

THE DERVISHES.

CHAPTER I.

THE earliest form, or principle, of Religion is connected with an intuitive conviction in the mind of man of the possession of a soul or spirit, independent of his body, or corporeal existence. The soul is believed to survive the body, and refers to a superior Spirit, creative and providential in its character. A more perfect knowledge and communion with this greater Spirit, or God, is the object of man's continuous aspirations. The senses (or faculties) of man are possessed in common with other animals. These are all intimately connected with his intellectual faculty, so much so that, when they do not exist, as in childhood and advanced age, or are enfeebled by accidental causes, as in idiocy, it is seriously affected. The reasoning faculty, and that of speech, seem to be those which distinguish man from ordinary animal nature, and yet both of these are possessed, in a greater and less degree, by most animals. It is supposed that the brain is the seat of the "intellectual faculty," and its operations are explained by its connexion with the nervous system and the other senses, such as hearing, seeing, and the touch. The size of the brain does not increase the reasoning faculty, nor that of the body the other ordinary faculties.

Man, thus, in his most degraded and least intellectual condition, in his most barbarous state, seems to have

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05551-2 - The Dervishes Or, Oriental Spiritualism

John P. Brown

Excerpt

[More information](#)

an “intuitive conviction” of the possession of a *soul*, and of a future existence after the death of his body. It seems not to be dependent upon mental culture, nor upon a knowledge of the greatness of this God, and the magnitude of His power and works. Does this perception extend to any other of His creatures, vegetable or animal, or is it restricted entirely to man? * I believe that the idea is always limited to the fact that there is a God, and that the belief in a plurality of Gods is a matter of pure imagination, dependent upon the varied convictions and wants of man in the several parts of the world.

Just as the soul of man thus leads him to believe in the existence of God, so does it likewise impress him with a conviction of the greatness of the Deity, and, in his helplessness, to supplicate Him in the hour of need, of suffering, and of danger. This, therefore, is the original means of communicating with the Creator on the part of the creature. Divine providences are not restricted to man only, but are experienced throughout all creation. The same laws of nature which affect him in this life extend also to all living beings, and the question may be again repeated, whether inanimate as well as animate creation, the vegetable as well as animal, have any perception of this fact?

Leaving the idea of the unity of the Deity, it is found that man has endeavoured to give to this simple conviction a place and a form. On the former there seems to be a belief in common among all men, that the Creator of all things exists far beyond the conceptions of the senses, and invisible to the ordinary senses; whilst the imagination ascribes to Him innumerable forms, all dependent upon the imagination and the fancied wants of ordinary life. With some He is all benevolence, with others avenging; whilst some believe that all His providences are unchangeable, and therefore constitute what is called destiny and fate, others regard them as merciful, and adapted to the needs of those who implore His compassion. Whilst He is considered omni-

* *Vide* Psalm cl. 6, and others.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05551-2 - The Dervishes Or, Oriental Spiritualism

John P. Brown

Excerpt

[More information](#)

THE DERVISHES.

3

potent in all things, it is held that He may, and does, alter His laws of nature, and so permit of occurrences which are called miracles. They even go still farther, and hold that He grants this power to those who invoke Him, so that they may effect equally surprising supernatural acts.

Besides this communion with God by spiritual means only, and a direct intercourse between the Spirit of the Creator and the soul of man, many—particularly in the East, the birth-place of humanity, according to the earliest history—believe it possible for him to *approach near to God*. This is effected by a devout adoration of Him, a frequent calling upon His Name; and the method of doing so has been established in a regular system. As this is peculiar to the East, the following account of the Dervishes will serve in some manner to explain it.

For most of the religious creeds of the Moslems I believe the source, or at least parallels, may be found in the Bible, and the history of Christian saints. The same thoughts give rise to a similarity of impulses and of acts; and this fact, with many, leads the mind to believe in their truthfulness.

