

"Muhammad is . . . the Apostle of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets . . ." HOLY QUR-AN 33:
"There will be no Prophet after me."—MUHAMMAD.

The **Islamic Review**

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Gertrude Elizabeth Lewes-Parker, B.A., (Dunelm). Saw service with Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps in France 1916-19, attached to the Army Pay Department. After the war she joined the Egyptian Government Service under the Ministry of Education and was English Mistress in the Madrasat al Banat. Helmieh Gedida, Cairo.



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A DECLARATION

I, Gertrude Elizabeth Lewes-Parker, do hereby faithfully and solemnly declare of my own free will that I worship One and Only Allah (God) alone; that I believe Muhammad to be His Messenger and Servant; that I respect equally all prophets—Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and others, and that I will live a Muslim life by the help of Allah.

La ilaha il-Allah Muhammad-un-Rasul Allah

[There is but one God (Allah) and Muhammad is God's Messenger.]

ELIZABETH LEWES-PARKER

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ISLAM*

BY MR. PETER J. CARRUTHERS

One might well ask what warrant have I for speaking to you on the subject of Islam, when I have never been further East than London. I can speak no Oriental tongue, and I have not even had the opportunity to discuss the subject with Muslims in this country.

On the other hand I have studied Islam for some time—I have read the Qur-án and many books and articles by Muslim writers. In that way I have endeavoured to gain some insight into what Ameer Ali would call “The Spirit of Islam.” Being free from the prejudices fostered by dogmatic tradition, I am not unduly influenced by the antagonism of the Christians and Hindus towards Islam, nor on the other hand by the loyalty of the Muslims in upholding their faith. That is my warrant for speaking to you on this subject.

Whilst trying to maintain an unbiassed attitude, I hold that the spirit of sympathetic understanding is better than that of cold detachment. The attitude of free inquiry and impartial judgment blended with a spirit of sympathetic understanding, I feel to be the right to Islam or any other form of religion, especially as I believe that religion is the expression of the real spiritual nature of man (which is Divine in essence), and comes from the kinship and communion of the human soul with the Universal Soul. There are well over 250 millions of Muslims in the world to-day of whom 78 millions live in India. Islam extends from Morocco to China and the East Indies, from Russia to Natal, and has its outposts in London and Paris, the United States and Brazil. Missionaries are spreading the faith in various parts of the world, especially among the African negroes.

*Text of the lecture delivered at the Torbay Lodge of the Theosophical Society.

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This religion is often called Muhammadanism, which is quite a good and convenient term to use, but is, strictly speaking, incorrect, and has been coined by Christians. The name given in the Qur-án is Islam, which is not the name of a creed, but rather of a way of living, an attitude of life and religion.

The Arabic word "Islam" is usually interpreted as submission, which to my mind is rather an inadequate translation. Islam means dictating the whole life to the service of God and the welfare of His creatures.

The self-willed man becomes a slave to his wayward passions and desires—but he who submits his will to God attains the highest freedom and joy. In the words of Muhammad: "My prayers and my sacrifices, my life and my death are for Allah, the Lord of the Worlds." That is the real meaning of Islam. The man who dedicates his life in this way is called a Muslim (Moslem or Musalmán). The word "Muslim" does not mean "true believer," as is often supposed; the Arabic word for believer is "Mumin." According to the Prophet, "A Muslim is he from whose hand no harm goes to another." The word "Islam" and "Muslim" are akin to the word "Salaam," which means Peace. That again gives us a key to the meaning of Islam.

The Prophet Muhammad was born at Mecca in the year 570 A.C., and passed away at Medina in 632. He had the misfortune to lose both his parents before the age of seven. In his early life he was noted for his nobility of character and was respected by all who knew him; and I see no reason whatever for supposing that he became transformed into a scheming impostor. If Muhammad was a sincere and upright man before his ministry, he was equally so during that time.

For many years he would retire to a cave or other lonely place to meditate, and in time spiritual experience convinced him that his mission was to establish the

pure worship of God and a higher way of living among the Arabian peoples who for the most part were idolaters and sunk in barbarism.

He commenced his ministry at the age of forty, and although at first he kept his religious ideas secret, he soon proclaimed them openly, and after some years he managed to convert several hundreds of people in spite of persecutions. In the year 622 his enemies plotted to kill him, so that he fled to Medina where many of his followers lived; he became ruler and lawgiver of the city, and was before long engaged in war with the Jews and idolaters. Concerning this there has been much controversy—some say that Muhammad tried to convert by force, and others say that he and his followers were forced to wage a defensive war against his persecutors. I hold the latter opinion for various reasons, especially as I have not seen one verse in the Qur-án which encourages aggression, although there are several permitting Muslims to defend themselves in case of need. Furthermore in the second Chapter of the Qur-án it is written: "There is no compulsion in religion."

It is not my intention here to give you a detailed life of the Prophet, but I feel I must quote the testimony of his disciples, which will give us an insight into his character and the effect of his teaching upon his immediate followers: "We adored idols; we lived in unchastity; we ate dead bodies and spoke abominations; we disregarded every feeling of humanity, and the duties of hospitality and neighbourhood; we knew no law but that of the strong; when God raised among us a man of whose birth, truthfulness, honesty and purity we were aware; and he called us to the Unity of God; *and taught us not to associate anything with Him*; he forbade the worship of idols; he commended us to speak the truth, to be faithful to our trusts, to be merciful and to regard the rights of our neighbours; he forbade us to

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speak evil of women, or devour the substance of orphans; he ordered us to abstain from vices and evil, to offer prayers, to render alms, to keep the fast. We believed in him, we have accepted his teachings."

Although Muhammad could neither read nor write he was one of the greatest geniuses of all times. Not only was he a great religious teacher, but was one of the world's greatest lawgivers and social reformers, and he founded a mighty civilisation which was the light of the world for five centuries. I believe that he was a true Messenger of God, like Jesus and Buddha, Lao-Tsze and Zoroaster, the Sages of India, and the Prophets of Israel.

The Qur-án, which is believed by Muslims to be a direct Revelation from God, is the Sacred Book of Islam. It was compiled shortly after the death of Muhammad, and consists of 114 Chapters each of which has a title; and all (except one) begin with *bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim*—"In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful."

I believe that, like the Bible and the Vedas, it contains the word of God, which is spiritual in nature and apprehended by spiritual experience. The Qur-án is a remarkable book, and although it may seem monotonous to some, it actually contains a wonderful variety of teaching. We may find verses of prayer and praise; verses of matter-of-fact laws and regulations; verses of a highly mystical and symbolic nature; references to Jesus and Mary; stories of biblical characters; and discourses on righteousness and unrighteousness.

Let us now consider the main aspects of the Islamic doctrine. Among the Muslims there are five main articles of Belief—God, the Prophets, the Scriptures, the Angels and the Future Life. In the first place Islam proclaims the absolute unity and spiritual nature of God, Who is the Creator and Sustainer of everything in

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existence. Idolatry, Trinitarianism, and the worship of beings besides God are denounced in strongest terms. Allah is simply the name given by Muslims to the Supreme Being. Much nonsense has been written about the Muslim idea of God, but we need not concern ourselves with the distorted ideas of bigoted opponents.

