

Selections.

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION A TENET OF MAHOMETAN ORIGIN.—We are indebted to a very valuable pamphlet, by the Rev. J. Gallagher, now in press, on the "Immaculate Conception," for the following curious information:—

That this notion had its beginning with Mahomet, is established by the following authorities:—

Gibbon, vol. v., p. 108, Harpers' edition, writes:—"The Latin Church has not disdained to copy from the Koran, the Immaculate Conception of his virgin mother." In a note he adds: "It is darkly hinted in the Koran, c. 3, p. 39, and more clearly explained by the tradition of the Sonnettes, Sales' note, and Maracci. Tom. ii. p. 112. In the 12th century the immaculate conception was condemned by St. Bernard as a presumptuous novelty. Fra. Paolo, Isteraidel concilio 1, 11.

The passage in the Koran to which Gibbon refers, is this: "Remember when the wife of Imram said, Lord, verily I have vowed unto Thee that which is in my womb, to be dedicated to *thy service*; accept it, therefore of me; for Thou art He who heareth and knoweth. And when she was delivered of it, she said: Lord, verily, I have brought forth a female (and God well knew what she had brought forth,) and a male is not a female. I have called her Mary; and I commend her to your protection, and also her issue, against Satan driven away with stones."

The last paragraph is the one regarded as containing the doctrine we are considering. Upon it, Sale has the following note:—"This expression alludes to a tradition, that Abraham, when the Devil tempted him to disobey God, in not sacrificing his son, drove the fiend away by throwing stones at him; in memory of which the Mahometans, at the pilgrimage of Mecca, throw a certain number of stones at the Devil, with certain ceremonies in the valley of Mina.

It is not improbable that the pretended Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary is intimated in this passage. For, according to a tradition of Mahomet, every person that comes into this world is touched at his birth by the Devil, and therefore cries out, Mary and her son only excepted; between whom, and the evil spirit, God placed a veil, so that his touch did not reach them. And for this reason, they say, neither of them was guilty of any sin; like the rest of the children of Adam; which peculiar grace they obtained by this recommendation of them by Hannah to God's protection."

Imram and Hannah were the parents of Mary, according to the Mahometans.

Sale refers to the leading Mahometan commentators, Jaddaloddin, Al Beidawi and Kifada as his authorities.

The Sonnettes, to whom Gibbon alludes above, are thus described by Irving in his life of Mahomet, p. 349. "Besides the Koran or written law, a number of precepts and apologies which casually fell from the lips of Mahomet were collected after his death, from ear witnesser, and transcribed into a book called the Sonna or oral law. This is held equally sacred with the Koran by a sect of Mahometans, thence called the Sonnettes." We thus learn that the doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary, was held to be contained in the Koran by its orthodox interpreters. That this is part of the Mahometan creed, is evident also from the statements of two other standard writers.

Forster in his able and interesting work, entitled:—"Mahometanism unveiled," vol. i., p. 366, enumerates among the doctrines of this religion, "our Lord's incarnation of a pure Virgin, by the immediate power or spirit of God; alleging him, further, to have been begotten after the similitude of Adam's creation, whom God called into being from the dust. His immaculate conception. His sole exemption, the blessed Virgin only excepted, from the touch of Satan or stain of Adam's transgression."

"Mahometan tradition, though more vague and undefined, is not without example of approximation to the truth; its recognition of the fall in particular, may be seen in that ascertained tenet of orthodox Mahometans, already hinted at, that of the whole human race, two persons only, Jesus-Christ and the Virgin Mary, were exempt from the touch of original sin," p. 393.

The learned Gagner, in his life of Mahomet, p. 89, writes:—"Il est certain que par ce mot de *farideau*, qui pesoit sur la dos de Mahomet, les interpretes entendoient une tache, ou une goutte noir, qui est le source due perche dans la coeur de l'homme, ou, comme nos theologiens parlent, LE PECHE ORIGINEL contracte en Adam. Pêche auquel Mahomet, du consentement meme de tous ses sectateurs, avoit participe

comme tous les autres hommes; et dont personne n'etoit exempt que Marie et son FILS JESUS."

