

**THE SPEECHES &
TABLE-TALK OF THE
PROPHET MOHAMMAD**

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The speeches & table-talk of the prophet Mohammad by Stanley Lane-Poole

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STANLEY LANE-POOLE

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PROPHET MOHAMMAD

Chosen and Translated, with Introduction and Notes,

BY
STANLEY LANE-POOLE



London
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1882

GOD! THERE IS NO GOD BUT HE, THE LIVING, THE
STEADFAST! SLUMBER SEIZETH HIM NOT, NOR SLEEP.
WHATSOEVER IS IN THE HEAVENS, AND WHATSOEVER IS
IN THE EARTH, IS HIS. WHO IS THERE THAT SHALL
PLEAD WITH HIM SAVE BY HIS LEAVE! HE KNOWETH
WHAT WAS BEFORE THEM AND WHAT SHALL COME
AFTER THEM, AND THEY COMPASS NOT AUGHT OF HIS
KNOWLEDGE, BUT WHAT HE WILLETH. HIS THRONE
OVERSPRADETH THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH, AND
THE KEEPING OF BOTH IS NO BURDEN TO HIM: AND HE
IS THE HIGH, THE GREAT!

THE THRONE VERSE, II. 256

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INTRODUCTION.

THE aim of this little volume is to present all that is most enduring and memorable in the public orations and private sayings of the prophet Mohammad in such a form that the general reader may be tempted to learn a little of what a great man was and of what made him great. At present, it must be allowed that although "Auld Mahound" is a household word, he is very little more than a word. Things are constantly being said, written, and preached about the Arab prophet and the religion he taught, of which an elementary acquaintance with him would show the absurdity. No one would dare to treat the ordinary classics of European literature in this fashion; or, if he did, his exposure would immediately ensue. What I wish to do is to enable any one, at the cost of the least possible exertion, to put himself into a position to judge of popular fallacies about

Mohammad and his creed as surely and certainly as he can judge of errors in ordinary education and scholarship. I do not wish to mention the Korān by name more than can be helped, for I have observed that the word has a deterrent effect upon readers who like their literary food light and easy of digestion. It cannot, however, be disguised that a great deal of this book consists of the Korān, and it may therefore be as well to explain away as far as possible the prejudice which the ill-fated name is apt to excite. It is not easy to say for how much of this prejudice the standard English translator is responsible. The patient and meritorious George Sale put the Korān into tangled English and heavy quarto,—people read quartos then and did not call them *éditions de luxe*,—his version then appeared in a clumsy octavo, with most undesirable type and paper; finally it has come out in a cheap edition, of which it need only be said that utility rather than taste has been consulted. One can hardly blame any one for refusing to look even at the outsides of these volumes. And the inside,—not the mere outward inside, if I may so say, the type and paper,—but the heart of hearts, the matter itself, is by no means calculated to tempt a reluctant reader. The Korān is there arranged according to the

orthodox form, instead of in chronological order,—it must be allowed that the chronological order was not discovered in Sale's time,—and the result is that impression of chaotic indefiniteness which impressed Carlyle so strongly, and which Carlyle has impressed upon most of the present generation. A large disorderly collection of prophetic rhapsody did not prove inviting, as the state of popular knowledge about Mohammad very clearly shows.

The attitude of the multitude towards Sale's Korān was on the whole reasonable. But if the faults that were found there are shown to belong to Sale and not to the Korān, or only partly to it, the attitude should change. In the first place, the Korān is not a large book, and in the second, it is by no means so disorderly and anarchic as is commonly supposed. Reckoned by the number of verses, the Korān is only two-thirds of the length of the New Testament, or, if the wearisome stories of the Jewish patriarchs which Mohammad told and retold are omitted, it is no more than the Gospels and Acts. It has been remarked that the Sunday edition of the *New York Herald* is three times as long. But the real permanent contents of the Korān may be taken at far less even than this estimate. The book is full—I will not say of vain repetitions, for in teaching and preaching re-

petition is necessary—but of reiterations of certain cardinal articles of faith, and certain standard demonstrations of these articles by the analogy of nature. Like the numerous stories borrowed by Mohammad from the Talmud, which have little but an antiquarian interest, many of these reiterated arguments and illustrations may with advantage be passed over. There is also a considerable portion of the Korān which is devoted to the exposure and confutation of those who, from political, commercial, or religious motives, made it their business to thwart Mohammad in his efforts to reform his people. These personal, one might say party, speeches are valuable only to the biographer and historian of the times. They throw but little light on the character of the man Mohammad himself. They show him, indeed, to be—what we knew him before—a sensitive, irritable man, keenly alive to ridicule and scorn. But for this purpose one instance is sufficient. We do not form our estimate of a great statesman from his moments of irritation, but from those larger utterances which reveal the results of a life's study of men and government. So with Mohammad, we may abandon the personal and temporary element in the Korān, and base our judgment upon those utterances which stand for

all time, and deal not with individuals or classes, but with man as he is, in Arabia or England, or where we will. This position is not taken with the object of saving Mohammad from himself. His attacks upon his opponents will bear comparison with those of other statesmen. They are doubtless couched in more barbaric language than we are accustomed to, and where we insinuate, Mohammad curses outright. But in the face of a treacherous and malignant opposition, the Arabian prophet comported himself with singular self-restraint. He only threatened hell-fire, and people of all denominations are still threatened with that every Sunday, to say nothing of Lent. Leaving out the Jewish stories, needless repetitions, and temporary exhortations or personal vindications, the speeches of Mohammad may be set forth in very moderate compass. One speech—*sura*, or chapter, as it is generally called—follows another so much to the same effect, that a limited number will be found to contain all the ideas which a minute study of the whole Korān could collect. I believe there is nothing important, either in doctrine or style, which is not contained in the twenty-eight speeches which fill the first hundred and thirty pages of this small volume. If I were a Mohammadan, I think I could accept the present