Muslims believe not only in the Holy Prophet Muhammad, but also in the prophets who preceded him, especially, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. All the teachers were Messengers of God, and Muhammad is called the Seal of the Prophets. In the Qur-án it is written: "We believe in God, in that which has been revealed to us, and that which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes; and in that which was given to Moses and Jesus and the Prophets from their Lord; we make no distinction between any of them and to Him only do we submit." (111:83.) Indeed, Islam sometimes takes such a catholic view of the world, that it sees but one religion of God, and all the spiritual teachers as prophets of that religion. The Qur-án says: "There is not a people, but an apostle hath been raised among them," meaning that God hath not left Himself without a witness in any nation.

It is interesting to note that the devout Muslim seldom mentions the name of Jesus without adding the phrase "on whom be peace" and, furthermore, Jesus is known in the Qur-án as Al Masih—the Messiah.

Regarding the Scriptures, I have always referred to the Qur-án; the law of Moses, the Psalms and the Gospels are also held to have been the revelations of God, but Muhammad believed that these older religions had lost their original purity, and that the Jews and the Christians were astray from the right path; so he came with a New Dispensation; and since the text of the Qur-án stands unaltered from the time it was first written, it is believed to be the final revelation by which the

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Bible is to be interpreted. However, the Muslims are well able to use biblical texts to support their religious beliefs; for example, the 16th Chapter of St. John's Gospel is claimed by them to be a prophecy concerning Muhammad. I know for certain that I can quote from the Scriptures of all religions to justify my way of thinking and believing.

Now, in every religion there is a belief in spiritual beings below the Deity, but higher than man—call them angels, devas, gods, or what you will.

As far as I can understand, Islam looks on the angels as being agents of God in the Universe, and modern Muslims tell us that when we attain the higher stages of spiritual evolution, these angels will become our servants.

Among the Muslim philosophers of the classical age (seven to ten centuries ago) angels were considered as beings who were on a higher plane of evolution than man. Jalal-ud-Din said: "And leaving the animal we became men. Then what fear that death will lower us? The next transition will make us angels. From angels we shall rise and become what no mind can conceive; we shall merge into Infinity as in the beginning. Have we not been told, 'All of us shall return unto Him?'"

So we see that the old-fashioned Christian and Muslim idea of angels has a great deal more truth in it than the rationalist would have us believe.

The fifth great doctrine is what the Qur-án often calls the "last day." The central idea of Islam concerning the future life is that what we sow by thought, word or action in this life, we reap in the next—and that applies to men and women alike.

The vivid descriptions of Heaven which we find in the Qur-án are typical oriental imagery, and although accepted by the ignorant as literal truths, are probably symbols designed to illustrate spiritual states of being.

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It is good to know that the Muslims as well as Christians are throwing overboard the old and barbarous idea of eternal punishment. The idea of spiritual evolution which is also being taught by Modernist Muslims, is by no means new in Islam, as it was proclaimed by the philosophers and Sufi poets in the classical period nearly a thousand years ago.

Having considered the main points of Islamic doctrine, we pass on to the five great acts of faith prescribed for Muslims, namely, the open declaration of Faith, Prayer, Fasting, Alms and the Pilgrimage.

In treating these five acts of Faith, I shall endeavour to show their inward meaning and spiritual significance.

The Creed is quite a simple one—there is no Being to be worshipped save God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God. The Muslim goes down on his knees, facing Mecca, to pray five times daily, whether he be in a city crowd, or alone in the desert; and neither priest nor mediator is necessary for his communion with Allah, the Merciful. The devout Muslim loves to draw aside from worldly affairs for spiritual communion; and, to him, prayer is as necessary for the soul as food or raiment for the body. And remember that the Muslim idea of daily prayer and the Christian idea of the Sabbath are fundamentally the same. They both recognise the same spiritual need of mankind, and are both means of satisfying that need. Furthermore, Muhammad emphasised, as well as Jesus, that prayer should come from the heart. The Qur-án says, "Woe unto those who pray, and who do not heed their prayers; who make a show of piety, and refuse help to the needy."

Fasting, which is prescribed only for the strong and healthy, is simply a religious discipline; and all religions recognise the need for some form of discipline—physical, mental and spiritual.

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The institution of almsgiving (*Zakat*) has been described as practical Socialism. It is based on the idea that the rich should give a part of their wealth to help the poor and destitute, and support good causes. Islam teaches that wealth is a gift from God, and should be regarded as a sacred Trust to be used in His Service, and for the benefit of less fortunate people. Accordingly, men and women of means were required to give a stated portion of their wealth annually for the purposes I have just mentioned.

Every Muslim, who can reasonably manage it, is supposed to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in his life-time. The ritual, of which I am ignorant, need not concern us very much—the importance of the pilgrimage lies in the fact that it brings together men and women of different race, class and colour, and so tends to foster a spirit of brotherhood and unity among Muslims.

There is no time to say much about such matters as polygamy, marriage, the rights of women, slavery and temperance. I only wish to point out that Muhammad had to civilise a savage and barbarous people before he could teach them the great spiritual truths—he had to instil in their minds the first principles of decency, courtesy and hygiene, and help them to discipline themselves. Jesus and the Buddha had an advantage over Muhammad as they lived amongst comparatively civilised peoples, with centuries of religious tradition behind them.

I am convinced that the teaching of Muhammad has infinite possibilities of spiritual and cultural development, and the testimony of history supports my contention.

I cannot do better than quote from that eminent Unitarian scholar, the late Dr. J. Estlin Carpenter: "And we know also that, however simple, or even

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monotonous, the Message of Islam may seem, it is in itself sublime; it is urged with passionate faith; and it does not present under the surface the same aspect of monotony which the student at first anticipates It has begotten a multitude of sects: it has allied itself with philosophy: it has accommodated itself to the most varied phases of spiritual culture—from the antique superstitions of an Egyptian fellah to the refined mysticism of the Sufis of Iran: it has had its tendencies to rationalism, or its excess of reforming zeal.”

That will help to show how mistaken the Christian missionary is when he imagines that Islam is a narrow and rigid faith, incapable of development beyond the tribal consciousness of the Bedouins. I intend now to touch upon the history of Islamic culture, which will go still further to illustrate my point.

By the year 750 A.C., the Arabic language and the Muslim religion had spread from Turkestan to the shores of the Atlantic; and the Muslims built up a great civilisation which lasted for over 500 years, and which lingered in India under the Moguls until the 17th Century. Large numbers of men and women learnt and taught the sciences of philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, chemistry, geography, history and medicine; and founded schools and colleges all over the Muslim dominions. Art and literature were also cultivated, whilst Muslim architecture has a peculiar beauty, all its own; the magic touch of the Eastern craftsman could wellnigh turn stone and marble into the finest.

