SECTION TWO

THE INTRODUCTION OF PHILOSOPHY INTO ISLAM

A. THE TRANSLATORS AND THEIR WORK

We have shown in an earlier section that the Christian Church in the East had developed philosophical schools and that theology had been treated in the philosophical manner. We have now to answer the question as to how Islam became acquainted with the philosophical sources, with Plato, Aristotle and the Neoplatonists, which, having served their purpose in philosophizing Christian theology, were to be set to the same task in Islam. Who were the early teachers of Islam in this particular province? It is here that we shall see the beginnings of those philosophical schools which, famous as the "Arabian Philosophy", were destined at the period of their highest development, to achieve something which would lend Islam an unique influence in the Middle Ages and refashion the Aristotelian Scholastic of Europe.

It is remarkable how in Islam's earlier formative period, that religion took gifts which the Christian Church offered, and later at her zenith returned to Christian scholars of the Middle Ages what she owed. The return was made with an accumulated interest of doubtful value to Christianity as such but as a stimulus to thought in the renaissance doubtless an enrichment.

Let it be understood that the philosophy with which we are primarily concerned here is the Hellenistic. That there were other influences at work is quite certain, but a great deal of research must be undertaken if these are to be properly analysed and adequately presented. For the most part that research remains to be done. It includes inquiry into the Persian, Zoroastrian, Mazdian, and Indo-Buddhist philosophies, and it can hardly be undertaken here.

The first centre of philosophical culture which we should notice is Harrān in Mesopotamia. Mas'ūdī[1] connects Greek philosophy with Harrān, and in mentioning this speaks of Platonist, Pythagorean and Aristotelian doctrines. We have in this area the evidences of a pre-Islamic culture that resulted in an eclectic system which, on the one hand, displays elements akin to Eastern solar cults and the Light myth, illuminism and Persian dualism and an emanational scheme of First Cause, Intellect, Soul, Matter and the World, all of which gradations are thought of as interacting[2] and, on the other hand, a paganism which recalls the reaction against Christianity in Egypt. Orpheus, Hermes, Apollonius of Tyana (Bulīnus) with Agathodaemon and

[1] *Prairies d'Or*, iv, 64–66.
[2] See traces of this in Miskawaih, *infra*.

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Pythagoras were their prophets. These wrought miracles and taught men the mysteries. The many-sided Hermetic literature has its reflection in Harrān. Added to all this is Neoplatonism, which it is not always easy to differentiate in that setting from older—perhaps Indian—emanation systems. The synthesis, if it can be dignified by such a term, is already complete before it comes to us. An identification which the Harranians made between Hermes and Seth, and Agathodaemon and Enoch hints at some sort of Gnosticism.[1] Some of the later pantheistic notions of Islam may have had their origin in this school. But the occult and mystical were not the only interests of the Harranians. We find notable Aristotelians among them. The *Fihrist* mentions one Abū Rūh, the Sabian, as a translator of the *Physics*, and Ṭhābit b. Qurra summarized the *Hermeneutics* and commented on part of the *Physics* with the commentary of Porphyry.

Nor was the Sabian left untouched by Christianity. Not far away were Edessa and Rasain. From the former city we read of Jacob of Edessa, and it is there we find the Syrian compilations of the pseudepigrapha of Pythagoras, Socrates, Plutarch and Dionysius. If ever the Greek literature apart from the philosophy had a chance to make some impact upon the East, it might have done so from that city. Theophilus of Edessa (d. 785) translated the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer into Syriac. Theophilus was the court astronomer of the Caliph Mahdī (775–785) and he translated the *Sophistica* of Aristotle into Syriac. Jacob was born just within the Muslim era and studied in Alexandria and other centres. His *Enchiridion* was a treatise on philosophical terms and some people credit him with the invention of the vowel system in Syriac.[2]

