

Book Review

Thomas Patrick Hughes (1885). A Dictionary of Islam. London: W. H. Allen & Co. 750 Pages.

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Thomas Patrick Hughes (1838-1911) was a British Anglican missionary who served under the auspices of the Church Mission Society in Peshawar in British India (now Pakistan) for 20 years. Noted for his facility with languages, Islamic scholarship and contributions to the completion All Saints Memorial Church in Peshawar. “*A Dictionary of Islam*” is a cyclopaedia of the doctrines, rites, ceremonies, and customs, together with the technical and theological terms, of the Muhammadan religion. He noted the aim of the book as follows: The increased interest manifested in relation to all matters affecting the East, and the great attention now given to the study of comparative religion, seem to indicate that the time has come when an attempt should be made to place before the English-speaking people of the world a systematic exposition of the doctrines of the Muslim Faith. The present work is intended to supply this want, by giving, in a tabulated form, a concise account of the doctrines, rites, ceremonies, and customs, together with the technical and theological terms, of the Muhammadan religion (p. v).

The book entitled “*A Dictionary of Islam*” includes an item of “Qur’an”. There are following subtitles under the title of “Qur’an”: I. The Inspiration of the Qur’an; II. The Collation of the Qur’an; III. The Divisions of the Qur’an; IV. The Contents of the Qur’an and the Chronological Arrangement of its Chapters; V. Sources of the Qur’an; VI. The Recital and Reading of the Qur’an; VII. The Interpretation of the Qur’an; VIII. The Abrogation of Passages in the Qur’an; IX. The Reputed Excellence of the Qur’an, and its Miraculous Character; X. Commentaries on the Qur’an; XI. Editions and Translations of the Qur’an; and XII. The Opinions of European Writers on the Qur’an. Hughes included the opinions of George Sale, Edward Henry Palmer, Stanley Edward Lane-Poole, John Medows Rodwell, and Francis Joseph Steingass about the Holy Qur’an in the last section of the book. Herein, we summarized these European writers’ opinions about the Holy Qur’an, quoted from “*A Dictionary of Islam*”

George Sale (1697-1736) was a British orientalist scholar and practicing solicitor, best known for his 1734 translation of the Qur’an into English. In 1748, after having read Sale’s translation, Voltaire wrote his own essay “*De l’Alcoran et de Mahomet*” (“On the Qur’an and on Mohammed”). François-Marie Arouet (1694-1778), known by his nom de plume Voltaire was a French Enlightenment writer, historian, and philosopher famous for his wit, his criticism of Christianity—especially the Roman Catholic Church—and of slavery, as well as his advocacy of freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and separation of church and state. Sale, in his Preliminary Discourse, noted the following paragraph:

The style of the Koran is generally beautiful and fluent, especially where it imitates the prophetic manner, and scripture phrases. It is concise, and often obscure, adorned with bold figures after the Eastern taste, enlivened with florid and sententious expressions, and in many places, especially where the majesty and attributes of God are described, sublime and magnificent; of which the reader cannot but observe several instances, though he must not imagine the translation comes up to the original, notwithstanding my endeavours to do it justice (p. 523).

Edward Henry Palmer (1840-1882), was an English orientalist and explorer. One of his chief writings is a translation of the Qur’an for the Sacred Books of the East series. In introduction of the Qur’an, Palmer noted the followings:

The Qur’an is written in rhetorical style, in which the clauses are rhythmical though not symmetrically so, and for the most part end in the same rhyme throughout the chapter.

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The Arabic language lends itself very readily to this species of composition, and the Arabs of the desert in the present day employ it to a great extent in their more formal orations, while the literary men of the towns adopt it as the recognized correct style, deliberately imitating the Qur'an. That the best of Arab writers has never succeeded in producing anything equal in merit to the Qur'an itself is not surprising (p. 524).

Stanley Edward Lane-Poole (1854-1931) was a British orientalist and archaeologist. Poole was from a famous orientalist family. From 1897 to 1904 he had a chair as Professor of Arabic studies at Dublin University. One of his chief books is Lane's Selection From the Kuran. Mr. Lane-Poole said the following about the Holy Qur'an in introduction section of his book.