The Sufi Movement, which arose during this period, especially in Iran and India, is of great interest to us, as it represents the mystical side of Islam; and indeed the writings of such men as Omar Khayyam, Saadi and Jalal-ud-Din show an amazing breadth of intellect and beauty of spirit.

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Some movements have sprung from Islam in comparatively recent times, and these bear witness to the spiritual vigour of the Muslim mind. I have, in the course of this talk, tried to show some of the great spiritual ideas of Islam, and would briefly point out two more, which I feel should not be omitted.

Firstly, Islam proclaims the equality and brotherhood of humanity, and makes no artificial distinction of race, class or colour; it recognises no colour bar, no pope and no priesthood: it is a simple and a democratic faith.

Secondly, Muhammad never professed to be able to perform miracles; instead of exploiting the peoples' credulity by signs and wonders, he taught them to see the great miracles of God in the glories and beauties of Nature. Islam in its original purity is devoid of superstition; in its essence it is a spiritual rationalism.

The Qur-án, besides praising God in Nature, contains passages of great mystical beauty, such as the following:

"God is the light of the heaven and the earth."

"His Light is like a niche in which is a lamp—the lamp encased in glass—the glass as it were a shining star. From a blessed tree it is lighted—the Olive which is neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would wellnigh shine out even though fire touched it not. It is light upon light."

"Hast thou not seen how all in the heavens and on the earth uttereth the praise of God—the very birds as they spread their wings?"

"Every creature knoweth its prayer and its praise!"

The question arises in the mind—what of the present and future of Islam?

In the latter half of the 19th century, Islam began to experience a great revival in culture and in missionary

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activities, which is still continuing. Islam owes gratitude to such men as Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Ameer Ali and the Aga Khan, who have played a worthy part in this revival.

This modern age is one of restlessness and change for Islam as well as for other religions.

I believe, however, that Islam has every possibility of a glorious future if the Muslims can assimilate what is best in Western science and culture without losing those things, of eternal value, which have been the spirit and mainstay of Islam for centuries.

The word of Islam is still one of the most beautiful and significant in the languages of humanity.

THE BENEFITS OF RAMADAN*

BY ISMAIL DE YORKE

The purpose of religion is to adore and serve God in the way He has revealed to us. He wishes it to be done.

We can best serve God by following a code of conduct throughout our lives, a code which, if we follow closely, brings us nearer to God in that we become spiritually higher and higher. Indeed it might well be said that God has created Adam to be His agent on earth, but Adam can only be His agent by following strictly the Word of God.

In order to make known His wishes to mankind God inspired certain prophets such as Abraham, Moses and Jesus, to teach His religion to the various nations of the earth, and finally, when they were sufficiently prepared, came the Prophet Muhammad to preach God's Word to the world in general.

*Text of a lecture given at a meeting of the Muslim Society in Great Britain. His Excellency Shaikh Hafiz Wahba was in the Chair.

THE BENEFITS OF RAMADAN

Although God has made His will known to those on earth He has placed no compulsion upon anyone to follow His Commandments, and He left it to each individual to be governed by his heart and by his will.

The heart and will are subjected to many and various temptations and it is necessary by self-discipline to train oneself to withstand any such temptation.

The most powerful senses in us are our appetites, and if we are able to control these, of which hunger makes itself most felt, we may well be able to master all other impulses, and consequently cause the better self in man to become predominant.

The great value of fasting in this direction is that those who fast have every opportunity of breaking their fast. Food is near at hand and yet it is the will, and the will alone that prevents one from eating.

Fasting during Ramadan consists of a general control of the senses, and it is only when these are properly under control that it is possible to be a true Muslim.

Islam is a religion of nature. All things have been created by God and therefore nothing is evil when in its proper place and under control. To take an example, it would be permissible to feel anger and to remonstrate at, say, a trivial insult, but one's feeling of anger would become sinful were one to allow it to grow into a blind fury out of all proportion to the insult, and so that one could not control one's actions.

What is it that enables a man to keep his anger from welling up and engulfing him? It is strength of mind, and this strength of mind can only be brought about by self-imposed discipline. This self-imposed discipline is far more valuable than any training received at school or in the family circle (good as that training may be) for in the former the only control is that imposed by one's own will, whereas in the latter the control is that of an immediate and greater force than oneself that

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can exert pressure upon one to obey certain rules and standards. Take this controlling force away, and there is nothing to stop one from deviating from the straight and narrow path.

Another very important aspect of fasting is that it enables the rich man, or rather the man who has never really been in want, to understand and feel—one might almost say actually live—the sensations of his poor brethren.

Indeed, he will be able to understand and sympathise all the more for the poor, for all he has to do to satisfy his hunger is to stretch out his hand whereas the poor man does not know from where to-morrow's meal is coming, and this is a state of affairs that exists in the poor man's household throughout the year and not only during the period of Ramadan.

The rich man, realising this, is awakened to his responsibilities towards the poor and he knows that it is his duty to give some of the wealth that his good fortune has brought him to allay the sufferings of the poor.

Islam is a sensible religion. The enjoining of the fast is not in the interest of God but to raise the spiritual level of mankind and therefore fasting is not enjoined where it would be certain to be harmful, for example, in the cases of extreme age, confinement, illness and the like. Thus, when such cases make it impossible to fast, Muslims who should otherwise be fasting can still contribute their share towards the good of their fellow creatures, an end towards which all the commandments of God are directed, by feeding one or more poor men a day for a period equivalent to that of Ramadan.

I must repeat and emphasise that this exemption from fasting is only in extreme cases, such as I have just quoted and on medical advice and that they should never be used as an excuse for breaking the fast.

THE BENEFITS OF RAMADAN

The body and the soul have been likened to a balance. When one is high the other is low, the weaker the body, the higher the soul. By this I do not mean that a physically strong man is more evil than a weaker one (otherwise I would be condemning myself in advance) or that an invalid is necessarily nearer to God than a man who is healthy, but I mean that when a man caters too much for his senses they become more and more desirous of being served until they become his masters. And this is what man must always guard against.

If a man overfeeds, he will have more strength than his body requires, he will be bursting with energy that must be worked off somewhere and somehow, and his lower appetites come to the fore, causing him to work against the general good instead of for it. It is then that a man's mind turns to evil thoughts and it is by not overheaping the fire with fuel that the flames can be kept down.

In this as in all things we must take the Prophet Muhammad as our example. It is said that the Prophet, apart from the period of fasting during Ramadan, frequently retired to bed at the end of the day hungry.

This is the nucleus of spiritual life in all religions, and among the Christians you will find hermits and monks who train themselves for their religious duties by frequent fastings and an austere life.

The Christians base the fasting in their religion on the occasion when Jesus Christ fasted for forty days in the desert. Satan then tempted him but he stood firm.

Moses also fasted and the Jews have several fasts during the year although in their case some of their fasts are directed to purifying the body from all worldly thoughts and others to mourning and lamentation.

It is, therefore, evident that the purpose of fasting is to remove man from the bestial plane to which he is

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so apt to sink and to raise him to a higher spiritual level.