A closer application to the contemplation of the Deity as the one Supreme Spirit, Creator of all things, and omnipotent Sovereign of the universe, and of the immortality of the soul of man, leads the mind to a disregard of the history of the human race as a Divine revelation. It places the *forms* of worship—sanctified in our estimation only by the assumption of their founder, that he possessed a position of devout communion with the Deity not possessed by his fellow-creatures generally—in a secondary, if not, indeed, in an unessential, point of view. They are valued only as the creation of the mind of one who commands our respect by his evident intention to benefit his fellow-beings, by elevating them from a meaningless idolatry to an adoration of the One only true Deity, and by wise moral laws and regulations to guide their ignorant and feeble intellects in a “pathway” leading

B 2

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05551-2 - The Dervishes Or, Oriental Spiritualism

John P. Brown

Excerpt

[More information](#)

from earth to heaven. Although we may be disposed to accept the idea that man has an “intuitive conviction” of the existence of God, this same intuition gives us no insight into the condition of the soul in its future existence. It nevertheless strongly suggests the fact of a right and a wrong, of good and evil acts, and of a future reward for the one, and a punishment for the other. The insignificance of the historical part of the Bible, in comparison with that which relates to man’s spirituality, becomes the more apparent as we pursue the latter. It is, in almost every instance, only the narrative of temporary human weaknesses,—of the empire of the passions, and of the feebleness of the soul, when unsupported by the Spirit of the Deity; often offering some of the worst deeds which darken and degrade mankind in his short career in this existence. These cannot be attributed to Divine inspiration, though the narrator may have been inspired to record them for a wise and useful purpose. The spiritual history of man only demands our deepest attention. In this we are led to regard with complacency, as non-essential to his future existence, the forms and particular rules of worship, established in modern as well as in ancient times, by the various individuals who fully considered the frailties of human nature, the necessity of external appearances, and the strength of whatever is mysterious upon the mind of men generally. How many men and women have believed themselves as especially called upon to assume the character of prophets and prophetesses, and to appeal to their fellow-beings in the language of Divine inspiration! We are struck by the strange mixture of good and evil which appears in the history of their own lives, and by the termination of their careers. We are lost in the vain endeavour to seize upon one fact calculated to procure a self-conviction of the truthfulness of their assumption. With some, we find youth and manhood devoted to mental instruction, in a religious point of view, and we are, therefore, led to give them our respect. And yet such instruction as this seems

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05551-2 - The Dervishes Or, Oriental Spiritualism

John P. Brown

Excerpt

[More information](#)

THE DERVISHES.

5

to command no claim to Divine inspiration, for the most unlearned have effected the most salutary results, the deepest and most lasting. Others, by the apparent purity of their lives, and the purely spiritual character of their administrations, place them high in our estimation; so that we do not care to call into question either their intellectual attainments or the grounds of their assumption, satisfied, as we are, by the evident benevolence of their designs to their fellow-beings.

In the East there is another class, who assume to have attained, by their own efforts, to a superior degree of spirituality, and to powers which come from Divine inspiration. These recognise the prophets and prophetesses who have preceded them, and who, through the purity of their lives, have become saints in the spirit-world, there filling positions of varied eminence and influence, which their followers invoke in their own behalf. This may be said also of some of the branches of Christianity, in which the theory of patron-saints is so far extended as to obviate the necessity of the worship and adoration of the Deity.

Revealed religion requires an unlimited degree of faith, and prescribes the exercise of reason, the same faculty, which, from its peculiar character, seems to have had a direct origin from the Creator, inasmuch as it places man above all other creatures. The simple religion of man, which is intuitive to his nature, is so perverted in modern times as no longer to inspire its principal feature, viz. that of universal benevolence; and, in its varied forms, is antagonistic to the evident will of the Supreme Deity, which cannot have any other object than that of justice, peace, and affection between all mankind. Revealed religion also teaches the existence of celestial spirits, who are supposed to be near the Deity, where they have been from a period the length of which cannot be even imagined. Of their origin nothing whatever is known: yet they must have been created in a manner different from that of man and his progeny. These are called Archangels and Angels, some of whose names we even know, such as Michael,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05551-2 - The Dervishes Or, Oriental Spiritualism

John P. Brown

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Gabriel, &c. ; and, in more modern times, the abode of God has been peopled with saints, transformed from ordinary corporeal beings in this world to purely spiritual ones in heaven ; and we still give them there the same names which they bore on earth.

