‘disobedience’ (>sin).

Despite these shortcomings the translation is a useful attempt and is sure to cater to the needs of non-Arabic-knowing scholars and lay intelligentsia who cannot utilize the original text.

KARACHI

A. Q. MUHAMMAD AL-ANSARI


This is the 23rd volume in the series ‘Ethical and Religious Classics of East and West’. The author Martin Lings is a Sufi in charge of Arabic books in the British Museum. He is an English convert to Islam and bears the Muslim name of al-Ḥājj Dr. Abū Bakr Serāj ad-Dīn. He is also the author of “The Book of Certainty”—a short introduction to Šūfism published by Rider and Co., London 1952. The book deals with the life, personality, teachings and the spiritual heritage and legacy of the celebrated Algerian Sufi Shaykh Ahmad al-‘Alawi of Mustaghanem (1869-1934), who was reported to have had more than two lakhs of disciples spread over the various Zāwiyyahs all over North Africa, Damascus, Aden, Addis Ababa, Marseilles, Paris, La Hague and Cardiff.

Hitherto research on Islamic mysticism has been confined to the lives and works of early and medieval Sufis, but as the twentieth century, despite its materialistic advance, is not devoid of spiritualism, it is refreshing to read a book on the life and works of a modern mystic of Islam.

In the Preface, the author mentions that the present volume formed the main part of a doctoral dissertation approved by the University of London for the degree of Ph.D. The book is divided into two parts—part one is entitled “The Path and the Order” and consists of four chapters, while part two is captioned “The Doctrine” and has eight chapters. The work has also two appendices, the first being a list of the Shaykh’s sixteen works, both published and unpublished and the second giving his “spiritual chain”. The book has two indices, one of persons, titles, places etc. and the other of Arabic terms occurring in the book. It also has five plates, two of them showing the Shaykh al-‘Alawi in about 1930 and 1905, The third illustration exhibits the supreme Name “Allāh”, the fourth a page from the Holy Qur’an, and the last one is a pencil-drawing of the Shaykh done from memory some years after his death by the author of “Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts.”

The book is based on first-hand sources until recently inaccessible to the general reader. The author has utilized both the Shaykh’s own writings and the works of other persons who had come into contact with him, as also collected information from those who had met the Saint in person.

The book opens with an English translation of the wonderfully vivid account of the Shaykh by a French physician, Dr. Marcel Carret, who had set up his clinic at Mustaghanem where the former resided thus having frequently come into closer and more intimate contact with the Shaykh as he had known him, avoiding any personal appreciation of his doctrine or discussing his ideas, and
thereby the Shaykh stands all the clearer and truer to life. Dr. Carret has to be thanked for his sincerity, his simplicity of narration and straightforwardness. It is indeed a vivid pen-picture of the Shaykh during the last fourteen years of his life.

The second chapter headed “The Reality of Sufism” is one of the most important chapters of the book but, in our opinion, this should have been placed first as a sort of introduction, being a general discussion on the Islamic origins of Sufism, thereby avoiding the present interruption of the Shaykh’s biography once it had been started. This chapter brings out the author’s masterly grasp of Sufism and his penetrating insight into its origins. He has established positively the Qur’anic origin of Sufism by quoting chapter and verse from the Holy Qur’an and the Hadith thereby refuting the assertion of Western Orientalists that Sufism derives from non-Islamic sources. Amongst the modern Orientalists, the late L. Massignon was the foremost who established by historical research, the Islamic origin of Sufism and summed up the results of his inquiry in his doctoral dissertation “Essai sur les Origines du Lexique technique de la Mystique Musulmane”, Paris 1922. The author has, however, quite correctly pointed out even Massignon’s understatement in this respect. Criticizing Massignon he says: “Massignon was probably not thinking of verses like these, and almost certainly not of the revelationary and therefore mystical ‘fabric’ of the Qur’an as a whole, when he wrote: ‘Contrary to the Pharisaical opinion of many fuqahā’ (canonists), an opinion which has been accepted for the last sixty years by many Arabists, I have had to admit, with Margoliouth, that the Qoran contains real seeds of mysticism, seeds capable of an autonomous development without being impregnated from any foreign source’ (La Passion d’l-Hallāj, p. 480). But even from the point of view in question, that is, simply considering the Qur’an as an exposition of doctrine and practice, Massignon’s verdict, though relatively refreshing, is an understatement…”