Another centre whence the Greek learning spread into the Middle East was Persia. There we find both Neoplatonist and Nestorian exiles. Erdmann[3] has said: "When Justinian, in the year 529, closed the schools of philosophy through anxiety for the Christian doctrine, he did not realize that if he had let them continue, the anti-Christian philosophy would not have been in the least dangerous, because it would have perished of itself, but being compelled to emigrate toward the Orient, it would, centuries afterwards, exercise an influence upon Christian thought more powerful than he had ever feared." While this puts rather too much emphasis on one particular episode in the infiltration of the Hellenistic philosophy into the Middle East, there can be no doubt that the exile of the Neoplatonist philosophers to which he refers and their taking refuge with Anushirwān Khusrū (*c.* A.D. 530) was an event fraught with important consequences for the development of thought in Persia. There were translations of

[1] See Shahrastānī: *Al Milal wa'n Nihal* (Cureton), pp. 203 ff.
[2] For fuller details, see Wright: *Short History of Syriac Lit.*, p. 149.
[3] *History of Philosophy*, Vol. i, p. 253.

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Greek philosophical works into Pahlawi before the Muslim era. And while Persia is ordinarily associated with the dualism of Zoroastrianism it should be remembered that there were monistic schools of thought there influenced by Indian and Buddhistic thought. Such schools would find something congenial in the Neoplatonist emphasis on the transcendent One and something to fortify them in their monistic leanings. However little or much the exile of Simplicius, Damascius, and their companions may have accomplished directly, some of the attractiveness of Neoplatonism for the great mystical poets of Persia may be due to an early familiarization of the Persians with Neoplatonist doctrine. Add to this the reinforcement of such influences from the Christians of the Nestorian Church and the subsequent Persian influence in the Muslim empire at Baghdad, and we may find that a great deal of the favour extended to Greek thought in the 'Abbasid Caliphate was fostered by Persians.

Of the names we have mentioned, by far the most important for us is Simplicius, whose commentaries we find mentioned again and again in the translations and the source literature for "Arabian" philosophy. In Simplicius we have an example of the synthesis of Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism. He belongs to the school of Porphyry. We find that he wrote commentaries on Aristotle's *De Coelo*, *De Anima*, the *Physics*, the *Categories*, etc.

Let it not be supposed for a moment that these last remnants of the Academy were the sole agents in bringing the philosophy of Greece to Islam. Their name is legion. High and low took part in it. The Muslim could learn the Greek knowledge from his fellow-citizens. Mansūr (750–775) made a direct appeal to the Byzantine Emperor to send him mathematical works. From the beginning of his reign Christians were the chief medium for the transmission of Greek learning and science. Until the tenth century they remained in the ascendancy as scribes, doctors and translators.[1] From that period they begin to decline, having lost touch with the source of their inspiration. The general level of culture of the Christians up to that time was high, though they did not produce any man of outstanding and original genius such as Al Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā and Al Bīrūnī.

Before the advent of Islam we have in Persia the Nestorian Schools and therefore the Aristotelianism which the school of Antioch favoured. Of the great scholars of that period may be mentioned Paulus Persa, who is also called Paul of Nisibis (530–580 ?). He is credited with a Logic which he dedicated to Khusrū. He is for many reasons a most important personage. He stands in the line of direct influence upon Junilius Africanus and Cassiodorus. The debt of the former to Paul

[1] In the time of Ibn Miskawaih we have evidence that there was a great colony of *Greeks* in Baghdād. They appealed to the Syrian Patriarch to appoint a metropolitan for them. See Browne: *Eclipse of Christianity in Asia*, p. 57.

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is obvious from his *Institutia Regularia* which is the precursor of *De Institutione divinarum Literarum* written by Cassiodorus. Here we have examples of the principles of exegesis which Paul taught. In him we find those problems discussed which afterwards agitated the schools of Islam, e.g., whether there was creation *ex nihilo* or an eternal primary matter. We should also note his theories in opposition to dualism and his discussion of the formula "God possesses contrary qualities" devised in the interests of a severe monism. To save dualism and the opposition of two principles, one of evil and one of good, one of light and the other of darkness, there were those who would predicate both light and darkness of the One Principle, sacrificing a unity of internal harmony for an external and arithmetical unity.[1] It should be noted that Paul of Persia wrote in Syriac, but most of these Syrians seem to have been bilingual.

