

LITERATURE.

(4) *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla (Bin Abdulkadar) Munshi.*

This is a very curious book of a rare kind, containing a genuine piece of Eastern autobiography. The autobiographer was born in Malacca in 1797, and was a Mohammedan of a mixed race, three removed from the Arab. While in language and national sympathy he was a Malay, he is described as having the vigour and pride of the Arab, together with the perseverance and subtilty of the Hindoo. Possibly our native insular pride might be a little abated if we could oftener learn the judgments passed upon us by Eastern gentlemen. Abdulla tells us that at Malacca, if people wished to correct naughty children, they would say to them—"Be quiet, or we will bring the drunken English and take you away," and adds, "This made them hold their peace at once." It is comforting to know that English drunkenness has done at least some little good—in making naughty children quiet! Readers may also learn for their instruction as members of a Christian nation, how when an English ship arrives at a Malay port not one respectable woman will be seen in the streets without very adequate protection. Can Christian gentlemen at home wonder that strange tales are readily believed of the Christian Church in places where the drunken Englishman is the bogie to frighten children, and respectable women protect themselves against the English, while the words "English" and "Christians" are at the same time synonymous in common parlance?

"Now, hear, O gentle reader, about a very stupid affair which got into the heads of mankind, i.e., the Klings, Malays, and Chinese in Singapore and Malacca." So writes H. Abdulla; and the very stupid affair is the terror which affected even his wife to such an extent that she sat in great tribulation and grief under locked doors at night, arising from the rumour that the Governor had ordered people to be killed for the sake of their heads, which were intended "to feast the spirit in the church." The popular explanation of the Governor's supposed order was that "the spirit" had come to him in a dream and asked for the heads of the people, threatening if this were not granted he himself would be killed, with all his retinue. Can anything be sadder than that such an idea of the God Christians worship should be credible to "Klings, Malays, and Chinese?" Can anything be more instructive than an inquiry into the causes which have rendered such an idea credible in any part of the world? Abdulla, who had been employed as a language teacher at a mission station, did his best to quiet the consternation, alleging that the rumours were "very big lies," because "the English had not the slightest belief in evil spirits and such dreams." The noble comfort an upright Mohammedan may gain from his own sincere faith is beautifully shown in a pathetic account of the loss of his daughter. His wife begged at his feet some words of pure counsel to moderate her affliction:—

"Then, in furtherance of her wish, I thought over all the books I could call to memory. If it had been for myself I could not have undertaken the task, for I trusted to God alone to assuage my grief; but after the above request I betook myself to compose a little book, which I named in the Arabic 'Doah Alkalub,' which means in Malay 'Obat ati' (medicine of the heart). In it I dilated on the cases of children who have died young, and the honour in the future state to their parents whose little children they were. How, therefore, improper is it of parents to nurse their grief and disconsolateness."

The earnest friends of Christian missions will do well to note H. Abdulla's account of his intercourse with the missionaries who were translating the Bible. The translations brought to him were full of blunders and improprieties of idiom, but he had the greatest possible difficulty in persuading the translators to delete them, although he assured them they were neither words nor phrases used in the Malay language, and were disagreeable to the Malay ear.

"So, O reader, they should be corrected if there be the verriest possibility, so as to have the true Malay idiom replaced—i.e., if the gentlemen would allow it; if not, then the fault is not mine. So in time to come let not people call me a blockhead, as not knowing the true Malay idiom, for I have often felt it through the obstinacy of Mr. Thomsen in his translations, wherein what was not Malay idiom has been in use till now—and yet I am called his gurn (preceptor)!"

But the truth is, he would not use the phrases of his gurn, he would bathe alone, and this is the consequence—by this people upbraid me. I am thus afraid of myself to be in the same dilemma twice. As the Malay proverb says, "The moose-deer may forget the trap, but the trap does not forget the moose-deer."

Abdulla was superior to the ordinary bigotry of his co-religionists, and was evidently a kind of Broad Churchman among Mohammedans. When asked what would become of unbelievers, he said that the reply of the imams (priests) would be that they would go to hell; but amongst laymen, such as himself, opinions were very various, according to constitution, education, and disposition. For himself, he had seen too much good in the holders of other faiths to condemn them.

"For instance, it would be absurd to say that the Revs. Dr. Morrison and Milne went to hell because they did not believe in Mahomed; but the priesthood and women will not agree to my sentiments, nor dare I press them amongst my co-religionists. They are fenced about by a boundary of ignorance which I have passed through. This they say has undermined my faith; yet you know I adhere to it, only with conditions of greater humanity, greater perception of the great goodness of the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth, and all creatures and all things. I thus the more appreciate His all-seeing love and benevolent justice. If we look into the garden, we see the rose, the lily, the daisy, the primrose, the violet, and other flowers, all with their various shades, colours, forms, and aromas; then why should the rose say that the lily and other plants went to hell because they differed from it, when really it is their very variety that makes this earth a paradise, and enables man to rejoice in it? God made this variety, so He rejoices in all."

Commending this passage from a Mohammedan pen to many a Christian, we beg to invite our readers to obtain a better knowledge of Hakayit Abdulla from this curious autobiography, which unfortunately is a posthumous publication. Abdulla died about 10 years ago, his autobiography having been written when he was 46.

(4) *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla (Bin Abdulkadar) Munshi. With Comments by J. T. Thomson, F.R.G.S. Henry S. King & Co.*