

ISLAM.

**In the 2nd Convention of Religions at
Allahabad in 1911.**

ISLAM—which means complete submission to Divine control in the mode and conduct of life, and implicit and unreserved obedience to laws revealed to man by God in preference to all our prepossessions, inclinations or judgments—is a religion which embraces all such religions that have been preached by teachers inspired by God in various ages and different countries. Thus the Quran says in this respect:—
We believe in God and in what has been revealed to us, as well as to Abraham, Ashmael, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants; we also believe in what was given to Moses, Jesus and to all the Prophets raised by the Creator of the Universe; we accept all of them, without making any distinction among them.

Before the revelation of Al-Quran, every nation, while claiming divine origin for its faith, denied this privilege to the creeds of all other nations. This disposition of exclusiveness engendered feelings of conceit, pride and contempt and caused dissension and discord in various members of God's family. No one for a minute turned his thought to those Divine morals which we daily observe in the Universal Provi-

dence. He who has been equally benevolent to all human race in providing them with means of physical nourishment, could not have been partial in giving His blessings conducive to spiritual growth. Does not His sun, His moon, His stars and His solar system equally serve all mankind. If no class of human race has been denied benefits of the water, the earth, the air and all other manifestations of nature, why this equal and impartial dispensation by Providence has been disbelieved in matters of revelation, which, in fact, is the most important and essential factor in the development of human faculties. It was a misconception of Divine Providence, and an error so fatal to the establishment of universal brotherhood of man, under which nations laboured from centuries to centuries till the last word of God appeared which, in the very first sentence, falsified this wrong conception of partial dispensation. The Quran commences with the words Al-hamd-u Lillahi Rabbil alamin, "All Praise and Glory is due to Allah, who is not only the Maker and Provider of India or Arabia, of Persia or Syria, but is the Creator and Provider of the whole Universe, who, as He has given means of physical growth equally to all men on the earth, has provided them with means of spiritual culture as well". This noble doctrine thus inculcated by the Quran, once more infused spirit of equality and fraternity in mankind, destroying that narrowness of mind which had been disintegrating the whole fabric of human society, and separated

brother from brother under the universal Fatherhood of God. This generous teaching of Al-Quran, if it prompts me to cherish feelings of love and reverence for Moses and Jesus, enjoins upon me also to pay my respect and allegiance to Ramachandra, Krishna and Lord Budha. If, with Al-Quran, I accept the authenticated portion of the Bible as the word of God, I regard the Gita and other Holy scriptures of India as my joint property with other Hindu brethren. Hence in accordance with the teachings of Al-Quran, Islam is the name of every religion, creed or faith, which has been preached from time to time in different countries and to various tribes by teachers inspired by God. They came from one and the same source and taught one and the same truth. But the hand of time, combined with want of efficient means in olden days to preserve those teachings intact, afforded occasions and opportunities for human interpolations and wrong interpretations. On the other hand, languages, which were originally the conveyance of these ancient scriptures, became obsolete, and set up unsurmountable hindrances in the way of coming generations to reach the spirit of old letters. Moreover, the development of human faculties, and complications of evils—a necessary sequel of earthly civilization—called for new orders of things. This emergency brought forth prophet after prophet, who came and restored truths already revealed and made necessary additions to meet the requirements of the age. As different races of mankind were distantly

located and separated from each other by natural barriers. with very limited means of intercourse between them, each nation needed its own prophet, and so was it blessed; as Al-Quran says:—"There was no nation but had its teacher."

If Hindustan had its Vedic rishis, with Krishna, Ramchandra and Gautama to follow them, China saw its teacher in the person of Confucius. If Zoraster came to kindle the spiritual fire in Persia, the Valley of the Jordan was fertilized with the Divine stream coming down the Olive Mount. Thus, whenever and wherever evil prevailed and man became corrupt, men were raised and inspired by God to teach and restore the same old Islam. Till a new state of things arose in the world, when laws of God began to be violated in all its corners, Divine limits and bounds were transgressed simultaneously on the whole surface of the Earth. Every country and each nation saw complete corruption and moral depravity, virtue became extinct, God seemed to have forsaken the Earth, Satan brought the whole world under its infernal sway. No one can refer to any other age in history than the seventh century of the Christian era, when human society sank to its lowest ebb spiritually as well as morally. If, in nature, light always follows darkness, and droughts by rains; if prophets come only in times when wickedness is rampant; if various incarnations of Vishnu in India descended from heavens only when earth could no more bear the burden of sin; and if Lord Krishna, in

