth. But how is the plague to disappear? The revelations of the Promised Messiah which foretold the appearance of the plague long before there was any sign of the pestilence in this country, also told how the plague was to disappear. The following are some of his revelations. *والله لا يغير ما بقوم حتى يغيروا ما* i.e., God is not going to remove the plague until the people purge their hearts of the pestilence of sins. *يا مسيح الخلق عدوانا* O

Messiah of the world, come to our assistance and pray for the removal of the epidemic." با و لی ا لله کذت لا ا عرفی The earth is represented as saying "O Friend of God, I did not recognize thee before." All these revelations foretell that a time is coming when the nations of the earth, being scourged with these visitations, shall at last open their eyes, and recognise the Messenger who is now in their midst, but whose existence they now ignore, and shall turn to him crying 'O Friend of God, we did not recognise thee before. Now come to our assistance and pray for the removal of these visitations.' It shall be then, and not till then, that the plague will disappear from the earth. Another revelation recorded in the Barahin-i-Ahmadiyya which bears on this subject runs thus : انت مبارة رک فی الدنیا "Thou art blessed in this world and in the next; Thou shalt remove the diseases of the people with divine blessings, verily thy Lord can do what He willeth." These words were revealed to the Promised Messiah more than a quarter of a century ago and contained a double prophecy. On the one hand, they predicted diseases and plagues among the people, and on the other hand, suggested the way by which they could be removed. As one part of the prophecy is clearly fulfilled, we can safely conclude that the other part of the prophecy must also be fulfilled. For those who entertain doubts as to the fulfilment of these promises, God adds 'verily thy Lord can do what He willeth.' Commenting on this revelation and other revelations of this class, the Promised Messiah writes in his book, the Siraj-i-Muneer, page, 59. "See how long it is since these things were revealed to me and God knows when they will be fulfilled. There is a time now when men die by my prayers (reference is to his prayer for the death of Lekh Ram, which was offered at the persistent request of the said Arya himself that it might be a sign of the truth of Islam) and there shall come a time when people will be saved through my prayers." I have said what I had to say; let the reader ponder over it.