This is an English translation of al-Ghazzālī’s Kitāb al-‘īlm, the first part of Iḥyā’ ‘Uṣūl al-Dīn, by Nabih Amin Faris, Professor of Arab History and Director of the Arab Studies Research Programme at the American University of Beirut. He is the author of Antiquities of South Arabia (1938), The Arab Heritage (1944), and other books, twelve of them in Arabic.

The Book of Knowledge comprises seven sections. The first deals with the virtues of knowledge and teaching and learning, both from rational and the traditional points of view. The second explains the kinds of knowledge and the nature of their obligatoriness, i.e., what kinds are farāḍ ʿayn and what are farāḍ kifāyah; how far the science of juriprudence and that of Islamic scholasticism (al-kalām) are to be regarded as religious sciences; and what is the science of the Hereafter and the science of this world. The third section treats of the kinds of knowledge which people regard as religious but actually they are not so; it further investigates into what sciences are praiseworthy and what are their limits. The fourth analyses the demerits and harmful effects of polemics and the reasons why people engage themselves in it. The fifth discusses the manners and etiquette of a teacher and a taught, while the sixth reveals the traps and pitfalls of knowledge and learned men and the marks of distinction between the worldly scholars and the truly spiritual ones. The last and seventh section sets out the merits of reason, its kinds and the Traditions which have come down to us in this regard.

It would have been desirable had the translator given a summary or described the basic ideas of the Iḥyā’ ‘Uṣūl al-Dīn in his Preface. In any case, an overall interpretative treatment of the Book of Knowledge would have added to the utility of the translation. But the translator has been disappointing in this respect. He has devoted the whole of the Preface, consisting of nearly two pages, to either acknowledgments or to a description of the four texts used. Dr. Faris also expresses the hope that by his rendering the work into English, non-Arabic-speaking scholars will benefit “even from my mistakes.” Modesty apart, this statement is rather astonishing. One fails to understand how in a translation the general reader could profit by the “mistakes” which may be even misleading, as actually some of them are in varying degrees.

The translation is literal rather than literary which has marred the beauty of the text and also much care does not seem to have been taken to use correct and appropriate language for conveying the original sense. The translation is accompanied by explanatory foot-notes, references to the Qur’ān, the Hadith and other works. Dr. Faris sometimes adds his own opinions and criticism to the references in the foot-notes. These are, however, not always self-evident. For example on page 80, he says that al-Ghazzālī has forced a certain verse of the Qur’ān, as quoted by the latter, out of context. One would like to know, however, why and how al-Ghazzālī’s interpretation is forced or artificial.

Dr. Faris’ translation does, not infrequently, distort the author’s ideas by modernizing them and thereby attributing to him thoughts that were utterly foreign to him. It also suffers from the drawbacks of a completely literal
translation, namely, making it incomprehensible to the general reader and often
perveting the literary character of the original. Further, it transforms a literary
product using the normal and accepted forms of the Arabic language into a work
rendered strained and unnatural by not conforming to the style of the English
language.

It seems that Dr. Faris did not bother much about the accuracy in translating
the Qur'anic verses and the Traditions occurring in the original and this fact
also has reduced the value of his translation. For instance, the following verse of
the Qur'an (IX: 122, p. 18).

فلولا فنر من كل فرقة منهم طائفه يستفقها في الدين (9/122)
has been translated: "And if a party of every band of them march not out, it is
that they may instruct themselves in their religion." It would be difficult for
a person who does not know the Qur'anic text to understand the translation.
"Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali's translation of the said verse is quite clear: "If a contingent
from every expedition remained behind, they could devote themselves to studies in
religion."

In the same way the following Tradition—

اقدم الناس عذاباً يوم القيامة عالم، لم ينعمه، الله سبحانه وتعالله
(p. 18), has been translated as: 'the most severely punished of all men on the day
of resurrection will be a learned man whom God has not blessed with his knowledge'
(ibid.). Apparently the translation means that a learned man whom God has not
given knowledge will suffer the severest punishment whereas the purport of the
tradition is that a learned man who does not make use of his knowledge will
be the worst sufferer on the Day of Resurrection.

The translation is also poor in the matter of Islamic terms e.g. 'qab'il al-zawil'
has been translated as 'before sunset' (p. 32, l. 28) while it means before noon;
and 'ilm al-mukashafah has been translated as 'revelation' (p. 6). Revelation
is equal to 'wahi' and 'ilm al-mukashafah should be 'intuitive knowledge.'
Salaf salihin has been invariably translated as 'righteous Fathers', a phrase which
has a Christian import in the English language and is quite foreign to Islam.
'Righteous ancestors' was a better translation. At another place the translation
reads 'whose possessors have held the chief positions in the religious organiza-

The meanings of religion and religious organization are wrongly equated. The
translation of 'al-aqâ'id wa 'l-â'mâl' as 'faith and works' (p. 79, l. 8) is also not
happy. Similarly the translation of 'al-aghrâd al-fâsidah as 'in bad faith'
(p. 80, l. 1) is incorrect; 'with ulterior motives' would have been a better
rendering. The translation or 'al-âfqah' (p. 80, l. 1) as 'versatile in jurisprudence'
and of 'fatwâ' as 'ordinance' is also not very accurate.

'Profane' sciences have been described as praiseworthy (ma'hmûd), blame-
worthy (madhmûm), and permissible (mu'bâh) (p. 37). The use of the term
"profane" for non-religious sciences, which include even praiseworthy and
permissible ones, is confusing due to inappropriate translation. 'Isyân has been
translated as rebellion (p. 32, l. 8) whereas the correct English rendering for it is
'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 Šūfīsm 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