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The late Islamic scholar, thinker and philosopher, al-`Allamah as-Sayyid Muhammad Husayn at-Tabataba'i (al-`Allamah at-Tabataba'i) came from the celebrated Tabataba'i family of Tabriz. For the last three centuries, this family has produced generation after generation of renowned religious scholars in Azarbayjan (Iran). They are descendants of the second Imam, al-Hasan ibn `Ali (peace be on both of them). The clan is also referred to with the title, al-Qadi.

Al-`Allamah at-Tabataba'i was the son of as-Sayyid Muhammad ibn as-Sayyid Muhammad Husayn at-Tabataba'i. al-`Allamah was born in Tabriz on 30/ 12/ 1321 A. H. (17/3/ 1904 C. E.). His father died in 1330 (1912). The orphaned child grew up in Tabriz, and after completing the religious education there, in circa 1341 (1923) he went to an-Najaf al-Ashraf (Iraq), the most important centre of the highest Shi'ah religious learning.

In an-Najaf al-Ashraf, he began his higher studies with such illustrious scholars as ash-Shaykh (al-Mirza) Muhammad Husayn (son of Shaykhu 'l-Islam al-Mirza `Abdu 'r-Rahim) Na'ini al-Gharawi (1277/1860-1 - 1355/1936) and ash-Shaykh Muhammad Husayn (son of al-Hajj Muhammad Hasan, Mu'inu 't-Tujjar) Isfahani (1296/1878 - 1361/1942).

These two, together with ash–Shaykh Diya'u 'd–Din (son of Mawla Muhammad) `Iraqi (1278/ 1861–2 – 1361 / 1942) are held in the highest regard in the Shi `ah world. They were among the most prominent scholars not only in the fields of the Shiite jurisprudence and the fundamentals of jurisprudence, but in all Islamic subjects. The opinions they expounded and the theories they established have been followed by all those who came after them.

Each of them founded his own school of thought. They trained thousands of Shi `ah scholars and jurists; and all the *maraji* `u 't-taqlid of the Shi`ite world, to this day, are their students. The Isfahani was a philosopher, unsurpassed in his time, a man of literature and a good poet of Arabic and Persian; he was a genius whose achievements made others to look upon him as their ideal. The Na'ini has carved for himself a niche in the history because of his bold opinions and decrees in the political and social life of the Muslim *ummah*.

al-`Allamah at Tabataba'i was much influenced by these two teachers, (and especially by the Isfahani) in the development of his thoughts and knowledge. A third influence was of as-Sayyid Abu 'l-Qasim Ja'far (son of as-Sayyid Muhammad al-Musawi) Khwansari (1313/1895-6 - 1380/1961), known as "the mathematician." al-`Allamah at-Tabataba'i was proud of learning the mathematics from him.

Also, he wrote a book on some topics of higher mathematics, applying therein some special theories of his teacher. The book is mentioned in adh–Dhari `ah, vol, ii, pp. 232 – 233. He learned philosophy and metaphysics from as–Sayyid Husayn (s/o as–Sayyid Rida s/o as–Sayyid Musa–) al–Husayni (1293/1876 – 1358/1939) of al–Badkubil a well–known teacher of philosophy and related subjects in those days.

In ethical and spiritual field, he received his training from his relatives, as-Sayyid (al-Mirza) `Ali Agha (s/o al-Mirza Husayn al-Qadi) Tabataba'i (1285/1869 – 1366/1947), a well-known divine who established a school of spiritual and ethical training which is flourishing to this day.

All those influences combined in al-`Allamah at-Tabataba'i to create in him a well-balanced academic and spiritual personality. A well-respected authority on religious subjects of jurisprudence and its fundamentals; a philosopher of independent views and various new theories; an inspired model of ethical and spiritual perfection, who not only taught morality but lived it – this was al-`Allamah at-Tabataba'i. Yet it will be correct to say that his scholarship was overshadowed by his fame and prestige as a philosopher and a spiritual man.

al-`Allamah at-Tabataba'i returned to Tabriz in 1353 (1934) where he was welcomed as a religous scholar. There he spent his time teaching higher philosophy to willing disciples – but it was a small place for his talents. In 1364 (1945) he migrated to Qum, the most important centre of religious education in Iran.

In Qum, he remained engaged in imparting knowledge of ethics, philosophy and exegesis of the Qur'an to the students who had already attained to a high level of erudition. There he remained till his death on Sunday, 18/1/1402 (15/11/1981). May Allah bestow His mercy on him. Amen.

Many religious leaders of the present generation were and are among his students and disciples, the most famous being the late Murtada Mutahhari (1338/ 1920 – 1399/ 1979).

al-`Allamah at Tabataba'i's fame rests on his various academic works – the , most important being his great exegesis of the Qur'an, *al-Mizan fitafsiri'l-Qur'an*. It may correctly be said to be the foundation stone of the academic prestige which al-`Allamah at-Tabataba'i was accorded in the Muslim world.