It is confused in its progression and strangely mixed in its contents; but the development of Mohammad's faith can be traced in it, and we can see dimly into the workings of his mind, as it struggles with the deep things of God, wrestles with the doubts which echoed the cavils of the unbelievers, soars upwards on the wings of ecstatic faith, till at last it gains the repose of fruition. Studied thus, the Kuran is no longer dull reading to one who cares to look upon the working of a passionate troubled human soul, and who can enter into its trials and share in the joy of its triumphs (p. 524).

John Medows Rodwell (1808-1900) was an English clergyman of the Church of England and an Islamic studies scholar. Rodwell's Qur'an translation (The Koran) was first published in 1861. Mr. Rodwell noted the following paragraph in introduction of The Koran:

The contrast between the earlier, middle, and later Suras is very striking and interesting, and will be at once apparent from the arrangement here adopted. In the Suras as far as the 54th, we cannot but notice the entire predominance of the poetical element, a deep appreciation (as in Sura xci.) of the beauty of natural objects, brief fragmentary and impassioned utterances, denunciations of woe and punishment, expressed for the most part in lines of extreme brevity. With a change, however, in the position of Muhammad when he openly assumes the office of "public warner," the Suras begin to assume a more prosaic and didactic tone, though the poetical ornament of rhyme is preserved throughout (p. 525).

Francis Joseph Steingass (1825-1903) was a British linguist and orientalist of German Jewish descent. He published a number of Persian-English, Arabic-English and English-Arabic dictionaries. Below is Dr. Steingass's opinion about the Holy Qur'an. He quoted from the book of "On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History" written by Thomas Carlyle, a Scottish cultural critic, essayist, historian, lecturer, mathematician, philosopher and translator. He also quoted from Christoph Ludolf Ehrenfried Krehl (1825-1901), a German orientalist. Krehl studied theology and philology at the University of Leipzig, where he attended lectures by Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer on Arabic, Persian and Turkish philology. One of Krehl's published works is "Das Leben Des Muhammed By Ludolf". The following paragraphs were also included in the *Risale-i Nur Collection*, a body of Qur'anic commentary exceeding six thousand pages, by Said Nursi (1877-1960), a late Ottoman scholar and the founder of the Nurculuk movement.

We may well say the Qur'an is one of the grandest books ever written, because it faithfully reflects the character and life of one of the greatest men that ever breathed. "Sincerity," writes Carlyle, "sincerity, in all senses, seems to me the merit of the Koran." This same sincerity, this ardour and earnestness in the search for truth, this never-flagging perseverance in trying to impress it, when partly found, again and again upon his unwilling hearers, appears to me as the real and undeniable "seal of prophecy" in Muhammad (p 527). Let us not forget that in the book, as Muhammad's newest biographer, Ludolf Krehl expresses it, "there is given a complete code of creed and morals, as well as of the law based thereupon. There are also the foundations laid for every institution of an extensive commonwealth, for instruction, for the administration of justice, for military organization, for the finances, for a most careful legislation for the poor: all built up on the belief in the one God, who holds man's destinies in His hand" (p 527).

Sublime and chaste, where the supreme truth of God's unity is to be proclaimed; appealing in high-pitched strains to the imagination of a poetically-gifted people, where the eternal consequences of man's submission to God's holy will, or of rebellion against it, are pictured; touching in its simple, almost crude, earnestness, when it seeks again and again encouragement or consolation for God's messenger, and a solemn warning for those to whom he has been sent, in the histories of the prophets of old: the language of the Qur'ān adapts itself to the exigencies of every-day life, when this every-day life, in its private and public bearings, is to be brought in harmony with the fundamental principles of the new dispensation (p. 528).

Here, therefore, Qur'ān's merits as a literary production should, perhaps, not be measured by some preconceived maxims of subjective and aesthetic taste, but by the effects which it produced in Muḥammad's contemporaries and fellow-countrymen. If it spoke so powerfully and convincingly to the hearts of his hearers as to weld hitherto centrifugal and antagonistic elements into one compact and well-organised body, animated by ideas far beyond those which had until now ruled the Arabian mind, then its eloquence was perfect, simply because it created a civilized nation out of savage tribes, and shot a fresh woof into the old warp of history (p. 528).

Consequently, the book of "*A Dictionary of Islam*" included much many vocabularies, names, items, and expressions related to Islam. I think that researchers interested in lexicography and Islamic history and those who are curious about the ideas of Western thinkers who lived in the 19th century about Islam and the Qur'an can benefit from this book.

