

THE KORAN. A new translation by N. J. Dawood. (Penguin Books; 5s.)

In his introduction Mr Dawood tells us it has been his aim to present the modern reader with an intelligible version of the Koran in contemporary English. He has succeeded. The version flows smoothly and has a certain literary quality of its own, something of the poetic fire and fervour which characterizes the original. It is not a book to be read through consecutively. Each chapter, or 'Sura', is a separate proclamation. In order to make the book more attractive to readers Mr Dawood has chosen to put first a number of the shorter and more poetic Suras, many of which are also among the earliest. Rodwell had led the way in this redistribution of the individual chapters, but he was concerned, following Nöldeke and others, with setting them, as far as possible, in chronological order.

In his brief introduction Mr Dawood refers to the 'cryptic Arabic letters which head certain chapters of the Koran'. He takes the line that they remain completely inexplicable. This view does not seem to give sufficient weight to the theories of Nöldeke, Bauer and others according to which these letters may well be monomarks referring to the owners of certain small collections of Suras contributed to the first authentic edition and retained as a memorial to their provenance.

The translator does not seem to have faced up to the implications of the word 'Koran', which, in itself, means 'proclamation'. Each Sura, and, indeed, various parts of some Suras, constitute independent proclamations or recordings of (divine?) revelations made to the Prophet. During Mahomet's lifetime there was no book. If a book is referred to in the text of the Suras, that book is the *ummul kitab*, the infinite divine knowledge of which the Koran is a partial disclosure. In a parallel sense one could say the same of the the word 'Gospel' in the Christian revelation. Another little grievance one might express is that, all through, Mr Dawood leaves 'Allah' in its Arabic form, instead of translating it. After all, Allah is the word for God used by all Arabic-speaking Christians.

In the Sura 'The Dawn', in the last verse (Mr Dawood does not number the verses), we find: 'Return to your Lord, joyful and pleasing in His sight.' For 'joyful' one should have 'pleased (with him) and pleasing', etc.—an apt description of the 'state of grace'.

In Sura 74 (The Resurrection), verse 17 in Rodwell, we find: 'We will see to the collection and recital of it'. The Arabic word *djama* would here be better translated by 'recollection'.

These observations, however, and others one could make, concern minor details and it remains true that Mr Dawood has made a fine and stirring version of the Arabic Koran.

Those of us who are apt to take a captious view of the Koran itself should remember that it is essentially a book for liturgical recitation. It is meant primarily to instil a feeling of awe before the divine majesty. It has done this for countless Mahometans and the present writer was impressed by finding that the son of a Maroccan chief, now a Franciscan Father, continues to carry his Koran about with him and to consult it constantly. Among the passages he would find in it are this: 'Do you not see how Allah compares a good word to a good tree? Its root is firm and its branches reach the sky.' (Sura Abraham); and this concerning our Lady (Sura The Imrans): 'And remember the angel's word to MARY. He said: "Allah has chosen you. He has made you pure and exalted you above all women".'

CYPRIAN RICE, O.P.

REFORMERS IN INDIA. An account of the work of Christian missionaries on behalf of social reform, 1793-1833. By K. Ingham. (C.U.P.; 18s.)

India is a country of astounding contrasts. Here is to be found lofty spiritual teaching, side by side with senseless superstitions, noble ideals mingled with vicious social customs. Keep your eyes fixed on one aspect of Indian life and you will be filled with horror and disgust; on another, and you will feel nothing but veneration and admiration. 'The Christian missionaries' whose activities are described by Dr Ingham were filled with Christian and reforming zeal and did not hesitate to denounce the abuses they found. But as they advanced in the study of the languages and literature of the country, they, like others after them, came to entertain a genuine respect for the genius of India's thinkers. They themselves had sprung from a very different background. They were English Baptists, Congregationalists, with some Evangelical Anglicans and Scottish Presbyterians. The author has confined himself to the period between 1793 and 1833, for reasons which he explains. But one cannot help hankering after some knowledge of developments subsequent to 1833. Still, he has put a great deal of knowledge, derived from patient and painstaking study of sources, into his 136 pages. No doubt, after 1833 the main initiative for social reforms had passed into the hands of the Government of India. In his book we find ample proof that the great religious and moral revival brought about by the dissenters in England in the early years of the nineteenth century and vividly described by Elie Halévy (*England in 1815*) was too vigorous to be confined to one country and needed to spend itself in generous enterprises overseas.

William Carey was the great pioneer. With his keen intelligence and encyclopaedic knowledge, his boundless zeal and courageous enterprise, he won for himself a great name in a sphere very different