fulfilment of his own words given in the Gita, must come in times of irreligiousness:—the seventh century was high time for the realization of these truths. This state of things called for either appearance of several prophets in several countries, or the advent of one Masterly hand, who should come to restore the old *Prachin* Islam in its perfect form. But the history of the world had then taken a new turn. Circumstances arose which facilitated means of mutual intercourse between various nations of the world. Different components of human society, so separated from each other by natural and artificial barriers, were about to come close to each other to make one united whole. The vast wide world was destined to be reduced into a country, with countries as its cities, and cities as its streets. Men of various nations and denominations were on the threshold of coming into contact with each other. To give different teachings to different nations at such a juncture was to cause a regular chaos. Hence the great Divine Wisdom was pleased to raise the last of Its prophets in a place which occupied central position in the known world. He taught the same old Islam, which had been preached by others before, and brought a Book which recapitulated old truths in their unalloyed form with requisite additions; as Al-Quran says: “Al-Quran is nothing but the old books refined of human alloy and contains transcendent truths embodied in all sacred scriptures, with complete additions necessary for the development of all human

faculties. It repeats truths given in the Holy Vedas, in the Bible, in the words of the Gita, in the sayings of Ramchandra, Budha and all other prophets, and adds what was not in them". This broadmindedness in ascribing Divine origin to all religions, which had been so unequivocally impressed on the Muslim minds by the Quran and its Holy Messenger, and had been reminded from time to time by various Muslim divines, sank into oblivion through the lapse of centuries. The epidemic disease of narrowmindedness, however, stole marches upon us and, like the adherents of other creeds, we also began to deny any worth in others' teachings. This resulted in straining mutual relations and putting an end to all sympathetic regard for others. India, the home of religions, was chiefly affected by this tension of feelings. Religious controversies began and were carried to the bitter end in bad spirit and with bad taste. Fault finding became the order of the day. The holiest founders of religions, who even now command respect and allegiance from millions of people in the world, were most ruthlessly subjected to scurrilous remarks and foulest libel at the hands of persons who, with least possible knowledge, made a regular trade of this undesirable system of religious criticism. I may safely remark that this rancorous attitude in religious polemics is more responsible for the present widened gulf between the Hindus and the Muslims than any other matter in politics. I may, for example, refer to the state of affairs in the "Land of Five Rivers," which

is the hot-bed of these unpleasant religious discussions. But the God of peace, who loves peace and desires to see peace in His people, came to our rescue. He raised in the heart of the Punjab an apostle of Islam, who declaring himself to be a humble servant of Prophet Muhammad, restored again the religion of toleration and liberal mindedness—which had been taught by his Master some thirteen hundred years back. He created in us a sense of appreciation of, and reverence for the, Teachers of the world. He acknowledged beauties in every religion, and, in order to produce harmony and concord in the conflicting elements of the country, he appealed to Muslims as Mahdi, to Christians in the person of the Promised Messiah, and to Hindus in the capacity of Lord Krishna. Those who are interested in seeing union and fellow-feeling again restored between Hindus and Muslims cannot do better than what this Apostle of the present age did in writing his Message of Peace to Hindus on the day of his departure to the heavens.

Now, I turn to my subject again. This is the purport of that cosmopolitan religion, named Islam, the last book of which, that is, Al-Quran, codifies truths revealed in the Vedas, the Bible and other sacred Scriptures, and, in addition, gives new laws to meet the contingencies of the present time, when the different members of God's family, who lived apart from each other in the days of old revelations, had to come close one to the other. Al-Quran gives us rules

and regulations adapted to the various needs and requirements of life. It is not merely a collection of moral precepts, or a book of rituals. It gives us, on one hand, true conception of Godhood and enlightens us with great truths, such as angels, revelation, prophethood, future-life, heaven and hell; on the other, it supplies us with principles to guide us in political and social, economic and domestic affairs, so that the whole human society, by acting up to them, may attain to its perfection.

Al-Quran is not confined to prayers, fastings, and sacrifices. It is a complete code of life. If a King is ordered therein to observe certain laws to govern his country, the subjects as well have been enjoined upon to pay allegiance to their ruler, foreign or otherwise. Similarly a law-giver, a statesman, a judge, a military officer, a merchant, a craftsman, a son, a father, a brother, a husband, a wife, a neighbour, a friend, the rich as well as the poor, in short a person in various capacities and walks of life, will find therein principles of guidance, to make him a useful member of society. This perfect teaching I could only find in the Quran, and therefore we Muslims believe that the old religion of Islam, that was preached by generations of prophets, saw its perfection in this final revelation in matters of law, as the Quran says: "To-day the Law is perfected for you." The time at my disposal hardly permits me to enter into any details, however brief, of what I have sketched above. But before I conclude, I

wish to point out one important thing inculcated by the Quran which confers the greatest boon on human race. None can be a greater benefactor of mankind than one who creates in them consciousness of their possessing highest capabilities and elevates their ideal and goal. The Quran does not admit that sin is innate in our nature and that we are by our own actions incapable of freeing ourselves from its bondage. It, on the other hand, teaches that man enters this world in a sinless condition, and can make uninterrupted and unlimited development if he would act upon certain laws. It announces "Verily We created man with the best and highest capabilities. He will gain unlimited results if he believes in and acts upon certain truths ; but if he disregards them, he is destined to sink into the lowest pit of degradation." Nothing can be stronger incentive for progress and advancement and greater check against fall and degeneration than what has been revealed in these verses. If we believe that sin is inherent, and that all our efforts to liberate ourselves from its clutches are fruitless, it is sufficient to benumb our faculties and damp our ardour and resolution. Is it not a most degrading view of our spirituality, when we are admitted to be capable of attaining to boundless material development. The Holy Prophet does not say that man comes with sin in this world. According to him, man is born with nature capable of observing laws and is therefore sinless, as sin is nothing but disobedience of laws