This in English is as follows: "It is certain that, by this word *farideau*, which fell from the back of Mahomet, his interpreters intend a stain or black drop which is the source of sin in the heart of man, or, as our theologians speak: ORIGINAL SIN contracted in Adam. Sin in which Mahomet, by the consent of all his followers, had shared like all other men; and from which no person had been exempt, but Mary and her, SON JESUS."

The biographers of Mahomet have recorded his miraculous purification by the ministry of the Angel Gabriel, from the stain or burden of original sin. Irving thus narrates the legend, p. 85: "At the age of three years, while playing in the fields with his foster brother, Masroud, two angels in shining apparel appeared before them. They laid Mahomet gently upon the ground, and Gabriel, one of the angels, opened his heart, but without inflicting any pain. Then taking forth his heart he cleansed it from all impurity, wringing from it those black and bitter drops of original sin, inherited from our forefather Adam, and which lurks in the hearts of the best of his descendants, inciting them to crime. When he had thoroughly purified it, he filled it with faith and knowledge, and prophetic light, and replaced it in the bosom of the child."

Strange as it may appear, that the doctrine which the Church of Rome has promulgated, with so much pomp and ceremony, for "the destruction of all heresies, and the confirmation of the faith of her adherents," should have had its origin in the Mahometan Bible; yet, the testimony of such authorities as Gibbon and Sale, and Forster, and Gagner, and Maracci, leave no doubt as to the marvellous fact.

PIETY IN THE CAMP.—It is extremely interesting to read the letters from the Crimea; not only from the valour, fortitude and patience exhibited in our army, but specially from the deep piety which appears in so many of both officers and privates. We have not space to print any of these letters at full length, but we give a few extracts casually taken from one letter as a specimen. Where death comes to so many, and in most instances with such sudden stroke it is a great blessing that there are such numbers of Christian men to bless their comrades with the means of grace.

"On piquet, the other night, I was gazing upwards at the bright moon and stars, thinking of the power and love of Him who made them, and of the star in the east which came and stood 'over where the young child lay.' And the Saviour's sorrows and sufferings from Bethlehem to Calvary, passed in review before my mind. This afternoon, while speaking to our poor fellows in the Cholera Hospital, who were lying ill and comfortless on the ground, rays of sunshine seemed to illumine that chancel tent as I brought the crucified Saviour before these men, for tears glistened in many an eye, and the smile of hope and peace was on many a lip.

"The weather is rainy again; but I have a pretty good tent, and the rain that finds its way through the roof is capital for drinking! We are expecting every day to meet the enemy in open field; or to storm the fortress; I wish they could go at it at once. Be not anxious about me, I am safe in the arms of my Saviour; I feel it—I know it—in life, or in death.

"Owing to the weather, we were unable to have Divine service to-day with the division, but several of us met together in the tent, and we shall again this evening please God. On my return from the trenches, last night, I found great comfort in reading the 1st chapter of the 1st Epistle of St. Peter, although, as soon as I had finished it, I went off to sleep like a top. I looked after my company, and saw them as 'comfortable as adverse circumstances admitted,' and afterwards made them a little speech around their bivouac-fire, combining, as well as I could, religious advice with a few words about our duties as British soldiers. The poor fellows cheered me long and loud.

"I had very little trouble with them since we came—less to be far than I hear of from others. I know they like me, and would do anything for me; and all officers who treat soldiers like men, with feelings like their own, and take an interest in their welfare, find they do not want many court-martials, nor see much insubordination. Yet I am very strict with them, but thus they get used to it.