Among his other works is *Usul–e falsafah wa rawesh–a realism* (The Fundamentals of philosophy and the Doctrine of Realism). This book is a comparative study of Islamic philosophy and various modern anti–Islamic schools of thoughts, especially the Marxism. His disciple, late Murtada Mutahhari, wrote footnotes and explanations to this work, thus making it easily comprehensible to the average man.

A third book *Shi`ah dar Islam* (Shi`ah in Islam), was first published in Persian; later it was published in English also, with the title: Shi`ite Islam. This book is based on al-`Allamah's discussions with Professor Kenneth Morgan of Colgate University, held in the summer of 1384 (1963) about Shi'ah and Shi'ism.

However, it is the tafsir, al-Mizan (published in Arabic in 20 volumes) which presents the true picture of

the author's academic taste and his way of thinking. Before starting this work, the author made a detailed plan to explain the Qur'an with the help of the Qur'an itself; and he faithfully fulfilled this pledge upto the end of the book. He has outlined this scheme in his Preface, in volume one.

It was a grace of Allah that He inspired us a few years ago to prepare and publish a *tafsir* of the Qur'an in English. We wanted it to be a *tafsir* that would help the reader to understand the divine Book and its verses, as much as practically possible – a *tafsir* that would bring its sublime meanings and divine themes nearer to the human mind; would explain the context in which the verses and chapters were revealed, would cover the points that are necessary for understanding its meaning and fully comprehending its import – all this without ignoring the Tradition of the Prophet and his *Ahlu 'l-bayt* (as) in arriving at the final conclusion.

On the other hand, we wanted it to be in sympathy with the mentality of the present day's readers, Muslim as well as non-Muslim, looking at the problems that boggle their minds and the questions that demand responsible and knowledgeable answers – to the extent it is related to the Qur'an and its explanation.

After much deliberation, we found that *tafsir*, *al–Mizan*, satisfies our both requirements to a great extent.

So, seeking the help of Allah, we decided to get it translated in the English language. Even before embarking on this work, we were fully aware that it was a gigantic task; we understood that the responsibility would be heavy and the efforts to bring this scheme to completion herculean; the expenses would be huge and the difficulties himalayan.

We knew all of it, and our only weapon was, and is, our reliance on Allah. We sought His help to make our dream come true; and to help us reach the end goal and prepare and publish the complete set. A few years ago, we entered into an agreement with someone to translate the first volume; but he did not fulfil his promise, although we gave him all the time and facilities – and even more – that were needed for it.

At last we requested al-`Allamah ar-Radawi to take this important responsibility on his shoulders, and we are thankful to Allah that al-`Allamah ar-Radawi fulfilled his promise.

We have written in short about al-`Allamah as-Sayyid Sa'eed Akhtar Rizvi (s/o as-Sayyid Abu 'l-Hasan [1309/1891 –1394/1974]) in the preface of his book, *The Family Life of Islam,* in which we, *inter alia*, wrote:

Sayyid Rizvi is one of the most sincere preachers of Islam and an active scholar, both when he was in Tanzania in the Bilal Muslim Mission (an Islamic organization active in Tanzania), and also now that he has returned to his own country of India. In the way of spreading Islam he has rendered enormous services and has been most active.

al-`Allamah Rizvi has written scores of books and booklets in English, Urdu and Swahili, many of which have been published; and we have given in the above-mentioned preface some titles which have been published by us. Some of his books have been translated and published by us in French, Italian, Japanese, Thai, Indonesian, Hausa and some other languages.

Here we must express our thanks to him for the efforts he has made and the difficulties he has overcome in rendering *al-Mizan* into English. The original Arabic book is replete with academic terms of all disciplines, Islamic as well as non-Islamic, and with philosophical discussions related mostly to metaphysics.

The learned translator has discharged his trust faithfully and conveyed the original idea into English truthfully. What you find in your hands is the true rendering of what al-`Allamah at-Tabataba'i wrote in Arabic. The translator has written some footnotes where he thought it necessary – without altering the original text in any way.

We left the entire responsibility of the translation in the hands of the translator, relying on his erudition and knowledge of Arabic language, philosophy and Islamic subjects and his long experience in rendering purely Islamic esoteric ideas into a western language like English.

Now he is personally responsible for the English translation, just as al-`Allamah at-Tabataba'i (may Allah have His mercy on him!) was personally responsible for the explanations of the Qur'anic verses, and the general discussions he wrote in his tafsir, *al-Mizan*.

We have prepared two lists for this book:

- 1. Names of the authors referred to in the twenty volumes of *al–Mizan*.
- 2. Names of the books which need a somewhat detailed introduction.

These two lists have been added in the first volume of the English translation only; two other lists will be printed with every volume.

We pray to Allah and beseech Him to make our deed purely for His pleasure, to help us complete the work we have started, and to guide us aright in every step we put forward on this road. Surely, He is the best Guardian and the best Helper.

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