

MAHOMET.

THE appearance in the English tongue of a defence of the Mahometan religion from the hand of one who on the one hand claims a lineal descent from the Prophet, and on the other hand has been enrolled in an English order of knighthood, is a mark of the drawing together of East and West which would have seemed impossible a generation or two back. And it marks that drawing together in its best form. It is something new for a professor of Islam, evidently devout and learned according to his own standard, to stand forth and challenge European and Christian thinkers on their own ground. It is a sign of a new spirit among thoughtful Mahometans, when a writer of their religion no longer shuts himself up within the old barriers of his exclusive creed. The bidding of his Prophet and forefather to make ceaseless war upon the infidel is carried out by Syed Ahmed Khan in a new shape. The faith can no longer be spread over new realms at the sword's point; but new fields of conflict, and therefore of possible triumph, are laid open. It is to the credit of the followers of Islam if they are learning, as the author of this book clearly has learned, that it is a false policy for a system which can no longer spread itself by temporal weapons to withdraw itself into sullen isolation. Our Syed takes a far worthier course, and one which shows a far truer faith in his own religion, by trying to show that that religion need not shun the light, but that it dares to stand forth and meet other systems face to face on the arena of free inquiry. The mutual contempt of Christian and Moslem has been largely the result of mutual ignorance. It has largely been the result of each side seeing the other in its worst form. And the fashion of glorifying one particular Mahometan power, which has prevailed by fits and starts for

some years, as it certainly does not rise out of any deep knowledge of Islam and its history, is not likely to tend to any fair and reasonable interchange of ideas between Mahometans and Christians.—Such a book as that of Syed Ahmed opens to us a new world. Few Europeans have any notion of the vast mass of theological literature which has gathered together at the hands of Mahometan divines, of the vast mass of commentaries of which the Koran has become the centre. It is possible that in some cases Western controversialists might find their antagonists in the East somewhat stronger than they might expect. But at all events they may be surprised at finding the war carried into their own country. Syed Ahmed is evidently not afraid of meeting either Christian divines or European scholars on their own ground. He is certainly not free from that contempt for the Infidel which seems inherent in the Moslem character, and which is, we suppose, specially becoming in a descendant of the Prophet. The Syed is ready to acknowledge, and to acknowledge with thankfulness, any instances where his great forefather has received favourable or even just dealing at the hands of European writers. Still, on the whole, he looks down on his Christian antagonists. And he looks down on them with a sort of contemptuous pity as his intellectual inferiors, as men less thoughtful and less well-informed than himself. Such a state of mind is certainly not the best for engaging in controversy; but on the other hand, it is certainly not the worst. Syed Ahmed, as we hold, over-rates his own knowledge and his own powers of reasoning, as compared with those of his Christian opponents. But by so doing he admits that the question is a matter for reason and inquiry; and, after all, our Mahometan controversialist