Revelation relieves the mind of man of much of what is dark and concealed. It sheds a light upon the mysterious and the unknown, and, when accepted as a pure matter of faith, gives calmness and repose to the believer. A firmly-seated conviction, be it whatever it may, right or wrong, renders its possessor tranquil ; and with it the Jew, the Christian, the Moslem, as well as even the idolater, or the fire-worshipper, passes through his career in life, satisfied with his faith, and meets the hour of his departure with cheerful confidence. *Religion*, in its ordinary signification, means the outward expression of a belief, accompanied by various forms of worship and external ceremonies. *Spiritualism* rejects these as non-essentials, and is the simple communion of the human soul with the Divine Spirit, by means of prayer and contemplation. The heart's adoration of the Supreme Creator may be audible or silent, and each be equal to the other, in point of value, with Him to whom nothing is secret. The inutility of forms and ceremonies is, therefore, evident, and at best may be regarded as human conceptions, or as symbols of mysteries having for object only an influence upon the mind and imagination of the worshipper. If these be considered as insignificant in the sight of the Almighty, they may also be regarded as innocent and harmless. These should not, however, tend to withdraw the worshipper from the Creator to the creature. It is impossible to suppose God unwilling to hear the supplications of any one who appeals to Him in a sincere and fervid spirit. It is equally impossible to believe that He has placed a barrier to this faculty, in the form of a multitude of intermediate creatures, or that He has given to any one a power to accept or refuse the salvation of another. The laws of God are equally over all and for all, and never can be otherwise than perfectly just. Any assertion to the contrary must, there-

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05551-2 - The Dervishes Or, Oriental Spiritualism

John P. Brown

Excerpt

[More information](#)

THE DERVISHES.

7

fore, be attributed entirely to the imagination, the vanity, and the weakness of man. Some men have been good for their own sakes only; others have not only been themselves good, but have endeavoured to induce others to be equally good, so far as weak human nature and the power of the passions permit. Here, then, is an evident principle of benevolence, which alone renders its advocate superior to those who disregard it. That religion which is erected on this basis rests upon an eternal foundation, and possesses a Divine origin; whilst any other which inculcates strife and enmity, with all their attendant evils, must be held as antagonistic to the design of the Supreme Creator and Judge of the whole human race. The laws prescribed by the earliest legislatist of whom we have any knowledge, Moses, impressed upon the minds of those whom he designed to benefit, *first*, the unity of the Deity, to whom only man must address his adorations, and *next*, the principle of right and wrong towards each other,—or, in other words, the necessity of mutual benevolence.

The subject of Spiritual Powers is the principal object of the writer in collecting the materials of the present little work. No one, so far as he can learn, has devoted a book to the Dervishes exclusively. Some accounts of them, especially of the external forms of their worship, are found in various writings; but few have gone farther than these, or have given, at most, biographical sketches of their more prominent members.

The subject is not a new one. It can be traced in the Old and New Testament, as well as in the Koran, and, I fully believe, is peculiar to the learned ranks of the people of India, from whence it entered into Arabia and Persia. It has its origin in the belief that man's spirit is a Divine emanation, and, under certain peculiar circumstances, is possessed of a Divine faculty disconnected with his corporeal part, and, therefore, to be attributed wholly to his spiritual. The unity of the Deity was the principle of the Greeks and the Hindoos, and the other gods were supposed to be emanations from

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05551-2 - The Dervishes Or, Oriental Spiritualism

John P. Brown

Excerpt

[More information](#)

the One great Supreme Deity, called among the former Jove, and the latter Brahman. Among the Jews the unity was retained, and among the people of Arabia the same principle has not been forsaken, though that of emanations, or peculiar gifts of the Spirit of Allah to those who devotedly invoke and adore Him, is sustained to its fullest extent. The Trinity of the Christian creed seems to have been the chief object of Mohammed's abhorrence. In chapter cxii. of the Koran is found the whole basis of his doctrine: "God is one God; He begetteth not, neither is He begotten; and there is not any one like unto Him."

Whilst Moslems reject the divinity of Jesus Christ, they fully believe in His miraculous conception, and even call him, *par excellence*, the "Spirit of God" (*Roo'h Ulláh*); they reject the theory of His mission as a Redeemer and Saviour, and of the Baptism, and yet admit him as one of the *saints* (*Evlia*) whose intercession with God is beneficial to those who implore Divine mercy.

I cannot do better than here quote the remarks of M. Garcin de Tassy, in his preface to the admirable translation of the poem "Mantic Uttair" (one of the most beautiful collections of ideas on the Spiritualism of the East), to demonstrate the subject before me:—

"The enigma of nature has been variously explained by philosophy. Great geniuses have arisen in different places and in different ages, and their varied suppositions on this subject have been reduced to systems and found millions of docile followers. However, an authentic explanation was needed for this great mystery which would satisfy the mind and the heart.