The author has quoted many verses of the Qur’an demonstrating that in “certain passages where the impact of the Qur’anic ‘substance’ is given a particular direction by the impact of the meaning there lies, virtually, the entire path of the mystics.” Similarly, he has stated that the full range of Sufism, as it has shown itself to be throughout the centuries, lies summed up in the well-known Hadith: “My slave ceaseth not to draw nigh unto me with devotions of his free will (i.e. the devotions in addition to the obligatory legal minimum) until I love him; and when I love him, I am the Hearing wherewith he heareth, and the Sight wherewith he seeth, and the Hand wherewith he smiteth, and the Foot wherewith he walketh” (al-Bukhari, Riqā’ : 37). He has thus come to the conclusion that “it is, therefore, scarcely possible to speak of any development, after the death of the Prophet, as regards the essentials of Sufism; but during the first six or seven centuries of Islam the tension between the general down-stream drifting of the community as a whole and the upstream movement of the path produced a kind of secondary development in Sufism which is neither upward nor downward, and which did not alter the essentials in themselves, but was concerned rather with such questions as varying formulations and disciplines to suit varying needs.” He has pointed out that “many Orientalist misunderstandings have sprung from
failure to perceive the ‘horizontal’ and entirely secondary nature of this
development. For not a few of those who write on the subject, Sufism consists of
a heroic asceticism punctuated by mystical poems, treatises and paradoxical
ejaculations, none of which can be considered as an essential feature of Sufism.”
Similarly, he has refuted the unwarranted remark of Nicholson “neither he (the
Prophet) nor his hearers perceived, as later Moslems did, that the language of the
Qoran is often contradictory,” while the Qur’an inter alia, adduces as one of the
reasons of its being of Divine origin its being free from contradictoriness in the
well-known verse “why do they not ponder over the Qur’an? Had it been from
other than Allah they would have certainly found herein many discrepancies.”
Indeed this chapter makes a very valuable contribution towards understanding
the true nature of Sufism and its Islamic origin.

However, it seems desirable to point out that the attempt made by the
author to distinguish between the predominance of ‘Love’ in Christian mysticism
and ‘Knowledge’ in Sufism is neither borne out by the Holy Qur’an and the
Traditions nor by the sayings of the early eminent Shaykhs. The Holy Qur’an
not only insists on a true Muslim having the strangest love for Allah but that
there is reciprocal love between Allah and the loving Believer: cf. the well-
known Qur’anic verses “and those who believe are the strongest in love for Allah
(والذين آمنوا أشد حبا لله)’ and “He loves them (i.e. the Believers) and they love
Him (يعهم ويعوبونه).” Similarly, in another verse it has been stated, “Say: If
you love Allah, then follow me (the Holy Prophet), when Allah will love you
(قل أن كنتم تحبون الله فاتبعوني يحبكم الله)” Indeed, Iqbal has well represented
the Islamic attitude in this respect, when he said:

"If there be no Love, then Shari‘ah and religion would be reduced to an idol-temple
of mere concepts.” It may be that either the author, despite his conversion
to Islam, was not able to overcome his Christian predilection in this respect or
else he was swayed by the popular but wrong notion that no love could exist
between the Almighty Creator and the creature, as is illustrated by an interesting
event in the life of one of the most eminent Muslim mystics of the third century
of the Hijrah, Abū ‘Abd Allah Muḥammad ibn ‘Ali al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī. He was
persecuted by his adversaries for his discourses on ‘Love’ inasmuch as a complaint
was lodged with the ruler of Balkh, as a result of which an inquiry was ordered
against him and he had to give an undertaking not to discourse any longer on
‘Love’ (see his autobiography entitled ‘Budūw Shā‘n al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī’, MS.
Sā‘ib Isma‘īl, Ankara).

Chapter III gives the facts about the Shaykh’s early life as stated by
him in his incomplete autobiography, found among his papers after his death. It
was evidently dictated to one of his disciples. This autobiography mentions,
inter alia, the Shaykh’s meeting with his spiritual mentor, Shaykh Sīdī Muḥammad
al-Būṣidī and how the latter gave a spiritual “orientation to the former’s habit of
charming snakes.”

Chapter IV entitled “The Spiritual Master,” is another important chapter
of the book giving a general account of the spiritual activities of the Shaykh and
an assessment of his spiritual calibre and achievements. The author says: "From his writings, as also from the testimony of those who knew him, one has the impression of a vast and penetratingly active intelligence of which the higher or central part was utterly and eternally satisfied—he speaks of 'remaining inwardly for ever steeped in drunkenness'—and of which the circumstances, that is, the earthly or mental part, insofar as it had any respite from the demands made on him by his thousands of disciples, found ample sustenance in meditating on the Qur'an and the Traditions and in exploring some of the Sufic treatises, in particular those of Ibn 'Arabi and Jili. Moreover he was a great lover of poetry, especially of the odes of 'Umar ibn al-Farid, long passages which he seems to have known by heart." In this chapter, his practice of Khalwah, i.e., spiritual retreat in the solitude of an isolated cell or small hermitage, as part of his method of spiritual instruction has also been described.