We now come to those Christian translators who were the direct means of bringing the works of the Greek philosophical writers to the Muslims. These are quite well known by Muslim writers. Some of them, though Christians, have been claimed as Muslim philosophers. Thus Shahrastānī says that among the Muslim philosophers are Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq, Yaḥyā b. 'Adī, etc.[2] The *Fihrist* of Nadīm[3] is constantly referring to these writers who sometimes were mere scribes, but sometimes collectors of manuscripts, translators and commentators. Some of them must have been men of great intellectual ability though not, perhaps, original thinkers. They probably added little to the tradition which they received. They seem to have exercised care in their work, and even when it was merely of a scribal character they took the trouble to record the state of the manuscript they used and, when opportunity offered, corrected these manuscripts by the use of better ones which came to hand.[4] Nadīm is writing in A.D. 987, and in addition to him we have evidence from Mas'ūdī (d. 956) and Bīrūnī (late tenth century), and from bibliographers and writers of biographical sketches like Ibn Khallikān. Ibn Miskawaih will be given, in evidence of the material assimilated, in a short translation, to which notes have been added.

A Jacobite commentator of whom we frequently hear in Muslim circles is Yaḥyā Naḥwī, John the Grammarian also known as Philoponus. There seems to be some uncertainty about his date. Some accounts would make him contemporary with Muhammad and some much later in the time of Mu'taṣim (b. 795). We may dismiss as apocryphal the story that he tried to preserve the library at Alexandria from the Muslim invaders. Indeed we may take it for granted that he

[1] Cf. Land: *Anecdota Syriaca*, iv (Leyden, 1870).
[2] *Kitāb ul Milal wa'n Niḥal*, ii. 348.
[3] The main account is to be found in pp. 331–370 of my copy published in Cairo (n.d.).
[4] *Fihrist*, p. 352.

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was not then alive, but lived in the sixth century. It is possible that he was a disciple of Ammonius the Neoplatonist. The *Fihrist* [1] refers to his works in refutation of Proclus,[2] Aristotle and Galen. Whatever he wrote in refutation of Aristotle did not prevent him from writing commentaries on the *Categories*, the *Prior Analytics*, the *Posterior Analytics* and the *Physics*. His book against Proclus was on the subject of the eternity of the world and it was translated into Arabic.[3]

A famous family of translators was that of Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq (809–73). He was a physician in the court of the Caliphs Mutawakkil and Wāthiq bi'llāh. He travelled in the Byzantine empire and there studied Greek, and he brought back with him many manuscripts. He was most prolific in his translation work, which included Euclid [4] as well as the Philosophers. His interest in medical matters and in meteorology is referred to by Mas'ūdī.[5] His translations include the *Laws* of Plato,[6] the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*. His translations of Aristotle are the *Categories*, *Generation and Corruption*, the whole of *De Anima*, parts of the *Prior and Posterior Analytics*, and the *Hermeneutics*. With his translation of the *Categories* he included the commentary of Porphyry. He amended Ibn Biṭrīq's translation of *De Coelo et Mundi* and epitomized the *Hermeneutics*. Most of his translations seem to have been into Syriac and it is even said that he translated the *Prior Analytics* into Syriac from an Arabic version by Theodore, but this may be a mistake. He and his son Isḥāq and his nephew seem to have formed a school of translators in Baghdad, and we often find it recorded that Ḥunayn did a certain translation into Syriac and that Isḥāq [7] translated it into Arabic. The Translations attributed to the latter are Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, *De Anima*,[8] the *Ethics* (with Porphyry's commentary), the whole of the *Post Analytics* into Syriac, Mattā b. Yūnus turning it into Arabic, the *Hermeneutics* into Arabic from the Syriac of his father, the *Topica* into Syriac, whence it was done into Arabic by Yaḥyā b. 'Adī, and the commentaries of Themistius and Alexander of Aphrodisias on the same. He is also credited with a translation of Plato's *Sophist* with the commentary of Olympiodorus. Aristotle's *Metaphysica*, *De Anima*, *Generation and Corruption* and *Hermeneutics* he translated with Alexander's commentaries.

