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THE ETHICS OF ISLÂM.

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BY

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P R E F A C E .

THIS little work embodies the substance of a lecture delivered to the Society for the Higher Training of Youths, and forms a mere attempt towards the exposition of Islâmic Ethics in the English language,—a task not unattended with difficulty owing to the extended range of selection. At the instance, however, of friends interested in the education of Mahommedan youths and in the diffusion of correct notions of Islâmic morality among outsiders, I am induced to place this brochure in the hands of the public, in the hope that it may, perhaps, help towards bridging the gulf which still in the nineteenth century divides the Mahommedans, not only from the Hindoos, but also from the Christians—followers of a cognate creed.

Besides most of the Koranic ordinances, I have inserted a number of the precepts and sayings of the Prophet, the Caliph Ali, and of ‘Our Lady,’

taken from, among other works, the *Misbâh-ush-Shariyèt*, the *Jâmaa-ul-Akhhâr*, the *Mustatrif*, the *Bihâr-ul-Anwâr*, the *Ghurrar-wa'd-Durrar*, the *Sahifai-Kâmila*, the *Lumaa't-ul-Baidha*, &c., and translated with as much precision as the exigencies and the *nuances* of the English language would allow.

CALCUTTA,

AMEER ALI.

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THE ETHICS OF ISLÂM.

NON-MOSLEMS, unless they have made the teachings of the Arabian Prophet a subject of special study, have generally a very distorted conception of Islâmic morality. They imagine that, with the exception of a few principles, borrowed from Christianity or Judaism, the rest may be summarised in the stern alternative of "the Koran or the sword." Few stop to consider the truth or the meaning of the antithesis; enough that it exists somewhere in the ecclesiastical records of the crusading days. It is impossible to exaggerate the baleful influence of this wholly unjust idea. In this country, English education has deepened the gulf between the two great communities which inhabit the soil of India, by diffusing through the medium of

histories written with a bias against Islâm, the notion to which I have referred.

To disabuse people therefore of the impression that Islâm is a religion of force and violence, I give in the following passages a short abstract of the Ethics of Islâm in the words of its great Teacher, of his Disciple, Ali, and of the moralists who have from time to time written on the subject. But before proceeding further I desire to point out that Islâm possesses, in common with all other moral creeds, the everlasting heritage of universal truth. It is to the new life, the new vitality, the vibration it causes to the pulse of humanity that we have to look for the moral force of the creed which wants to take the place of an older faith, and not to what new truths it teaches—for truth cannot be new; it is immutable and eternal like Nature itself.

Such, in my opinion, is the position of Islâm. Its democratic appeal to the conscience of humanity, its assertion of the absolute equality of mankind in the "sight" of the universal Father,

its disclaimer of mysteries, its constant affirmation of the intimate communion of the soul of man with its Creator,—appeal more strongly to the ethical faculty of reasonable beings than most other creeds. Legends and stories must grow up as the circle of influence enlarges or time advances,—to suit the tastes and temperaments of the sovereigns as well as the people. No religion has escaped from the effects of this natural desire on the part of man to read the dictates of his particular creed according to his own inclinations.

I trust that the words I wish to quote will help people to see that after all Islâmic morality has as pure aspirations as any other creed ; that, instead of inciting people to strife and hostility, it also teaches peace and good-will among mankind in as eloquent terms as any other ethical system.

In order to appreciate the true value of the ethical system of the Arabian Prophet, it must be remembered that in Islâm, the service of man and

the good of humanity constitute pre eminently the service and worship of God. Faith without work has no meaning ; “ this life is but a tillage (*mazraa*) for the next,” and therefore we are told repeatedly, “ do good that you may reap there.” The mere recognition of a creed or formula does not constitute Islâm. It is “ a life to be lived in the present.” “ Dost thou desire to approach thy Lord, act righteously for,— the crooked path never leads to Him.” It is pointed out in the language of poetry that man partakes of the nature of the beast as well as of the angel ; and he is adjured to leave the nature of the beast, that he may surpass the angel. Striving for the good, the true and the pure is inculcated in the most emphatic terms, “ for striving is the ordinance of God, and whatever God has ordained can only be attained by striving.”