and no advancement can be achieved without obeying law. "A child is pure at birth," so says the noble and liberal Prophet, "not because he is the son of a Mussalman but because he is the son of man." If one with such immaculate nature is provided with good laws, he is bound to reach the highest goal of perfection. If the world, in its material progress, can produce Newtons, Hershalls and Edisons, where lies the impossibility of seeing Krishnas, Christs and Budhas again, especially when these eminent teachers themselves promised in unequivocal terms their re-appearance in the world. And, in my opinion, if any sacred book claims finality, as every one of us accredits his book thus, it must contain laws, observance of which may create perfect man of the days gone by, because they observed certain laws and thereby reached the goal of spirituality. If any book falls short of these requisities, it makes room for another book to be final. Among prophets similarly, one can only claim, as Muhammed did, to be the last of the sacred race, who shows you the way to that spiritual perfection which means receiving of Divine revelation. If all the spiritually advanced men used to hold communication with God, as is held by their followers, and if speaking to men has been recognised as one of the Divine attributes, how can one justify a belief that the door of revelation is sealed for good? If God is as Omniscient, Omnipresent, Perfect and All-merciful, as He used to be, and if His Divine attributes are not in abeyance, He must

speak always as He did before. But some of us believe that since certain event God has abandoned speaking to man. Logically one of the two things must have happened. Either God has lost some of His attributes, or man has, on account of his degradation, lost some of the capabilities possessed by his forefathers. But both these hypotheses are wrong on the very face of them. Perfect God must have and keep His attributes intact, while the present man is physiologically the same as the past one. Some may make the present man unfit, but I was exceedingly rejoiced to read the Gita when I found Lord Krishna promises his reappearances now and then on certain occasions; and I feel proud to believe in a Book which holds out to me a promise in the following words: "O God, Show us and guide us along the straight path—the path trodden by your blessed people—the Prophets, the Truthful, the Martyrs and the Righteous." In answer to this revealed prayer, God says: "Those who exert in our way, We show them our path." Thus in the words of Al-Quran, it is man's own exertions along the Divine path, that qualify him for the choicest blessings of God, which is termed revelation. The Quran lays down laws and rules to enable us to become recipients of the Divine blessings showered on perfect men before. In short, we believe Muhammad to be the last of the prophets, not only because he gave us a complete code of guidance in life here, but because he also enabled us to claim heritage of Prophets. He says: "The Divines amongst my followers will be like the Pro-

phets of Israelites." He also promised us an inspired Reformer at the head of each century, who is called "Mujaddid" in the Muslim terminology. And we find fulfilment of these prophetic words in the annals of Muhammadan history. I cannot say with certainty if India saw men after the likeness of Krishna and Ramchandra amongst the votaries of the Vedas, or the Christian faith could produce men like John and Peter, possessing some qualities of Jesus. But no century has passed on Islam that has been without men receiving revelation from God. For instance, Omar bin Abdul Aziz; Ba-Yazid of Bustam; Junaid of Bughdad; Mohy-ud-Din Ibn Arabi of Spain; Sh. Abdul Qadar of Gilan; and in India Moin-ud-Din Chishti, Sheikh Ahmad Mujaddid Alif Sani, Nizam-ud-Din Aulia, Bawa Farid Shakar Ganj, Data Ganj Bakhsh, Shah Wali-ul-Lah and Sayed Ahmad Bareilvi, may be counted amongst men who were blessed with the word of God.

This truth has been taught in clearest terms by the Quran, but the materialistic tendencies of our age, which are responsible for the scepticism so rife in these days, were strong enough to obscure it into oblivion and the revelation would have become a myth pure and simple, as it is at present in Europe, if the head of our century had not seen its promised Mujaddid. God raised Ahmad in the Punjab, who presented his own pattern to his fellow-beings. He showed that his implicit obedience to the Quranic laws and his faithful observance of the holy practi-

ces of the Prophet, secured him the highest grace, the revelation. He declared that the door is not closed, but is open to him who knocks at it. This is, the highest object a man should aim at, and this is the loftiest destination of human soarings. It was to achieve this that Islam was revealed from time immemorial and saw its perfection at the hands of Muhammad (peace and choicest blessings be on him). Blessed is the Book which acknowledges in you great capabilities and creates in you their consciousness and thus raises your ideal. Likewise, blessed is the man who, by his practical example, inspires in you a spirit to appreciate and aspire to that high goal.