Mattā b. Yūnus,[9] sometimes called Abū Bishr Mattā b. Yūnus al Qannai was a translator and commentator. Among his translations

[1] P. 356.
[2] See Al Bīrūnī's *India* (Sachau's trans.), i. 36, etc.
[3] Steinschneider: *Die Arabischen Uebersetzungen aus dem Griechischen*, p. 93.
[4] Ibn Khallikān: (De Slane) i. 478.
[5] *Prairies d'Or*, iv. 180 ff.
[6] *Fihrist*, 343.
[7] See *Fihrist*, 344, 352, etc. Isḥāq died 910 A.D. See also Ibn Khallikān: (De Slane) i. 187.
[8] See Mas'ūdī: *Prairies d'Or*, iv. 61.
[9] *Fihrist* and Brockelmann, i. 207. He died 940.

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were the *Sophistics* of Aristotle into Syriac, the *Poetics* from Syriac into Arabic, several parts of *De Coelo et Mundi* and the commentary of Alexander on *De Generatione et Corruptione*. He commented on the *Categories*, parts of the *Prior Analytics*, the *Post Analytics*, and the first part of the *Topics*, and wrote a super-commentary on the commentary of Themistius on the *Poetics*.

Abū Zakariyā Yaḥyā b. 'Adī al Manṭiqī (d. 974),[1] is credited with a translation of Plato's *Laws*[2] and Aristotle's *Poetics* which "is said to contain Themistius also". He translated Ḥunayn's Syriac translation of the *Physics* into Arabic. He also turned the *Sophistics* in the Syriac version of Theophilus into Arabic, and corrected a translation of the *Timaeus*. He seems to have done a good deal of emendation, the *Phaedrus*, the *Physics* of Abū Rūḥ, the Sabian, Mattā's translation of Alexander's commentary on *Generation and Corruption* and the commentary of Themistius on *De Coelo et Mundi* all passing through his hands. He also did some work with Alexander's commentary on the *Topics*.

Yaḥyā b. Biṭrīq[3] (f. ninth century) is said to have translated the *Timaeus*, and Aristotle's *Meteorology* and an abridgement of the *De Anima*. He was also responsible for a version of the *Book of Animals* and *De Coelo et Mundi* which Ḥunayn amended. Qusṭā b. Lūqā is attributed with a translation of a book by Plato on the principles of geometry. He turned the Syriac of Ḥunayn's translation of the *Physics* into Arabic. Beside these Nadīm says that he translated commentaries of Alexander Aphrodisias on the *Physics* and *Generation and Corruption* and Yaḥyā Naḥwī on the former work. 'Abd ul Masīḥ b. 'Abdullāh Nā'ima al Ḥimṣī is mostly famous for a translation of the so-called *Theology of Aristotle* into Syriac and a translation of the *Sophistics*. We read of one Abu'l-Khayr al Ḥasan al Khammār (late tenth century) as the author of a harmony of Christianity and Philosophy. Others whom we may briefly name are Abū 'Alī 'Isā b. Isḥāq b. Zur'a (d. 1008),[4] and several who are merely names, a certain Basīl who is said to have translated the *Physics* with the commentary of Porphyry, Stephen of Alexandria who summarized the *Hermeneutics* and whose work on the *Categories* is also mentioned in the *Fihrist*, one Theodore or Theodorus who, according to the same, translated the *Prior Analytics* into Arabic, and perhaps most surprising of all, a book by Gregory of Nyssa on the *Nature of Man*,[5] is mentioned by Nadīm. In contrast to the very extensive list of Christian translators, we find very few Muslims engaged in this task, but the day was shortly to

[1] *Fihrist*, 369 and Brockelmann, i. 207.
[2] *Fihrist*, 344.
[3] Brockelmann, i. 203.
[4] Brockelmann, i. 208.
[5] *Fihrist*, 357.