As we all know and as I have stated above, all the religions preached by the prophets were the religions of God, and if they differ from Islam it is only because they have become distorted or corrupted after the death of their prophets. Yet it is remarkable that there is one principle common to all religions and that is the principle of fasting. All the religions I have mentioned and most others have as their object the moral uplift of mankind and that is why fasting is enjoined in them all.

The well known saying that attack is the best mode of defence may well be applied in connection with fasting. The best way to control our baser passions is to attack them at their source which is our appetite. This can only be done by depriving them of the sustenance that enables them to grow. Therefore, quite apart from the fast enjoined upon us during Ramadan, we should always control our diet—and I mean diet in all things—with this end in view.

This brings me very close to the medical aspect of fasting, and I do not think that my talk would be complete without touching on this subject.

It is well known that people live longer to-day, on the average, than they did in olden times, and I think it is also well known that in the good old days people ate far more than they do to-day. I think that I am right in saying, although I stand to be corrected if I am wrong, that a good many ailments are brought about by the wrong type of diet, quite apart from the quantity of food taken. In many cases it is advisable for persons to drop some kind of food even though it may be unpleasant for them to do so. How much easier will it be, then, for them to be able to dispense with some well loved but harmful delicacy if they have been trained into subjecting their bodies to their will by fasting during Ramadan.

ISLAM AND WOMEN

In concluding my talk, I would like to emphasise that fasting, as I have mentioned previously, is a Commandment for the good of society. Islam is a religion that has never had any Commandment that was designed to torment mankind, and although it may be unpleasant to some when we see that there are such great advantages attached to it any initial discomfort will be drowned in the realisation of our future uplift and the bettering of our spiritual life.

Such an uplift can only mean that men in the future will have a milder, friendlier outlook on life and that they will really begin to understand the meaning of the word brotherhood. Should such a state be reached I think it might and indeed would bring an end to all the evils and strife rampant in the world to-day.

This end is one that mankind should pursue hot-foot. And I think that if the detractors of Islam were to realise the beautiful and fine objects of the fast as enjoined during Ramadan, they would better be able to understand what Islam really is and it would be a tremendous step towards bringing about the brotherhood of man under Islam.

ISLAM AND WOMEN

BY MIZANUR RAHMAN, M.A.

PROPHET'S ESTIMATION OF WOMANHOOD

"Heaven lieth at the feet of mothers," declared the Prophet of Islam (Peace be on him.) The significance of the saying, which is perhaps the sublimest of tributes ever paid to womanhood in any language or religion, is all too obvious to need detailed elucidation. "The best amongst my followers are they who are best and kindest towards their women;" "the woman is the sovereign of her husband's house" and "the best source of delight, amongst the objects of joy and delight of which the

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world is full, is a pious and chaste woman," are some other authentic sayings of the same Prophet. "To acquire knowledge is the obligatory duty of *every* Muslim man and *every* Muslim woman" is yet another saying of the unlettered Prophet of Arabia, whereby he enunciated, more than thirteen hundred years ago, the principle of compulsory education for both men and women, with equal emphasis in the case of both—a principle which is now being aimed at by all civilised countries of the world.

QUR-ANIC CONCEPTION OF WOMANHOOD

The sayings quoted above are not mere words uttered by the Prophet of Islam in a chivalrous vein. These are quite in consonance with the *de jure* position of woman in Islam according to its religious code—Al-Qur-án (The Word of Allah); Al-Hadith (The Sayings of the Prophet) and Al-Sunah (his practice.) One whole chapter of the Holy Qur-án, *viz.*, the Fourth Chapter, is entitled "An-Nisa"—"the Women"—and opens with the following verse: "O ye men, fear your Lord Who hath created you from one person and hath (also) created, of his own kind, his wife, and from these two hath spread abroad many men and women. And fear Allah from Whom you seek favours, and (respect) the Wombs that bear you; Allah is ever watchful over you." This verse clearly exalts women to a very high position by commanding respect for "the Wombs that bear you" in the same breath in which you are commanded to fear Allah, the Creator, Nourisher and Sustainer of the Universe, and the Vigilant Observer of your activities on earth from birth till death. The warning implied in the everlasting watchfulness of the Lord leaves no room for doubt that the Qur-anic injunction concerning WOMANHOOD is meant to be strictly followed on pain of penalty on the Day of Retribution.

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ISLAMIC IDEALS OF WOMANHOOD

The ideals of womanhood in Islam are further expounded in the Qur-ánic verse which state that "the women are like a garment unto men, just as the men are like a garment unto women;" that "the men have the same rights over women as the women have over men;" that "of the signs of God is His creation of wives for men out of the same kind or stuff, so that both man and woman may be comforted with each other out of love and tenderness engendered in them by Divine Grace" and so forth. The very vindication of Eve, in the Holy Qur-án, from the most unchivalrous accusation, in the Bible, of her having been solely responsible for Adam's Fall from Heaven on account of his eating of the "forbidden tree" at the instigation of Satan, is proof positive of Islam's very lofty conception of womanhood. The unfolding of the story, as narrated in the Bible and in the Qur-án, will make the point clear.

EVE ALONE NOT TO BLAME

According to the Bible, "Adam was not deceived but the woman being deceived was in transgression" and, after the Fall from Divine Grace, Adam sought to excuse himself before Jehovah at the expense of Eve, unchivalrously submitting that "the woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat." The Qur-ánic version of the story blames both Adam and Eve, and not Eve alone, for the Fall for, in his confessional submission before Allah, Adam pours out his penitent soul as follows: "*Rabbaná zalamná unfusaná wa illum-taghfir laná wa tarhamná lanakunaná minal kháserin*" which means "O our Lord, we have both transgressed ourselves; if Thou forgive us not and be not merciful towards us, verily we shall be of the losers." Is not this version more dignified, more chivalrous and more plausible, when we remember that both Adam and Eve were in the same place, ate of the same forbid-

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den tree, and had to leave their heavenly home for the same offence? The Bible brands womanhood with the sole responsibility for the original sin and, through it, for the sinful propensities of the human creation. The Qur-án contradicts the theory and makes men and women equally responsible for their respective actions. If the Biblical version is to be accepted, one may legitimately feel ashamed of having been descended from a gentleman who did not scruple to make his consort the scapegoat for his own action. The Qur-anic version, however, removes the stigma from womanhood and also saves Adam, our progenitor, from the slur of being unchivalrous towards his own consort—the “Mother First” of the whole human creation.

