

Abraham Renounces Idolatry

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The following is a translation of an Arabic copy of "The Story of the Prophets." This book might be described as "The Child's Bible of the Arabs." An Arab friend told me it was written for the illiterate and the children. All Arabs read it and most of them believe it; some know the stories by heart. What is related in these stories goes to amplify the truths (?) of the Koran. In this way the abstract statements become concrete and comprehensible.

The following shows how Abraham renounced idolatry. After relating many stories of the mysterious birth of the prophet, the thread continues: When Abraham, upon whom be peace, grew up, being still in the cave, he said, "Who is my Lord, mother?" She said, "I." He said, "Who is your Lord?" She said, "Your Father." He said, "Who is the Lord of my Father?" She said, "Nimrod." He said, "Who is the Lord of Nimrod?" She said, "Keep still." And he kept quiet. Then she turned to her husband and said, "Have you seen the boy who relates that he shall change the religion of the people of the earth? And verily, he is your son." She informed him of all he told her. Thereupon his father, Aazar, came to him, and Abraham, upon whom be peace, said, "O my father, who is my Lord?" He said, "Your mother." He said, "Who is the Lord of my mother?" He said, "I." He said "Who is your Lord?" He said, "Nimrod." He said, "Who is the Lord of Nimrod?" Then he slapped him a good one and said: "Be still!"

After that Abraham said to his parents, "Take me away." And they removed him from the cave and departed until the setting sun. Then Abraham looked upon the camel, the cow, the sheep and the horse, which were being led along. He asked his father, "What are these?" He said "A camel, a horse, a cow and a sheep." Then he said "Is it not necessary that they shall have a Lord Creator?" Then he beheld and thought about the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and said, "Surely He who created me, fed me and gave me drink is my Lord. I have no Lord beside Him." Then he looked and behold, Jupiter had arisen, by some called Venus. That night was the last of the month. Now he saw the star before the moon and he said, "This is my Lord." But when he saw it disappear he said, "I do not like the things that disappear." And when he saw the moon peep through he said, "This is my Lord." But when it disappeared he said, "Surely unless the Lord lead me I shall be of the people who go astray." When he saw the sun peep through he said, "That is my Lord. This is the greatest." He noticed that the light was stronger. But when it also disappeared he said, "O people, I have no part in your idolatrous worship. I have turned my face to Him who created the heavens and the earth. I am true and not of the idolators."

Some said his father was making idols. Pressing Abraham to himself he began to make idols and gave them to Abraham to sell. And Abraham, upon whom be peace, went out with them and called to those who were to buy, "Buy what does not benefit nor injure you!" But no one bought of him and when they became burdensome he went with them to a river, and, bending their heads, said, "Drink! There is no demand for you!" He was mocking his people with regard to their error and ignorance to the extent that his voice and his mocking spread among his own people and the people of the village. His people argued with him about his religion. Said he: "Do you argue with me about Allah?" He contended with them and overcame them in the argument. Then Abraham invited his father Aazar to his religion. He said: "O father, why do you worship that which does not hear nor see, that which does not benefit you in the least?" But his father refused to answer the invitation. Then Abraham, upon whom be peace, showed his people his abhorrence to what they were worshipping. And he explained his religion and said, "Do you perceive what you worship as did your fathers and your ancestors? For all objects of worship are my enemies except the Lord of Creation." They said, "What do you worship?" He said, "The Lord of the universe." And they said, "Do you mean the king?" He answered, "No, He who created me and leads me." Now this spread among men so that proud Nimrod got news of it. He called Abraham and said, "O Abraham, have you seen your Allah who sent you and to whom you invite men? Do you remember what His power is by which you might exalt him above other gods?" Abraham said, "My Lord is He that maketh alive and causeth death." Nimrod said, "I can cause death and make alive." Abraham said, "How?" The king said, "I shall take two men worthy of death in my judgment. I shall kill one of them. By that I shall cause him to die. Then I shall pardon the other and leave him. By this I shall cause him to live." Whereupon Abraham said, "But Allah leads the sun from the East and again brings it from the West." By this Nimrod was stunned and answered him not a word. The argument settled him.