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come when they would use the material provided for them and, bringing fresh minds to the work, accomplish a new synthesis which became familiar to Christians after an interval of centuries.

It would be as well here to summarize the results in order to form some idea of the material available at this time and which forms the bulk of the source literature for the later philosophy of Islam.

Of Plato[1] we find the following works known and translated at least into Syriac if not into Arabic. *Laches*, *Charmides*, the two called *Alcibiades*, *Euthydemus*, *Gorgias*, *Ion*, *Protagoras*, *Euthyphro*, *Crito*, *Theaetetus*, *Cratylus*, *Sophist*, *Timaeus*,[2] *Parmenides*, *Phaedrus*, *Meno*, *Menexenus*, *Thaion* (?), the two called *Hippias*, *Phaedo*,[3] *Clitopho*, *Republic*, *Laws*,[4] *Apology of Socrates*,[5] *Theages*, *Politicus*; and *Minos*, *Hipparchus*, *Athleticus* (?) and a book on the principles of geometry attributed to Plato. Of commentaries on Plato we have reference to those by Proclus on *Phaedo*, *Gorgias*, part of the *Republic*,[6] and *Timaeus* and that of Olympiodorus (fifth century) on *Sophist*.[7]

For Aristotle[8] the list is also quite comprehensive. We find *Categories*, *Hermeneutics*, *Prior Analytics*, *Apodeictics* (the name for the *Posterior Analytics* in the Muslim writers, following Galen and Alexander of Aphrodisias), *Topics*, *Rhetoric*, *Poetics*, *Physics*,[9] *De Coelo et Mundi*, *De Generatione et Corruptione*, *De Anima*, the *Ethics* and the *Metaphysics*.[10] The commentaries known are: Nicolaus,[11] Simplicius particularly on *Physics*, *De Anima*, *Categories* and *De Coelo et Mundi*, Damascius (perhaps), Themistius[12] (so extensively mentioned that it is futile to particularize), Alexander[13] of Aphrodisias (also most extensively used), Olympiodorus on *De Anima*,[14] Porphyry on *Prior Analytics*, *Categories*, *Ethics* and his *Isagoge*.[15]

The Neoplatonists known include the following: Proclus who, in the *Fihrist*[16] is given his full name Diadochus Proclus and to whom is attributed, beside the commentaries mentioned, books on Pythagoras, his *Elements of Theology*, and a shorter *Elements* which we believe is otherwise unknown. He is also mentioned and quoted in Al Bīrūnī's

[1] Mas'ūdī: *Prairies d'Or*, iii. 134 and 362–3 and *Fihrist*, 344 f.
[2] Mas'ūdī: *op. cit.*, iii. 363. Al Bīrūnī: *India* (Sachau's trans.), i. 35, etc.
[3] Al Bīrūnī: *op. cit.*, i. 65, ii. 166. He quotes it in i. 85–6.
[4] Al Bīrūnī: *op. cit.*, i. 123, 385, etc.
[5] Referred to by Ibn Abī Usaybi'a cf. Al Bīrūnī: *op. cit.*, ii. 171.
[6] Baumstark: *Geschichte der Syr. Lit.*, p. 231.
[7] Quoted by Ibn Sīnā, cf. also *Fihrist*, 344.
[8] Mas'ūdī: *op. cit.*, ii.250 and *Fihrist*, 353, etc.
[9] Al Bīrūnī: *op. cit.*, quotes i. 320.
[10] Mas'ūdī: *op. cit.*, ii. 250.
[11] *Fihrist*, 355.
[12] Mas'ūdī: *op. cit.*, iv. 61, and *Fihrist*, 357, etc., also Al Bīrūnī, *passim*.
[13] Mas'ūdī: *op. cit.*, iv. 61, and *Fihrist*, 353, 357, etc.
[14] *Fihrist*, 352.
[15] Mas'ūdī: *op. cit.*, iii. 68, etc.
[16] P. 353.