The essence of the Islâmic Ethics,

The ethical code of Islâm is thus summarised in the fourth Sura of the Koran :—

“ Come, I will rehearse what your Lord hath

enjoined on you,—that ye assign not to Him a partner, that ye be good to your parents; and that ye slay not your children because of poverty : for them and for you will We provide ; and that ye come not near to pollution, outward and inward, and that ye slay not a soul whom God hath forbidden, unless by right.....and draw not nigh to the wealth of the orphan, save so as to better it...and when ye pronounce judgment then be just, though it be the affair of a kinsman. And God's compact fulfil ye, that is, what He hath ordained to you. Verily, this is my right way ; follow it then."

And again, "Blessed are they who believe and humbly offer their thanksgiving to their Lord.....who are constant in their charity, and who guard their chastity, and who observe their trust and covenants...Verily, God bids you do justice and good, and give to kindred their due ; and He forbids you to sin and to do wrong and oppress."

"Who speaketh better than he who inviteth

unto God, and worketh good...good and evil shall not be held equal. Turn away evil with that which is better."

Again, speaking of Paradise, it says, "it is prepared for the godly, who give alms in prosperity and adversity; who bridle their anger and forgive men; for God loveth the beneficent."

History has preserved, for the admiration of posterity, many examples of patience under suffering exhibited by the followers of other creeds. But the practice of the virtues of patient forgiveness is easier in adversity, when we have no power to punish the evil-doer, than in prosperity. It is related of Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet, that a slave having once thrown the contents of a scalding dish over him as he sat at dinner, fell on his knees and repeated the verse of the Koran. "Paradise is for those who bridle their anger." "I am not angry," answered Hussain. The slave proceeded, "and for those who forgive men." "I forgive you." The slave, however, finished the verse

adding, "for God loveth the beneficent." "I give you your liberty and four hundred pieces of silver," replied Hussain.

The author of the *Kashshâf* thus sums up the Islâmîc teachings: "Seek again him who drives you away; give to him who takes away from you; pardon him who injures you: for God loveth that you should cast into the depth of your souls the roots of his perfections."

The return of good
for evil.

The return of good for evil
is preached on all occasions.—

"Think only of what is good for each, and consider not the wrong that has been done to thee: pardon others readily, and do good unto all. Fair is the dwelling-place of those who have bridled their anger and forgiven their adversaries. Return good for evil."

To the humble denizen of the earth, "with his mouth in the dust," comes the message from Him to lift up the stricken soul.

"By the noonday brightness, and by the night when it darkeneth, thy Lord hath not forsaken

thee, neither hath He been displeased. Surely the future shall be better for thee than the past ; and in the end He shall be bounteous to thee, and thou shalt be satisfied. Did He not find thee an orphan, and give thee a home ; erring and guided thee ; needy and enriched thee ? As to the orphan, then, wrong him not ; and chide not away him that asketh of thee, and tell abroad the favours of thy Lord.” “Did ye think we had made you for sport, and that ye should not be brought back again to us ?”

To the errant sinners turning with a true penitence to their Creator and crying out to Him, —‘ O our Lord, punish us not if we forget and fall into sin, blot out our sins, and forgive us,’ is conveyed the promise of mercy and forgiveness : —“ Come back, come back, whatever thou art, come back ; hast thou denied Me or worshipped another for Me, or broken My commandments, come back. This Threshold of Mine is not the threshold of despair. If thou hast forgot thyself, turn with true penitence and come back.”

It has been truly said that “the moral idea of the new gospel was set in the common sense of duty and the familiar instances of love.”

“Blessed is he who giveth away his substance that he may become pure, and who offereth not favours to any one for the sake of recompense... but only as seeking to approach the Lord Most High.”

“They are the blest who, though longing for it themselves, bestowed their food on the poor and the orphan and the captive (saying), ‘we feed you for the sake of God : we seek from you neither recompense nor thanks.’”

“Worship God alone ; be kind to kindred and servants, orphans and the poor ; speak righteously to men, pray, and pay alms.”

“Defer humbly to your parents ; with humility and tenderness say, ‘O Lord, be merciful to them, even as they brought me up when I was helpless.’”

“Abandon the old barbarities, blood-vengeance, and child-murder, and be united as one flesh.”

“Do thy alms openly or in secret, for both are well.”

“Give of that which hath been given you before the day cometh when there shall be no trafficking, nor friendship, nor interception.”