Chapter V is captioned "Oneness of Being" (Waḥdat al-Wuḍūd). The reviewer had pointed out to the late Prof. Massignon that Martin Lings had attacked him, inter alia, in this chapter. He replied that the author stood for Waḥdat al-Wuḍūd as against Waḥdat al-Ṣuhūd. Indeed the author's treatment of the doctrine of Waḥdat al-Wuḍūd shows that he defends Ibn 'Arabi, who is followed by Shaykh Aḥmad al-‘Alawi in this respect, against criticism of this doctrine. He says: "Oneness of Being is the doctrine that behind the illusory veil of created plurality there lies the one Divine Truth—not that God is made up of parts, but that underlying each apparently separate feature of the created universe there is the One Infinite Plenitude of God in His Indivisible Totality." Since this doctrine has remained the subject of endless controversy through the ages (cf. Ibn Taymiyyah's criticism of this doctrine on moral ground and Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī's criticism on the basis of his mystical experience), it seems rather beyond the scope of this review to dwell on its merits and demerits vis-à-vis the other viewpoints. In this connection, the author has recommended the study of Titus Burckhard's "An Introduction to Sūfī Doctrine."—a book which he regards as almost indispensable to any one who wishes to make a serious study of Sūfism but does not read Islamic texts at first hand.

Chapter VI is headed "The Three Worlds." In this chapter the author has discussed the Shaykh's mystical theology especially with reference to the Divine Essence, Qualities and Actions. A small extract from the Shaykh's views will explain the title of the chapter. 'These Qualities are of three different kinds, and each group hath its own specific world. Hearing, Sight and Speech are of the World of Human Sense ('ālam al-nāsūt); Power, Will and Knowledge are of the Dominion ('ālam al-malākūt), whereas Life is of the World of the Domination ('ālam al-jabarūt), and none of them are (sic) separate from the Essence in virtue of its All-embracingness and its Transcendence over all localization.'

Chapter VII discusses some of the salient points of the Shaykh's treatise "The Book of the Unique Archetype (Al-Numūdhaj al-Farid)" which signifieth the way unto the full realization of Oneness in considering what is meant by the envelopment of the Heavenly Scriptures in the Point of the Basmalah." This title is self-explanatory.

Chapter VIII is headlined "The Great Peace". This chapter deals with the ultimate aim of Sūfism, namely, "to raise the Spirit above oneself"; in other
words, "inward Peace" which is called the Supreme Station and the means of attaining this end e.g., inward concentration and extinction (fanā'). Other allied Sufi terms like "drunkenness," "sobriety," "separation," and "union" have also been touched. Further, it it also discusses the nature of sainthood and the respective status of the Prophets, Saints and the Believers. In footnote 2 at page 166, one again finds the author's strange Christian predilection to the following effect: "An outstanding example of this rare occurrence, (viz. 'cutting off') though somewhat beyond the scope of the Islamic perspective, would seem to be the cleavage between the two natures of Christ as expressed in the last words on the Cross. If the human nature had not been momentarily 'forsaken' by the Divine Nature, the Sacrifice would not have been complete—wa 'lāhu q'llam.' This belief is contrary to the explicit Qur'ānic text which says: "And they (Jews) did not kill him (Christ) nor did they crucify him (wa 'lāhi, wa salīhū)."

Chapter IX captioned "Gnosis" is another important chapter of the book as it discusses the moot point about the possibility of the outward eye gazing at the Truth in direct vision, while still 'in this world'.

The last Chapter captioned "Selections from his poetry," gives in English verse, a remarkable translation of some poems selected from the Shaykh's Diwan.

The foregoing analysis of the book shows that it is extremely interesting as well as thought-provoking. The author seems to have poured out his heart and soul into this composition with the result that he cannot fail to move the reader. Despite French being his mother-tongue, the author's command of English is remarkable and his translation from the Arabic prose and poetry is excellent—so that it gives an impression of being an original composition. The book is well-documented and copiously annotated throughout, thereby evidencing the author's wide reading and scholarship. The style is lucid and fascinating. A remarkable feature of the book is that the author has taken great pains to explain, in the text and footnotes, all the Arabic terms and expressions, particularly the technical terminology of Sufism, used throughout the book. If the author had added a sketch-map of North Africa and the Middle East, showing the important places concerned with the spiritual activities and journeys of the Shaykh, it would have given the reader a good picture of the scenes of his operations. Similarly, some photographs of the various Zāwiyahs spread over different places of the Shaykh's spiritual influence particularly that of the mother Zāwiyah of Mustaghanem, his native place, would have been welcome.

KARACHI

Ch. ABDUL AZIZ.


This is a very welcome addition to any library or office having an academic interest in "The Middle East." It is a "must" work of reference for anyone seeking to find out, in a preliminary way, the "who," "what" and "where" of the