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India.[1] Porphyry is well known.[2] Simplicius we have already had occasion to mention. Beside these there are Ammonius[3] and Iamblichus and some less important names. Pseudo-Dionysius seems to have been known but not by name so far as we have learned. His disciple and devotee Maximus (580–662) is mentioned.[4] Plotinus is known through the misnamed *Theology of Aristotle* which contains some of the material to be found in the *Enneads*. This book is to-day obtainable in cheap form in the East. Its exordium runs: "The book of Aristotle the Philosopher called in Greek the *Athūlūjīya* (*theologia*). It is the statement on Divinity with the commentary of Porphyry the Syrian and 'Abd ul Masīḥ b. 'Abdullāh Nā'ima al Ḥimṣī[5] and Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb b. Isḥāq al Kindī amended it for Aḥmad b. al Mu'taṣim." The *Elements of Theology* was known in an abridgement or rather translation of parts of that book into Arabic. This Arabic compilation became, when translated into Latin, the *Liber de Causis*, which we find quoted so much in the mediæval scholastics. It is rather interesting to see that Al Bīrūnī refers a book of this name to Apollonius of Tyana.[6]

Among other famous Greeks of whom we find some notice in the early bibliographers we may instance Galen and Hippocrates,[7] Plutarch,[8] Pythagoras,[9] and Socrates,[10] and Homer is quoted by Al Bīrūnī.[11] Hermes is known apparently only as an astrologer.[12]

On the whole, we find that Aristotle takes the chief place and that he is acclaimed as the philosopher *par excellence*, but there does not seem to have been any standard of judgment available to the Muslims, alongside the works which were copied and translated for them, whereby they might be able to distinguish Aristotle from Plato or the Neoplatonists. It seems to be assumed that, except in minor points, all taught the same, that is the truth. Their very Aristotle comes to them for the most part at the hands of Neoplatonists, and of his commentators Themistius and Alexander are plainly preferred, but the former seems to have been more in favour than the latter, particularly with Shahrastānī, and Ibn Sīnā before him. Subjects which we find rooted and integral in the later theology have their origins in Aristotle, e.g., the denial of infinite series, or the impossibility of infinite causes

[1] I, 57.
[2] *Fihrist*, 354, 357, etc. Al Birūnī: *India* (*ed. cit.*) i. 43. Mas'ūdī: *op. cit.* iii. 68, iv. 8.
[3] *Fihrist*, 355 and Al Bīrūnī: *op. cit.*, i. 85.
[4] Reference lost.
[5] In the Arabic of this name there is a *tashdid* written in my copy cf. Emessa.
[6] *Fihrist*, 373; see Al Bīrūnī: *op. cit.*, i. 40.
[7] Al Bīrūnī: *op. cit.*, i. 95, 123, 222, 35 and ii. 168, etc. Mas'ūdī: *op. cit.*, iii. 134, etc.
[8] *Fihrist*, 342 and 355.
[9] *Ibid.*, 342.
[10] *Ibid.*, 342.
[11] *Op. cit.*, i. 42, 98 and 231.
[12] *Fihrist*, 373.

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and effects, the argument from the First Mover[1] (though some reject this), his definitions in the *Metaphysics*, the division of form and matter, the classification of the possible and the necessary. There is an acquaintance with elements to be found in Aristotle, Plato and the Neoplatonists with regard to the Soul, and all are forced into a strange juxtaposition which hardly becomes a synthesis. Thus we have the division of the soul as rational, concupiscible and irascible, which is Galenist Aristotelianism, joined with ideas contained in the *Phaedo*,[2] and such conceptions as the pre-existence of the soul and transmigration (raised as a question to be refuted). The mystical idea of union with the One[3] reflects Neoplatonism. Al Fārābī uses arguments for the existence of God which have their origin in the *Timaeus*.

In his *Fields of Gold*,[4] Mas'ūdī gives us glimpses of the debates which took place on the nature of the Soul, on the spheres, meteorology, the properties and measurement of figures, disposition and nature, relation and aggregation, the syllogism, composition, physics in general, metaphysics, substance, accident, etc. The discussion still goes on.