"Mussulmans have shown a remarkable subtlety in developing the mystery of nature. They have undertaken the most serious task of showing the alliance between philosophy and revelation. Placed between the Pantheism of the Indian Jogis and the Koran, which is sometimes an informal copy of the Bible, their philosophers, named the *Soofees*, have established a Pantheistic

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05551-2 - The Dervishes Or, Oriental Spiritualism

John P. Brown

Excerpt

[More information](#)

THE DERVISHES.

9

school appropriate to Islam ideas,—a sort of esoteric doctrine of Islamism, which must be distinguished from Indian Pantheism, though indeed it presents only the errors of the *Vedānta* and the *Sāṅkhya*. ‘Pantheism, as a moral doctrine, leads to the same conclusions as materialism—the negation of human liberty, the indifference to actions, and the legitimacy of temporal enjoyments.’ In this system *all is God, except God Himself*, for He thereby ceases to be God.

“The spiritualism of the *Soofee*, though contrary to materialism, is, in reality, identical with it. But if their doctrine is not more reasonable, it is, at least, more elevated and poetical. Among their authors, there are some who have endeavoured to form a concord between Mohammedan dogmas and their own principles, so as to establish for them a character of orthodoxy.

“The doctrine of the *Soofees* is ancient in Islamism, and is much spread, especially among the partisans of ‘Alee (the fourth caliph). Out of it grew the belief in the infusion of the Divinity in ‘Alee, and their allegorical explanation of all religious precepts and ceremonies. One Islam writer says that the first person who took the name of *Soofee* was Aboo Hāshim of Koofa, in the latter part of the eighth century; whilst another declares that the seeds of Soofeeism were sown in the time of Adam, germed in that of Noah, budded in that of Abraham, and the fruit commenced to be developed in that of Moses. They reached their maturity in that of Christ; and in that of Mohammed produced pure wine. Those of its sectarians who loved this wine have so drunk of it as to lose all knowledge of themselves, and to exclaim, ‘Praise be to me! Is there any greater than me?’ or rather, ‘I am the Truth (that is to say, God)! There is no other God than me!’

“It is well to remember that the word *Soofee* does not come from the Greek word *σοφός* (*sage* or *wise*), as one might be tempted to suppose, but from the Arabic word *soof* (wool), and signifies a *woollen dress*,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05551-2 - The Dervishes Or, Oriental Spiritualism

John P. Brown

Excerpt

[More information](#)

which forms the costume of the Dervishes and Fak-
 keers, 'contemplatifs and spiritualists.' From this name
 comes that of the *Soofees*, *Mutasauwif*, and signifies
 especially a *Tâlib*, or novice, who desires to become a
Soofee. They generally give the name of *Sâlik* to the
Tâlib, as 'one who walks in a spiritual path.' This
 name also simply signifies 'a man.' They call '*Aboodiyat*,
 'slavery' or 'servitude,' the service of God; and
 '*Abâ*, he who devotes himself to His service. *Ârif*, or
 the 'knowing,' is the devout contemplator; and *Ma'rifat*,
 the 'knowledge of God,' is the object of the contempla-
 tion. He who has reached this knowledge is called a
Wâli, or one who is brought near to God; an expression
 which, in the end, signifies a *saint*. *Jezb* is the Divine
 attraction; the ecstatic state, which is the result of
 contemplation, is called *Hâl*, and its degrees, *Makâm*;
 the union with God is *Jam'*; the separation *Fark*, and
 the continuation with Him, *Sukinât*. They call the
 ignorant or worldly individual *Jâhil*, and this expression
 signifies one who is not occupied with spiritual matters;
 and a distinction in fervour is thus defined, viz. :—
 Love of God, '*Ashk Ullâh*, differs from 'Affection;'
 Friendship, *Mohabbet*; *Shevk*, 'Desire;'
Ishtiâk, 'Ardour;'
 and *Wejd*, 'Ecstasy.'

"These are the principal expressions used by Mussul-
 men Spiritualists, though there are many others, which
 cannot here be given."

The following extract from a mystical poem on
 Spiritualism, cited by the same author, will serve to
 develop the Dervish idea of God and man :—

"Man is the most perfect of God's creatures; he is
 the king of nature, because he is the only one in the
 world who knows himself,—knows, thus, the Creator,
 and possesses the intelligence of revelation. One may
 compare God to the sun reflected upon the waters; this
 reflection of light is nothing other than the light itself.
 For this reason, religious men, intoxicated with the cup
 of Divine communion, exclaim, 'I am God.' In fact,
 man's attributes are of a Divine character—what do I
 say?—his substance is that even of God. The only