Then Abraham wished to show his people the weakness and impotence of the idols which they were worshipping in the place of Allah. For this he sought argument. He manufactured an opportunity and knew so to manage it that he was present at the feast where they were accustomed to gather every year. When they returned from the feast they went to the idols for worship and then returned home. Now when that feast came round Abraham's father said to him, "Abraham, if you come with us to the feast you will be pleased with our religion." And Abraham went with them. But when he was on the way he threw himself down and said, "I am ill. My feet trouble me." But they ran away, he being cast down. Now when they passed on he cried to the last, for the weaker ones remained behind, "I swear by Allah, I shall outwit your idols yet if you turn your backs on me in

flight." They heard this from him. Other authorities claim that Abraham spoke this in secret, unknown to the people, and no one heard it but one of them and he told on him. Some say that Abraham, upon whom be peace, returned from the way to the house of the idols. Now in the house is a river, and facing the entrance of the river a large idol, and close in order smaller ones, up to the entrance of the river. They had food prepared and laid before the gods, and they said, "When it is time for our return we will come back and eat,—our food having been blessed by the gods." And when Abraham, upon whom be peace, looked upon the gods and what was before them by way of food, he said to them, by way of mocking, "Do you not eat?" When they did not answer he said, "Why do you not speak?" And he outwitted them, beating them with his right hand, and with an axe broke them in pieces until no one remained but the largest of them, upon whose head he hung the axe. After this he went out.

When the people returned from the feast to the house of the gods and saw them in this state they said, "Who has done this with our gods? Surely one of the evil people!" Some said, "We have heard a boy mention them, Abraham by name, who we think did this." This then came to the ears of the proud Nimrod and the nobles of the people, who said, "Bring him before the eyes of the people, perhaps they may testify against him, saying it is he who did this." But they detested taking him without evidence. Others said, "Perhaps the people can inform us what to do with him, for we shall punish him." Now when they brought him forth they said, "Abraham, did you do this to our gods?" Abraham said, "Nay, the biggest of them did it. That one was angry because you worship, along with him, these small idols, while he is the greatest of them, and he broke them. But ask them, if they are able to speak." (The prophet, upon whom be peace, said, "Abraham did not lie, except three times, all of them concerning Allah, the Highest: his saying, "I am ill," and, "Nay, but the greatest did this," and his saying to the king who was presented to Sarah, "She is my sister.") Now when Abraham said this to them, they turned to their own and said, "Surely you are treating this man unjustly in your questionings. As for these your gods, what was done to them is evident. Ask them." And that was the saying of Abraham, "Then ask them, if they can speak." And the people said, "We do not find but as he said." Now when it was told them, "Surely you are unjust in the worshipping of your idols, this big one with the small," they bent their heads, perplexed at the affair. They understood now that they could not speak nor make an attack and they said, "Did you know that they could not speak?"

Now when the argument turned against them and for Abraham, upon whom be peace, he said to them, "Do you worship besides Allah that which does not benefit nor hurt you? Woe unto you! Why do you worship that which is not Allah? Do you not think?" And when

the argument gripped them and they were unable to answer they said, "Burn him and rescue the gods, if you are up to this thing!" Another authority has said, "Allah caused the earth to swallow him up and he shall be shaken in it until the Day of Resurrection." He said also, "When Nimrod and his people agreed on the burning of Abraham, upon whom be peace, they imprisoned him in a house, and built for him a house like a fold." This same authority continues, "They were gathering wood for a month, so that wood increased greatly and they took from it what they wished and started fire in every quarter where there was wood. The fire grew to such a degree that should a bird pass by it would burn up because of the intensity of the heat." Then they repaired to Abraham, upon whom be peace, and lifted him to the top of the house and bound him. Thereupon they took a battering ram, at the advice of Satan; may Allah curse him. Since they were not able to cast him in the fire, because of the intensity of the heat, they took the battering ram and put him in it, bound and shackled, the prayers of Allah be upon him. And the heavens and the earth shouted, the hills, angels and all creation, except the demons, with one cry, "O Lord, there is no one who worships Thee but Abraham, and he is to be burned with fire. But allow us to rescue him." Then said Allah, "If he desires aid of you, then give it and it will rescue him. I give you permission, and if no one else give him help, I will know about it and I shall be his deliverer. Leave it between him and me."