It is a dangerous proceeding to try to reconstruct the body of knowledge available to these early Muslims. It is just as easy to underestimate their knowledge as to overestimate it. We have not only the lists of books to go by, but the sudden budding genius of the early Muslim writers on philosophy. No one can doubt the genius of Al Bīrūnī, and there are the less scientific but more purely philosophical Al Kindī, Al Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. There was a stimulus of an unique order behind their work, and it is not to be accounted for by a mere smattering of knowledge about books but of real and commendable study of them. The pity is that they had not more than they possessed and more to make their critical judgment sounder, but even as it was they were able to accomplish a great deal.

So that the reader may form some sort of independent judgment on the subjects which at this early period were discussed by the philosophizing theologians we here append a translation of the Shorter Theology of Ibn Miskawaih called *Al Fawz ul Asghar*. With this we have given footnotes which are not to be taken as indicating the immediate source so much as parallel ideas to be found in early writers which illustrate the general body of ideas current at this period. Nothing in the nature of dogmatism about the sources is intended. If sometimes we have been betrayed into a categorical statement which appears to conflict with this warning we crave forgiveness. We are here very seldom travelling in the region of absolute certainty.

Ibn Miskawaih died an old man in A.D. 1030. He was said to be a

[1] Al Bīrūnī: *op. cit.*, i. 320.
[2] *Ibid.*, i. 65 f, and Mas'ūdī: *op. cit.*, i. 19.
[3] Al Bīrūnī: *op. cit.*, i. 85.
[4] *Op. cit.*, i. 19–20.

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convert from Zoroastrianism to Islam, but if the work of a modern writer[1] contains genuine material for his life and work, it seems possible that he had some association with Harrān, for his works are said to have contained an account of Thales, Hermes Trismegistus and Agathodaemon. In the account given in Yāqūt's *Dictionary of Famous Men*[2] we find him a devotee of Yaḥyā b. 'Adī and in the service of Abu'l Khayr al Ḥasan al Khammār, the Christian, already mentioned as the author of a harmony of Christianity and philosophy. Mention is made of his study of the *Isagoge* and the *Categories*. Not much is known of his life, but his great work *Tajārib ul Umam* (*The Experiences of the Nations*) has been published in facsimile,[3] and *Al Fawz al Asghar* was published in Beirut.

B.

AL FAWZ UL ASGHAR

THE SHORTER THEOLOGY OF IBN MISKAWAIH

PART I. GOD

CAP. I. THE PROOF FOR THE EXISTENCE OF AN ARTIFICER

In one respect this question is very easy and in another it is very hard. On the one hand the quest of this supreme goal transcends our customary ends and purposes, while on the other hand there is nothing so clear and evident, because the essence of the Exalted Truth is most luminous and bright. Thus the proof of the Creator is exceedingly easy in respect of His Essence, but in respect to the impotency and infirmity of human intelligence it is extraordinarily difficult. A philosopher has made this clear by an excellent illustration of the bat which is incapable of seeing the sun. In the same way, man's reason fails to perceive the essence of God.[4]

Wherefore sages and rational philosophers have endured great pains and mortifications to achieve this honourable quest and, becoming inured to the hardships of the task, have gradually progressed to that measure of contemplation of the Creator which is within the compass of the creature. And in truth, there is no other way to the knowledge of God except these mortifications and gradual advances.

[1] Muhammad Bāqir: *Rawdat ul Jannāt*, 70.
[2] Vol. 2, 88.
[3] Gibb Memorial Series No. 7 (Old Series).
[4] Arist: *Metaphysica*, Bk. α 993a, 30 ff. It is interesting to note that the opening words and the illustration of the bat almost translate Aristotle. But in Aristotle the subject of inquiry which is in "one way easy and another way hard" is Truth. Here there is a tacit acceptance of the identification of the Creator of the Universe with the Truth.

SAMPLE

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