ISLAMIC RIGHTS OF WOMANHOOD

Islam does not merely exalt the position of women theoretically, but it confers on them positive and codified rights which are not enjoyed by their compeers in any other religious system of the world. A Muslim woman is entitled to specified shares of her father's as well as of her husband's properties. She cannot be legally married to a man against her free will and consent; if she is, the marriage is void in the eye of Muslim *Shariah* (religious code). Under specified and well-defined conditions formulated with an eye to the stability of society, she possesses the right to repudiate or nullify an unhappy or undesirable alliance but not for the mere fun of “fresh fields and pastures new.” She has also the right to remarry, if she chooses, after the husband's death. Marriage dowry is her inalienable right, and has to be redeemed by the husband by actual payment in full or in part, the balance in the latter case being duly and validly excused by the wife. A Muslim girl in minority, if married to a man by her lawful guardians, has the right to repudiate the marriage on attaining puberty or age of consent. The Muslim marriage is a full-fledged

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legal contract on either side, and is not merely a matter of love at first or second sight, or to be trifled with either by the man or by the woman. Thus a marriage between minors, though not theoretically forbidden, is practically ruled out in Muslim *Shariah*. That is also the case with polygamy, which, according to Islam, is permissive to the extent of four wives as the maximum for one man at a time, provided the husband is capable of *doing justice to or dealing fairly and squarely with all his wives in all matters*, including apportionment of love and worldly necessities of life. The proviso is a very, very stiff one, and practically makes polygamy not the rule but an exception in Islam, with a view to minimising the social evils emanating from the preponderance of females over males in times of peace or war, in that it is definitely laid down in the Qur-*anic* Verse that monogamy must be the objective if the husband cannot be equitable to all the wives in all respects. The Verse, which is the only one in the Qur-*an* permitting polygamy conditionally, is well worth quoting in full: "And if you fear that you cannot act equitably towards orphans, then marry such women as seem good to you, two or three or four; but if you fear that you will not do justice (between them), then (marry) only one or what your right hand possess; that is more proper that you may not deviate from the right course." (4:3). A legally-married first consort of a Muslim does not, therefore, stand the risk of being assorted with one or two or three more women at her husband's hearth and home, merely at the sweet will or lustful tendency of the husband, unless he wants to violate the Qur-*anic* injunctions in this respect, both in the letter and in the spirit. Those who shudder at the provision of polygamy in Islam might perhaps be reminded of the historical truth that "prostitution, the great evil of civilisation, which is a real canker, with its concomitant increase of bastardy,"

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necessitating such shameful things as "Unmarried Mothers' Societies" or "Societies for the Maintenance of State Babies" in countries where polygamy is taboo, "is practically unknown to countries where polygamy is allowed as a remedial measure."

PURDAH OR SECLUSION

A Muslim woman is generally considered to be an object of pity or sympathy, in view of her supposed deprivation of the rights of free movement outside the pale of *zenana* or *Harem* (domestic sanctuary) on account of the system of Purdah or seclusion supposed to be enjoined by Islam. It may be stated straightaway that the sympathy is undeserved, though not practically misplaced, as far as the women of India and some other neighbouring countries are concerned; but these Purdah-ridden countries of the East do not represent the quintessence of Islam's intrinsic injunctions in this respect. Islam certainly enjoins certain specified restrictions on womanhood which may euphemistically be termed as *Purdah*, but the Islamic system of seclusion for women cannot be called *Confinement*, without doing violence to the Qur-ánic injunctions on the point. These run as follows: "And say to the believing women that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts and not display their ornaments except what appears thereof, and let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms" (24: 31). Be it noted that in the preceding verse the injunctions for "casting down their looks and guarding their private parts" are made applicable to the "believing men" as well.

The Qur-ánic injunctions quoted above can by no means be construed into enjoining seclusion, much less confinement, of Muslim womanhood within the four corners of the seraglio or the harem. On the other hand, the commands for casting down their looks, guarding their private parts and not making a parade of their

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ornaments beyond the display that is necessary or unavoidable in the pursuit of daily avocations, clearly permit Muslim womanhood, by implication, to stir out and about with their eyes cast down, privacies covered, and their heads and bosoms veiled—instructions which are apparently inspired by a sense of decency and decorum which is the *sine qua non* of civilised society not yet enamoured of the “naked and shameless” for, if the Muslim women were to remain confined within zenana walls these divine commands for modesty and abstinence from casting lustful looks of love at others seem to be absolutely redundant and uncalled-for. Then again, if the commands for “casting down their looks and guarding their private parts” mean seclusion for the “believing women,” well, I do not see how the “believing men” to whom also these identical words have been addressed just before, can escape seclusion or confinement indoors—a proposition which is obviously untenable, undesirable and ridiculous.

THE TRUTH

The truth is that Muslim women are not required, under religious commandments, to remain confined within the harem, as is wrongly supposed by some. The Muslim women are free to move about, duly and decorously dressed, but are warned against flirting with others, and can certainly enjoy Nature’s free light and air as others do. In Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Turkey and other principal Islamic countries, the Muslim women do move about as much as the Muslim men. In India, too, where perhaps the system of womanly seclusion is the most rigorous, the women, both Muslim and others, do enjoy rights of fairly unrestricted movement in rural areas which constitute real India. The so-called Purdah System mostly obtains in urban areas only and is confined almost exclusively to the upper-ten of society who, by customs and traditions handed down from their pre-

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decessors rather than by religious injunctions, used to take pride in enforcing the system with considerable rigour on their female dependants. The practice, however, is gradually softening down into the Islamic system of Purdah, and the old rigours are now definitely found to be few and far between. The old order is palpably changing and yielding place to the new, and the time is not far distant when the old aristocratic ideas about womanly seclusion will even in India be a matter of antiquarian interest only.

THE COMPARISON

The revolutionary changes effected by Islam in the status of women can be better realised by a comparison of the respective rights and privileges of the women in Arabia itself *before and after the advent* of Islam. The latter aspect of the matter has been discussed above, though in barest outline. A few remarks on the pre-Islamic side of the shield may now be attempted.

The Arab woman, before her emancipation by Islam, had no status of her own. She was but a domestic chattel to be inherited by the sons and heirs of the deceased husband, and could even be married by the heirs if they were not her own offspring. An Arab Bedouin could marry as many women as he liked or as he could lay his hands on, and, after his death, these unfortunate widows used to be treated as chattels by the heirs. Their honour and wealth, if any, were none too safe at the hands of the guardians or of their enemies. The despoiling of womanhood was considered to be the most effective method of wreaking vengeance on enemies in those days, and that is why the Arab Bedouins, so sensitive to their desert heraldry and family prestige, used to bury alive the new-born babes of the softer sex so that the feminine buds, when blossomed into full-blown flowers, might not be the targets of revengeful depredations by the hostile marauders.

