BOOK REVIEWS

‘UMAR BIN ‘ABDUL ‘AZIZ by Mawlâna ‘Abd al-Salâm Nadvi. English translated by Hadi Hassan. Published by the Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore. Pages 200, price Rs. 25/-.

‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, the famous ruler of the Umayyad Dynasty, occupies a unique position in the history of Islam. At the time of his nomination to the highest post of the Islamic state, the general condition of the Muslim world was very dismal. The religious, political, moral and cultural system of Islam had greatly deteriorated. ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz devoted his life to re-establish the Islamic system of government that prevailed in early Islam during the time of the four Rightly guided Caliphs of the Prophet. He succeeded in his efforts and saved the Islamic world from further decay. The author of the book under review has described his reforms in great details. Some of his reforms seriously affected the members of the royal family and the rich section of the society. One of these reforms was the restoration of the original status of the state lands. According to Islamic law, all conquered lands such as those of ‘Iraq and Irân were state property. But by the passage of time, the influential members of the ruling classes misappropriated large areas from these state lands. This had consequently reduced the revenues of the Bayt al-Mâl; and to make up this deficiency, extra taxes were unjustifiably levied on the general public which the Islamic law did not allow. That is why it always agitated the minds of the public. ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz restored all these usurped lands to the public treasury. His personal estate at Khaybar also fell under this category which he immediately surrendered to the Bayt al-Mâl. (p. 26) This step increased the revenues of the Government which eventually facilitated in the withdrawal of all the extra taxes. Because of his similar achievements, the Sunni ‘Ulamâ’ gave him the title of reformer and renovator (Mujaddid) of the first century. (p-113).

However, it is unfortunate that the Caliph did not care to make any permanent arrangement for the continuance of his reform movement. The present author has not discussed this vital issue. ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz considered the nomination system for the Muslim monarchs against the teachings of Islam. That is why he got his nomination approved from the general public. (p-22) Had he adopted similar procedure in respect of his successor Yazid ibn ‘Abd al-Malik-the nominee of Sulaymân ibn ‘Abd al-Malik and nominated the electee of the general public, then nobody would have discontinued his reform movement as was done by Yazid. (p-180).

The original work is in Urdu written by a famous scholar ‘Abd al-Salâm Nadvi. The translator, in addition to the translation of the original book, has added a useful introduction to the book. It narrates the main events of the life of ‘Umar which portrays his personality and briefly describes his achievements.

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