

commentators. Yet such a warning as this makes him only the more anxious to master the commentators. He sees that the corruptions of a religion or of a code are an essential portion of its history. He feels that, thoroughly to understand the history and working of Islam, he must know, not only what the Prophet meant, but what his followers in successive ages have taken him to mean. And he is perhaps inclined to be indignant at finding any whole class of men described as 'vicious scoundrels.' He knows something of the controversies of Christendom, of the additions and perversions with which disputants of one sect or another have overwhelmed the original purity of the faith. He knows something of the history of law in European countries, of the strange subtleties and the frequent wrongs which have sprung from the perverse ingenuity of lawyers, Roman, English, or any other. Yet he knows perfectly well that it would be utterly unfair to set down either the theologians or the lawyers of any age, sect, or country in Europe, as being, in the mass, 'a set of vicious scoundrels.' Nay more, if a religious and civil code has been for ages expounded by a set of vicious scoundrels, the mere fact is surely remarkable in itself. Such a fact must also have had a most important effect on the condition and history of the nations who have so long followed such unhappy guidance. The repulsive picture thus drawn of the Mahometan commentators makes us only the more anxious to know something about them. But we feel that, without giving up more time than we can afford to make from still more important matters we must be content to abide in ignorance.

This is the kind of difficulty which is met at every step by those who lay no claim to the character of professed Oriental scholars, but who wish to gain that knowledge of Eastern matters without which they feel that their knowledge even of Western matters is very imperfect. Yet they must thankfully acknowledge that a class of Oriental scholars has arisen, whose writings take away not a few of the difficulties in their path. We cannot forbear, even in passing, from paying a tribute of gratitude to such

works on Oriental history as those of Malcolm, Elphinstone, and Erskine. As to our own immediate subject, German scholarship may well be proud of such works as those of Weil and Sprenger, and English scholarship of the great work of Sir Wm. Muir. We can hardly fancy a book better suited to our purpose, from our own point of view, than the clear and business-like volume of Dr. Weil. In the larger work of Dr. Sprenger a purely Western scholar may sometimes get bewildered with an Eastern scholarship which is too deep for him; he may sigh for something like order and method, and he may sometimes wish that the results were set forth with somewhat less of what he may be tempted to call irrelevant and undignified sprightliness. He may also perhaps be inclined to see in his guide somewhat of a disposition to know more than can possibly be known. Yet he will none the less admire the prodigious stores of knowledge which Dr. Sprenger has gathered together—stores especially rich in collateral information touching the Prophet's companions and contemporaries. The work of our own countryman is a noble monument of research, thought, and criticism. Yet even here we sometimes feel that the author leads us just deep enough into the matter to make us wish to go deeper. We doubt here and there whether Sir William Muir has always bodily carried out his own canons of criticism, and we long for time and opportunities to test his authorities for ourselves in detail. We feel sure that, beneath the destroying hammer of Sir George Lewis, nay, in the hands of writers much less unbelieving than Sir George Lewis, whole generations and ages of alleged early Arabian history would pass away from the domain of unascertained history into the domain of ascertained legend. And we cannot help seeing that Sir William Muir's earnest and undoubting faith as a Christian man has sometimes stood in his way as a critical historian. A man may surely be a good Christian without bringing in the Old Testament genealogies as historical documents from which there is no appeal; and when Sir William Muir hints his belief that in some parts of his career Mahomet was the subject of what we may call