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FROM LOWEST DEPTHS TO DAZZLING HEIGHTS

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be on him!) prohibited all these inhuman practices and gave womanhood the status already indicated. From what depths to what heights were women elevated by the Prophet of Islam! Truly Muslim womanhood must remain ever grateful to Muhammad, the unlettered Prophet of Arabia, for having given them, thirteen hundred years ago, a status which is yet to be enjoyed even by their more enlightened sisters of other religious dispensations, not excluding the modern Eves of the West, their cultural and sartorial superiority notwithstanding. It may even be noted here that, despite the vauntings of modern culture and civilisation and the development of democratic ideas and institutions, the European Eves are yet to be politically enfranchised in all countries of the West, though these political rights and privileges are automatically vested in Muslim womanhood by reason of their personal qualifications or inheritance. There is no bar or disadvantage to the Muslim women, merely on sexual grounds, even in the political domain. It is but recent history that Muslim Turkey outstripped other European countries by appointing a woman—Madame Khālidā Edib Khanoum—as the first “Woman Minister” even in the enlightened West of to-day. Neither is there any bar to Muslim women as such in the domain of religion or in any other sphere of social activities. The Muslim women are entitled to all religious practices enjoined by Islam both at home and in the mosque where they can and do repair for offering congregational prayers along with men. The writer has seen Muslim women assembled at the Delhi Jama Mosque for Friday Prayers. It is a very great tribute to Womanhood that it was a lady,—the Prophet’s consort, Khadijah, called “Ummul Muminin”—“Mother

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of Muslims"—who was the first to accept Islam after Muhammad's call to Prophethood on the heights of Hira—the "Mount of Light" where the Prophet's heart was illumined with "Light Divine." Without meaning any disrespect to anybody, it may be stated that the Founder of Buddhism forsook his partner-in-life, under cover of the darkness of night, in search of Divine Light which he ultimately attained far away from the "guiles of womanhood," whereas the Prophet of Islam attained the Light Divine in the comforting companionship of his first consort and counsellor in despair who also accepted the enthralling message of the Prophet, without the slightest demur, and thereby received the honoured appellation of the "Lady of Light."

CONCLUSION

The foregoing account of Islam's verdict on the ideals of womanhood and of its efforts for elevating their moral, material and social status is but a peep into the interesting subject which needs much more space for an exhaustive survey than what is available on the present occasion. The outline attempted may, however, serve to remove certain misconceptions about the rights and disadvantages of women in Islam who may, with justice, be said to enjoy a status which in respect of matters bearing on marriage (primary or secondary), rights of inheritance, liberty of conscience, political and social rights, and so forth, undoubtedly ranks as the highest in the world in its present stage of development. From the view-point of cultural education, however, it must be admitted with shame, that the Muslim women are not receiving in some quarters in our days their deserts at the hands of their sterner counter-parts, in spite of the very clear and emphatic command of their Prophet, though it may be argued with some amount of justification whether or not the present system of education in vogue is really suitable for the softer sex whose sphere

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of mundane duties is fundamentally different from those of the sterner sex. This is, however, no excuse or palliation for so flagrantly violating the unequivocal injunction of the Prophet in the matter of the education of womanhood. It is to be noted with pleasure that the Muslim world is gradually coming to realise the importance of female education and is at present astir with the pulsation of a new life in this very important aspect of human activities.

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BY G. ALI (SWEDISH MUSLIM)

[Continued from Vol. XXVII, page 107.]

A Finnish lady has published a scientific work in the English language: "Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village." Let me quote from it:

"What is known of divorce in the Arabic and Muhammadan world forms only a very incomplete picture. It has become customary to develop the purely theoretical side of the matter by emphasising the man's formal right, at any time, and for the least cause, to divorce his wife by merely expressing the legal formula, often contrasting the woman's lack of the same right and thus giving it as an illustration of the woman's complete lack of rights, and her dependence upon her husband's favour. Other facts, however, must be reckoned with which act as a check upon and limit the husband's right. It would be of the greatest importance and value to obtain, from as many places as possible, comparative material in the form of inquiries about the actual number of divorces, their effect and the causes of their

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great or small number. I think that this would result in important corrections and reductions of our ideas of the powerful husband in the East, who requires only to express the formula of divorce to be rid of his wife, and who does it frequently."

Dr. Hilma Granqvist gives to the husband, and only to him, the right of separation, and, in short, calls woman "a being who grows up among trifles and cannot plead before the Courts." Bishop Andrae says regretfully:

"So stands, as we see, faith against faith, belief against belief, a dreadful picture of the limitations and one-sidedness of our imaginings and judgments. It is indeed well known that the Muhammadans surpass all other believers in self-satisfied faith in the superiority of their own religion; but their way of interpreting history can make even a Christian thoughtful. Perhaps we also are tempted to stretch history a little in order to prove the extraordinary value of our views and ideals."

Personally, I consider myself justified in casting a lance in the face of Islam's Western slanderers. For it is just their lies about Islam that led me to seek the truth. I have read their transparent adjusting, or, rather, their deliberate falsifying of history, and it is extremely curious that I should talk in the same way, and be imbued with the same spirit as my fellow believers all over the world. A mind that is open to the truth must of necessity find its way forward to the Prophet of Islam, and will be filled with the same spirit of brotherliness that is Islam's—the true, eternal mark of true religion. A mind that is open to the truth always turns with disgust from the Christian Church, which is

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only a parody of Jesus' lofty teaching. I thank Allah that I, though born in a Christian country, have become a Muslim.

Bishop Andrae asks:

"What is the truth about Muhammad and Islam?

It can hardly be disputed that the Arabian Prophet and his religion have generally been misjudged in the West. After a lecture on Islam, I once received a troubled letter from an old missionary. He said that he felt hurt in his mind while he listened to such flattering description of a religion which he, for thirty years, had known close at hand, and whose spiritual and moral deficiencies called to heaven."

Bishop Andrae almost agrees with the old missionary:

"It is true that I could, from the stores of history, bring forth enough material to make a really terrible picture; I could speak of cruelties and unbridled sensuality, and of superstition and deep pharisaism; I could tell of the Prophet's family scandals and his liking for underhand ways and dissembling. I could describe persecutions and oppression, rigid formalities and spiritual death."

Here we have a good example of Christian fanaticism which is not the less real because it tries to dress itself in sheep's clothing. Apart from Muhammad's religious importance, if the Prophet is looked at from a historical point of view only, must we not acknowledge that he is among the world's great ones? Must we not admit that the French historian and poet, Lamartine, is right when he says of Muhammad:

"By whatever standard we may measure human greatness, where is there to be found a

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human being greater than he? If the greatness of the enterprise, the limitations of the means, and the immensity of the result are the three measures of human genius, who can, then, humanly speaking, compare any great man of more recent history with Muhammad? The most famous of these have only busied themselves with arms, laws and kingdoms; they have not founded anything other than a worldly power which fell to pieces at their feet. Muhammad roused armies, kingdoms, senates, peoples, princely families, millions of human beings over a third of the inhabited globe; he brought down altars, gods, religions, ideas, creeds; he set up, on the foundation of a book in which every letter has become law, a spiritual nationality which embraces all tongues and all races and on this Islamic nationality he has set an indelible seal."

In his extreme stupidity and ill-will, Bishop Andrae speaks of the Prophet as if he were talking about an average professor in Sweden. In his hatred of Islam, he loses all his scientific nimbus. It is tragi-comic that just this book of his, the one we are now considering, is considered a sign of awakening liberality in the Church!

He, whose mind is parched by fanaticism and *odium theologicum* can persist in his spiritual darkness, like the missionary who was troubled by Bishop Andrae's description of Islam; but all Christian missionaries in Muslim countries become obdurate because they fail. Islam's followers are not interested in the Christian church.