"About ten o'clock, I read by firelight with—the 23rd, 90th, and 91st Psalms, and derived great benefit and peace from them. One of my brother officers came up to warm himself while I was reading, and begged me to go on. God grant that he may soon find

"a dwelling in the secret place of the Most High," even in the heart of the Lord Jesus, and be able to say, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I will not fear what man can do unto me." I went to sleep securely, resting on Jesus my precious Saviour. My bed was made of dried leaves, with a stone for my pillow; and had it not been for the biting cold, I should have slept like a top."

SUNDAY IN THE CAMP.—We find the following picturesque and striking passage in a recent letter from the Crimea:—

"Yesterday being Sunday, the routine was broken by the impressive ceremony of an open air church parade. Each division, on these occasions, has Divine service performed by its own chaplain. Ours was drawn up on the rising ground, just beyond the tents, in a dense hollow square. The clergymen and officers occupied the centre. Every one was covered. Some of the men wore forage-caps, for lack of shakos; and on dit that the loss of these stiff and ugly varieties of head gear is submitted to with great resignation by the line generally. The chaplain, with his dark velvet skull-cap and black moustache and beard, reminded me of a foreign padre in canonicals.

"We were scarcely placed in position, before the loud rush of round shot from the fort was heard; again and again, in our ears, causing sundry dislocations of the square—the men grinning and swaying about at each whirl in a kind of jocular disorder. Nothing was left for it but to move off.

"So we took up ground a few hundred yards lower down, and here—through a fleecy little cloudlet, which announced its birth in a thunder-clap, showed that a shell had burst above us, not very far off to our rear—the service was conducted to a close. Everybody of course stands on these occasions throughout the ceremony. To obviate fatigue, therefore, the Litany and Communion are omitted. The chaplain preached extemporaneously, and with so excellent a voice, that though the wind was blowing his surplice about, it did not drown his tones. I was amused by his British sang froid. Half his congregation might perish round the walls of Sebastopol before the next church parade—a theme which the threatening missiles exploding about him, would have served sufficiently well to enforce, but he utterly disdained such obvious rhetoric. Perhaps, indeed, it is considered undesirable to make allusions of the kind; and certainly they are too potent to need much insisting on. At any rate, the reverend gentleman neither noticed the pyrotechnics in his sound practical sermon, nor in his own person; but stood with his back to the fort, and preached on some every day text, and never changed his voice or turned his head in compliment to either shot or shell."

INTERESTING ARCHÆOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES AT SIDON.—A letter from Beirut, in Syria, in the New York Journal of Commerce gives an account of some interesting archæological discoveries at Sidon. It appears that there is a current belief that vast treasures are buried there, being deposited (probably for safety many, many centuries ago; and it was in searching for these—some small portion of which have been found—that the discoveries in question were made. The letter says:—

"On the 9th of January last, some men were digging for more hid treasure in an ancient cemetery on the plain of Sidon, called *Mugharat Tybtoon*, when at the depth of about twelve feet below the surface, and near the walls of an ancient edifice, they uncovered a sarcophagus, upon the lid of which there is a large Phœnician. The lid is of a blue, black marble, intensely hard, and taking a very fine polish. The lid is eight feet long, by four feet wide. The upper end is wrought into the figure of a female head and shoulders, of almost a giant size. The features are Egyptian, with large, full, almond-shaped eyes, the nose flattened, and lips remarkably thick, and somewhat after the negro mould. The whole countenance is smiling, agreeable, and expressive, beyond anything I have ever seen in the disinterred monuments of Egypt, Nineveh. The head dress resembles that which appears in Egyptian figures, while on each shoulder there is the head of some bird—a dove or pigeon—and the bosom is covered by what appears to be a sort of cape, with a deep fringe, as of lace.

On the lid, below the figure head, is the inscription, consisting of twenty-two long lines, closely written. The letters are in perfect preservation, and can be read with the utmost ease and accuracy, and the whole forms by far the longest and most perfect inscription yet discovered in this most ancient language and character. It appears to be mainly a genealogical his-