

OBITUARY NOTICES

Professor Ignaz Goldziher

On 13th November, 1921, the *Royal Asiatic Society* lost one of the most distinguished of its Honorary Members by the death of Ignaz Goldziher, Professor at the University of Budapest, who was perhaps the greatest authority on Mohammedan theology that the world has ever seen. He was born in 1850 at Székes-Fehérvár (called by the Germans Stuhlweissenburg) in Hungary, and after studying Semitic languages both in his own country and in Germany received his Doctorate at Leipzig in 1870. Three years later he spent some time in the East, and succeeded in realizing an ambition which he had long cherished—the privilege of attending lectures at the Azhar in Cairo. On his return to Europe he soon acquired a world-wide reputation as an Orientalist, but the fact that he was a Jew rendered him an object of suspicion to the bigoted rulers of Hungary, and it was not till 1894 that he obtained a Professorship. In spite of the ungenerous treatment which he had received from his fellow-countrymen he was, throughout the whole of his career, a fervent patriot.

Of his numerous publications it is impossible here to give any adequate account. His reading was of enormous extent, and he never treated any subject without throwing fresh light upon it, for he possessed, in a high degree, the faculty of selecting out of the vast mass of details that lay before him those which were of real interest. Among his contributions to the study of Arabic poetry it is sufficient to mention his edition of the *Diwān* of Jarwal ibn Aus al-Ḥuṭai'ah (published originally in the *Zeitschrift* of the German Oriental Society and afterwards in a separate form, 1893), and his *Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie* (1896, 1899). But by far the most important of his works are those which deal with the origin and internal development of Islām, in particular his

Muhammedanische Studien (1889, 1890) and his *Vorlesungen über den Islām* (1910). Here, as in everything that he wrote, his standpoint is that of a strictly impartial scientific investigator, and for this reason the conclusions at which he arrived will be pleasing neither to the blind admirers nor to the fanatical opponents of the Mohammedan religion. It had long been recognized, not only by European scholars, but also by intelligent Mohammedans, that the books of Sacred Tradition, such as the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī and the other so-called "canonical" collections of *Ḥadīth*, contain much that is untrustworthy. Nevertheless it may be truly said that Goldziher was the first to discover how large a part of the Sacred Tradition was deliberately fabricated in the interest of one or another of the various parties which arose during the first three centuries after the Prophet. Moreover, Goldziher had the merit of pointing out in detail the influence exercised by other religious systems, in particular by Christianity, Gnosticism, and Neoplatonism, on the development of Mohammedan theology. Thus we are now enabled to perceive, much more clearly than was possible forty years ago, that Islām, as it has existed from the Middle Ages to the present day, is an amalgam of many elements which are often quite inconsistent with one another.

Most of Goldziher's writings were published in German, but unfortunately some of them remain shrouded in the impenetrable obscurity of the Hungarian language. It is most earnestly to be wished that all his contributions to learning should, as soon as possible, be rendered generally accessible to Orientalists, for even his briefest articles have a permanent value.

To him we may apply, in the deepest and truest sense, the verse of al-Husain ibn Muṭair—

Fatan 'īsha fī ma'rūfihī ba'da ma'itihī
Kamā kāna ba'da 's-saili majrāhu marta'ā.

A. A. BEVAN.