When I first entered an Islamic country, a country where, nevertheless, the so-called European culture had destroyed valuable treasures, I felt as if, after a long

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travel abroad, I had come home. I understood those brothers of mine so well. On the other hand, the Christian missionaries, during their stay in Islamic countries, find only material for darkly-coloured and sensational descriptions. This does not hinder them from being double-tongued. They express themselves in a different way before Believers from what they do before Muslims, who, therefore, are not able to see through their deceit.

Bishop Andrae says:

"In Christian circles, Islam is usually called a religion of law, in which piety consists of only a faithful and punctual fulfilling of innumerable obligations, which Allah and His Prophet have been pleased to lay upon the Faithful, a piety which makes no distinction between large and small, which strains at a gnat and swallows a camel, which avoids the serious demands of conscience by punctuality and seriousness in a thousand small things."

Is there ground for this accusation? To prove that there is, Bishop Andrae quotes from "A Book of Piety for Day and Night" and then he comes to this conclusion:

"From him who belongs to the company of the Faithful, not even a grain of faith is demanded. It is enough to have once uttered Islam's creed. So cheaply no religion can offer salvation."

The most ignorant Muslim knows more about it than this ill-natured, learned Christian.

Nevertheless, Bishop Andrae wants to "be just;" he wants to speak well of his neighbour, even if he should happen to be a Muslim, and therefore he quotes, with a certain purpose, the beautiful story of the Prophet's

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meeting with the pious Bedouin in Kaaba. Perhaps, even in such a setting, this story may cause some heart to open to the truth.

Bishop Andrae relates further how Ali Zain-al-Abdin visited an enemy in his home and said to him: "If it is true what you say of me, may God forgive me; if it is not true, may God forgive you!" The Bishop also tells of Al Rabi-ibn-Haithan, who was sitting outside his gate when an enemy threw a stone at him which caused a bleeding wound on his head. Al Rabi wiped away the blood, saying: "Forgive him, God! He did not aim at me!"

In this connection, Bishop Andrae should have told of the Syrian prince, Djebala, who came to Mecca to take up the Islamic religion.

Bishop Andrae says of the example of Islamic piety he has given:

"The tone which meets us in these words seems to us wonderfully familiar. One after another of the words from the Sermon on the Mount, although in a strange and curious disguise, come before our inward sight. It is no illusion. Islam rejected the Christian dogmas of the Triune God and of the Divinity of Jesus, distrusted the Church and considered the New Testament a forgery; but, in spite of enmity and misunderstanding, a breath of the Evangelists has nevertheless found its way, from the Eastern Churches and, in the first place, from the Christian monks and hermits whose severe piety Muhammad tried to copy, in and amongst the Arabian Prophet's congregation."

This last quotation is typical of Christian self-sufficiency. We need not hear more to understand that the Christian Church cannot be renewed or reformed. The

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spirit of Jesus is not in that Church, but it is in Islam. Look, for example, on Abyssinia to-day, and its connection with the Christian Powers in Europe!

Europe has never understood the teaching of Jesus and, in our day, it understands it less than ever. It is true what an American missionary dares to say:

“Christianity has never dared to preach the Jesus faith, and still less to practise it. Before Christianity can hope to conquer the world, it must first conquer itself!”

The Swedish author, George Ljungström, who was honoured by his famous countryman, August Strindberg, with the title of “Great,” once wrote:

“I know that no name of the founder of a religion is so scorned and reviled in Europe as Muhammad’s, but I, ever since my school-days, have re-acted most indignantly against the contempt with which our historians have regarded his figure. I will admit that no name of any historic personage is to me greater, holier and dearer than Muhammad’s.”

That distinguished Swede was an exception. Generally, Muhammad’s name is still scorned in Sweden, where even to-day, to go over to Islam is considered an expression of unpardonable originality.

In a little lesson-book on the history of religion in general, for the use of the public schools in Sweden, the late Archbishop Nathan Soederblom wrote:

“The Christian religion and the Christian culture have had no bitterer and more dangerous enemy than Islam.”

As a final word on Islam, the Ecumenic Movement’s Primus Motor said:

“Islam seems to give a certain discipline and harmony but at the same time crushes the possibility of higher development.”

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Archbishop Soederblom does not seem to have been aware of Arabian culture, which has given Europe so much.

The lesser gods amongst the leaders of the Swedish Church have the same opinion of Islam as Archbishop Soederblom had.

Doctor C. W. Lindeberg, Lecturer on the History of Missions at Lund University, writes the following:

“Christ has never had a bitterer opponent than Muhammad. From the very beginning extraordinarily great contrast became still more emphasised by the Crusades.”

As you can see, Islam is made responsible for the Christian military expeditions against Islam.

The Swedish Missionaries go even further than the more scientific of the Swedish apologists. A missionary in East Turkestan, Hoeberg, speaks about Muhammad in a way which it is forbidden for a Muslim to quote. Missionary Hoeberg writes:

“We have not to struggle against flesh and blood, but against the spirits of evil in the heavenly spheres, against a stronghold of lies and Satan’s depths.”

This Missionary further writes about the Muslims of India:

“They have so many liberties and rights assured to them that, if any other people should take the same liberties, they would immediately be sent to prison. If a Christian is guilty of bigamy, he is prosecuted and sentenced; but a Muslim may, in accordance with his law, take an unlimited number of women to wife, and the children are legitimate, and have all legal rights.”

'ID-AL-AZHA (1357 A.H.) SERMON

A worker on the Mission in East Turkestan says:

"Most of the Muslims in East Turkestan are dishonest and false in the highest degree. It is a result of their faith, which allows lying."

Mrs. Hoeberg, wife of Missionary Hoeberg, writes:

"Vanity, sensuality, cunning, unfaithfulness, intrigue have become the Islamic women's second nature."

It is not surprising that, in Sweden, it is formally forbidden to go over to Islam. The examples of Christian lying and pharisaism given above are sufficient to characterise the Swedish mission. It is not controlled by any moral consideration. It should not surprise one that any request from outside must fail, which appeals to the feeling for liberty in a country that, ironically enough, calls itself "Liberty's Home on Earth."

'ID-AL-AZHA (1357 A.H.) SERMON

BY MAULVI AFTAB-UD-DIN AHMAD

"And who forsakes the Religion of Abraham but he who makes himself a fool, and certainly We chose him in the world, and in the hereafter he is surely among the righteous.

"When his Lord said to him, submit, he said, I submit myself to the Lord of the worlds.

"And the same did Abraham enjoin on his sons and (so did) Jacob: O my sons, God has chosen the religion for you, therefore die not unless you are Muslims." (Holy Qur-án, Ch. 2, Vs. 130—132.)

Brothers and Sisters in Islam,

Praise be to God.

We have assembled here to-day, Muslims of many different races and nationalities, to celebrate 'Id-al-Azha

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or the festival of sacrifices,—the greater of the two festivals in our religion.

If Ramadan teaches us self-restraint, this festival teaches us the next and final lesson of complete sacrifice of ourselves to the will of God.