And when they wished to throw him in the fire, the angel of waters said, "If you wish I shall smoulder the fire, for the supply of water and rain is all in my hands." And the guardian of the wind came to him and said, "If you wish I will cause the fire to fly in the wind." And Abraham, upon whom be peace, said, "I have no need of you." Then he lifted his head to heaven and said, "O Allah, Thou art the one in heaven and on earth. There is no one on earth who worships Thee besides me." Abraham, upon whom be peace, when they bound him and threw him into the fire said, "There is no Allah besides Thee. Thy name be praised. Lord of the universe! Thine is praise and power. Thou hast no associate." Then they threw the battering ram, with Abraham in it, into the fire, in a remote place. And Gabriel, upon whom be peace, approached Abraham and said, "Abraham, are you in any need?" But he said, "As for you, no." Gabriel said, "Ask Allah, thy Lord!" And Abraham said, "The sufficiency of my asking is known to him. He knows my condition. Allah is my sufficiency and the most excellent of helpers."

And the news about Abraham is that he was saved by the saying, "Allah is my sufficiency, and He is the best of helpers." Allah, the exalted and magnified, said, "O fire, be cold and be peace to Abraham!" One authority has pointed out that if He had not said, "Peace," Abraham would have died of the cold, and there would not be any fire left on the earth, for it would have been extinguished altogether.

Educational Work in Basrah

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The opening bell had rung and the pupils of the School of High Hope marched in, not very martially, we fear, but still with evident satisfaction, to sing their morning song. After this came a brief prayer and then the roll call, which, to the uninitiated, sounded like anything but the names of a "fairy garden of girls." Like a garden they were in their bright many-colored garments as Arabs, Persians, Turks, Armenians, Jews responded to the strange appellations; but we missed the friendly smile and flashing teeth of our one "Topsy" who had all the color of her famous ancestress but, fortunately for discipline, none of her mischievous traits. One of those present volunteered the information that she did not intend to come any more, so at recess we went in search of her, not as a truant officer sallies forth in righteous indignation to bring the offender to judgment, but from an earnest longing to see a real education have a chance to play its part in the moulding of this handful of Arabia's daughters.

We found her home, a small mud hut opening on a court, which was shared by neighbor women, babies, dogs, cats and chickens alike. Here, sitting on a clean grass mat and partaking of the inevitable cup of hospitality, we learned from our pupil's mother the news, apparently as unwelcome to the girl as to us, of her engagement. Although she was not to be married for "a long time,"—the long time in this case being about two months!—she could not come to school any more because the other pupils would tease her, and besides it was not the proper thing for an engaged girl to appear in the streets every day. Doubtless the thought that with the chief goal of desire in sight an education was a trivial thing, was present in their minds, but out of deference to our profession they suppressed it. Knowing how large a place the subject of matrimony occupies in the thoughts and conversation of the girls outside school hours, we were not sorry, except for her own sake, to have the disturbing figure of a bride-elect withdrawn, since no plea of hers or ours would induce her parents to allow her to enjoy her girlhood a little longer. "Was she not fifteen years old, and although of course she did not know her future husband at all, they say he is good to his mother and, if God wills, he will be good to her also." So easily is parental solicitude satisfied and thus suddenly do our girls leave the school fold for a life that for most of them has little of romance or lasting happiness. Each wedding in our circle, however, makes us realize afresh how fleeting is our opportunity and redouble our efforts so to teach the girls that they shall in time demand and deserve a home whose cornerstone is love and sympathy.