

THE FUTURE OF ISLAM

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The Future of Islam by Wilfrid Scawen Blunt

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"La taknatu addurru youthara akdaha
Lianda ahsana fi nichami wa ajnala."
"Fear not. Often perils are unstrung
To be put in better order."

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1882

PREFACE.

THESE essays, written for the *Fortnightly Review* in the summer and autumn of 1881, were intended as first sketches only of a maturer work which the author hoped, before giving finally to the public, to complete at leisure, and develop in a form worthy of critical acceptance, and of the great subject he had chosen. Events, however, have marched faster than he at all anticipated, and it has become a matter of importance with him that the idea they were designed to illustrate should be given immediate and full publicity. The French, by their invasion of Tunis, have precipitated the Moham-
medan movement in North Africa; Egypt has roused herself for a great effort of national and religious reform; and on all sides Islam is seen to be convulsed by political portents of ever-growing

intensity. > He believes that his countrymen will in a very few months have to make their final choice in India, whether they will lead or be led by the wave of religious energy which is sweeping eastwards, and he conceives it of consequence that at least they should know the main issues of the problem before them. < To shut their eyes to the great facts of contemporary history, because that history has no immediate connection with their daily life, is a course unworthy of a great nation; and in England, where the opinion of the people guides the conduct of affairs, can hardly fail to bring disaster. > It should be remembered that the modern British Empire, an agglomeration of races ruled by public opinion in a remote island, is an experiment new in the history of the world, and needs justification in exceptional enlightenment; and it must be remembered, too, that no empire ever yet was governed without a living policy. The author, therefore, has resolved to publish his work, crude as it is, without more delay, in the hope that it may be instrumental in guiding the national choice. He is, nevertheless, fully aware of its

defects both in accuracy and completeness, and he can only hope that they may be pardoned him in view of the general truth of the picture he has drawn.

Since the last of these essays was written, their author has returned to Egypt, and has there had the satisfaction of finding (the ideas, vaguely foreshadowed by him as the dream of some few liberal Ulema of the Azhar, already a practical reality. Cairo has now declared itself as the home of progressive thought in Islam, and its university as the once more independent seat of Arabian theology. Secured from Turkish interference by the national movement of the Arabs, the Ulema of the Azhar have joined heart and soul with the party of reform. The importance of this event can hardly be overrated; and if, as now seems probable, a liberal Mohammedan Government by a free Mohammedan people should establish itself firmly on the Nile, it is beyond question that the basis of a social and political Reformation for all Islam has been laid. It is more than all a hopeful sign that extreme moderation with regard to the Caliphate

is observed by the Egyptian leaders. Independence, not opposition, is the motto of the party ; and no rent has been made or is contemplated by them in the orthodox coat of Islam. Abd el Hamid Khan is still recognized as the actual Emir el Mumenin, and the restoration of a more legitimate Caliphate is deferred for the day when its fate shall have overtaken the Ottoman Empire. > This is as it should be. < Schism would only weaken the cause of religion, already threatened by a thousand enemies ; and the premature appearance of an Anti-Caliph in Egypt or Arabia, however legitimate a candidate he might be by birth for the office, would divide the Mohammedan world into two hostile camps, and so bring scandal and injury on the general cause. > In the meantime, however, liberal thought will have a fair field for its development, and can hardly fail to extend its influence wherever the Arabic language is spoken, and among all those races which look on the Azhar as the centre of their intellectual life. This is a notable achievement, and one which patience may turn, perhaps in a very few years, to a more