The word "Islam," as you know, signifies this unhesitating sacrifice and surrender of our whole self to the will of God. The Holy Qur-án makes this point clear in the verse I have quoted, with reference to Abraham. It relates, obviously, to God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his then only son Ishmael, while Isaac was yet unborn. Although the command of God did not mean actual slaughter of the youth, Abraham thought it to be so, and he was thoroughly prepared to obey it as such. Although the catastrophe was averted in the nick of time by a fresh communication from the Lord, on Abraham's side it was as good as happened. The spirit embodied in this act is, indeed, the spirit of Islam. Abraham's frame of mind is the true Islamic frame of mind.

Throughout the history of mankind, there have been Muslims, people prepared to sacrifice themselves and their possessions in obedience to calls from God, under the heads of truth, justice, chivalry, etc. But for their existence, humanity would relapse into veritable barbarism. Among these personages Abraham stands very prominent. His sacrifices and obedience to the calls of God, must have been of a surpassing nature, so that the subsequent spiritual history of mankind was to be bound up with his memory and tradition. It is most impressive to recall that the great prophet Moses, the founder of Judaism, the great prophet Jesus, the founder of Christianity, and the great prophet Muhammad, the founder of our religion—peace and blessings of God be upon them all—are all descendants of this great Patriarch. Whereas the prophets Moses and Jesus were

'ID-AL-AZHA (1357 A.H.) SERMON

descended from Isaac, the second son of the Patriarch, the Prophet Muhammad was descended from Ishmael, the eldest. The Qur-án refers to the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael, and the Old Testament gives some details of the incident. The place where the mother and son were settled in their banishment, was no other than the Holy City of Mecca. It was from there that the Ishmaelites or the Arabs, as they are otherwise known, spread over the whole Arabian peninsula, waiting to be welded, under the leadership of the greatest genius of their race, into a compact nation, and inspired with a new religious ideal that was to blend the scattered cultures of humanity into one united whole. This genius, needless to say, was no other than the Prophet Muhammad, a pre-eminently worthy son of Abraham, and the latest example of an ideal Islamic life.

Prophet Muhammad did not claim to bring any new religion. He wanted only to re-establish in its pristine purity the ancient religion of Islam, the Religion of Humanity, of which Abraham was an exemplar and preacher. To show his identity with the Abrahamic tradition, he preserved all that really belonged to it in the practices of his race. Among those was the annual festival in commemoration of Abraham's attempted sacrifice of his son. It is remarkable that, although corrupted beyond recognition, at the time of the Prophet's appearance, Ishmaelitish practices should include this celebration, which is so noticeably absent in the Ishraelitish traditions, Jewish as well as Christian.

This celebration, as you know, passing through necessary reform and refinement, came to be established as a great institution of Islam under the name of Hajj or pilgrimage, which every Muslim man or woman, with the means, is expected to participate in, once at least, in his or her lifetime. From an Ishmaelitish festival, it was made into a call to the believers all the world

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over. From year to year, since the time of the Prophet, believers from all corners of the earth, white and black, brown and yellow, speaking innumerable languages, flock there on this date and offer their all to the Lord of the Universe.

Selfishness in man dies hard. Suppressed in comparatively narrower circles of interest, it lingers, undetected, in wider circles of interest such as race, nation, and so on. But man's sacrifices for God, to be of any abiding value, must be of a perfect nature. Selfishness must be killed even in the widest circle of interest. The Institution of Hajj is, indeed, the most remarkable achievement in this direction.

Through all these manifold turns of history, even in times when life was extremely unsafe in Arabia, believers living in comparatively more attractive and comfortable parts of the world have flocked there to realise that brotherhood of man which transcends all feelings of race and nationality. It is not always fully appreciated that in the observance of this institution most of these pilgrims spend the savings of their lifetime. As if to remind the pilgrim of the real vision and objective of this assembly, religious rites demand the discarding of national costumes and the wearing of one simple uniform of unsewn and uncoloured cotton cloth. Praise be to God, the Lord of the Nations; the world cannot present another assembly pregnant with such a realisation of the unity of the human race. Commemorating the great sacrifice of Abraham, this institution very appropriately makes its observers offer sacrifices, great both in quality and in quantity.

The sacrifices of animals which form a part of this celebration of Hajj, hold rather a secondary position compared with those sacrifices on the part of the pilgrims, of money, of comforts, and of sentiments.

'ID-AL-AZHA (1357 A.H.) SERMON

Animals are killed, in countless numbers, every day all over the world, sometimes for necessary food, sometimes just for luxury. Those who do not indulge in animal food nevertheless use these beasts in such a way that a thoughtful man gets the same impression about the objective of their lives as the Qur-án has announced in so many words, *viz.*, that they are created for us. Living or dead, therefore, they are a sacrifice to human life; and this is quite in accordance with the rules of creation. The lower and narrower interest has to be a sacrifice to the higher and wider. The animals themselves live on plant life, which in turn lives on inferior forms of existence. As the most evolved form of existence and consciousness in the universe, we are entitled to the sacrifice of all other and less evolved forms of existence. What we do thoughtlessly, however, every day, may be done thoughtfully with a spiritual concentration, on a certain occasion, in order to impress upon ourselves the grand principle which gives us the right to take the lives of those animals. That principle is clear. It is that no life is too sacred to be sacrificed when the demand of a higher life leaves no alternative. If animals are killed to support the physical life in man, men and women, countless in number, have been sacrificed—nay, have sacrificed themselves, for principles of purity, of honesty, and of justice. What is most impressive in this connexion is that the greatest amount of sacrifice in its most thrilling forms has come from those who happened to be the cream of humanity. What a number of men like Jesus, Socrates, and Hussain has the world seen in the course of its chequered history!

Abraham's readiness for the supreme sacrifice is symbolic of the constant preparedness on the part of spiritual humanity to lay down its physical self whenever and wherever higher objectives, commonly called principles, demand it.

ISLAMIC REVIEW

Let us, who are assembled here to-day, revive our understanding of the principle underlying this festival of sacrifices, of which the principal part is the Hajj which takes place during this month every year in the Holy City of Mecca and in which all of us look forward to participating one day in our life.

Celebrated to-day, this festival has one message for the Children of Abraham and another for humanity at large. To the descendants of Abraham, physical or spiritual, it stands as a rebuke for their having neglected their hereditary duty of upholding the moral and spiritual values in preference to the material values of life.

Indeed, the world expects them to behave better than by filling it with economic, political and racial problems, just at this moment when it badly needs a lead in the spiritualisation of its affairs.

Although people will die and kill one another recklessly for the dubious possibility of a comfortable physical existence, or for slogans betraying only the vanity and egotism of individuals or groups, the world to-day is almost devoid of persons or peoples who would stake something for the universally recognised principles of virtue and goodness. Indeed, never before in its history did the world stand in such dire need of ideal martyrs or, to use the Qur-ánic expression, "Muslims, whose prayers and sacrifices, and life and death, are according to this Book, dedicated to God, the Eternal Nourisher of all the Worlds."

May the memory of Abraham, celebrated in this prayerful way, bring the erring humanity to its senses!

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