“Wouldst thou be taught the steep path? It is to ransom the captive, to feed the hungry, the kindred, the orphan, and him whose mouth is in the dust. Be of those who enjoin steadfastness and compassion on others.”

“Woe to them that make a show of piety, and refuse help to the needy.”

“Make not your alms void by reproaches or injury.” “Forgiveness and kind speech are better than favours with annoyance.” “Abandon usury.” “He who spendeth his substance to be seen of men, is like a rock with thin soil over it, whereon the rain falleth and leaveth it hard. But they who expend their substance to please God and establish their souls, are like a garden on a hill, on which the rain falleth and it yieldeth

its fruit twofold ; and even if the rain doth not fall, yet is there a dew."

"Judge between men with truth and follow not thy passions, lest they cause thee to err from the way of God." "Covet not another's gifts from God." "There is no piety in turning the face east or west, but in believing in God only and doing good." "Make the best of all things ; enjoin justice and avoid the foolish ; and if Satan stir thee to evil, take refuge in God." "Touch not the goods of the orphan." "Perform your covenant, and walk not proudly on the earth." "The birth of a daughter brings dark shadows on a man's face.....Kill not your children for fear of want : for them and for you will We provide. Verily, the killing them is a great wickedness." "God hath given you wives that ye may put love and tenderness between you."

"Commit not adultery ; for it is a foul thing and an evil way."

"Know ye that this world's life is a cheat ; the multiplying of riches and children is like the

plants that spring up after rain, rejoicing the husbandmen, then turn yellow and wither away. In the next life is severe chastisement, or else pardon from God and his peace." "Abandon wickedness and the very semblance of it. They, verily, whose only acquirement is iniquity, shall be rewarded for what they shall have gained." "Those who abstain from vanities and the indulgence of their passions, give alms, offer prayers, and tend well their trusts and their covenants, these shall be the heirs of eternal happiness." "Show kindness to your parents, whether one or both of them attain to old age with thee: and say not to them, 'Fie!' Neither reproach them, but speak to them both with respectful speech and tender affection." "And to him who is of kin render his due, and also to the poor and to the wayfarer, yet waste not wastefully."

"And let not thy hand be tied up to thy neck; nor yet open it with all openness, lest thou set thee down in rebuke in beggary."

"Enjoin my servants to speak in kindly sort."

“ Turn aside evil with that which is better.”
 “ Just balances will We set up for the day of resurrection, neither shall any soul be wronged in ought, though were a work but the weight of a grain of a mustard seed, We would bring it forth to be weighed : and our reckoning will suffice.” “ Seek pardon of your Lord and be turned unto Him : Verily, my Lord is merciful and loving.” “ And your Lord saith, ‘ Call upon Me, I will hearken unto you.’ ” “ Say : ‘ O my servants who have transgressed to your own injury, despair not of God’s mercy, for all sins doth God forgive. Gracious and merciful is He.’ ” “ The good word riseth up to Him, and the righteous deed will He exalt.” “ Truly my Lord hath forbidden filthy actions, whether open or secret, and iniquity, and unjust violence.”

“ Call upon your Lord with lowliness and in secret, for He loveth not transgressors, and commit not disorders on the well-ordered earth after it hath been well ordered ; and call on Him

with fear and longing desire : verily, the mercy of God is nigh unto the righteous.”

“ Moreover, We have enjoined on man to show kindness to his parents. With pain his mother beareth him ; with pain she bringeth him forth : and he saith, ‘ O my Lord ! Stir me up to be grateful for Thy favours wherewith Thou hast favoured me and my parents, and to do good works which shall please Thee ; and prosper me in my offspring : for to Thee am I turned, and am resigned to Thy will.’ ” “ For them is a dwelling of peace with their Lord ; and in recompense for their works shall He be their protector.” “ Lost are they who, in their ignorance, have foolishly slain their children, and have forbidden what God hath given them for food, devising an untruth against God ! Now have they erred ; and they were not rightly guided.”

“ The likeness of those who expend their wealth for the cause of God, is that of a grain of corn which produceth seven ears, and in each ear a hundred grains ; they who expend their

wealth for the cause of God, and never follow what they have laid out with reproaches or harm, shall have their reward with their Lord; nor fear shall come upon them, neither shall they be put to grief ;...a kind speech and forgiveness is better than alms followed by injury.”

“ God will not burden any soul beyond its power. It shall enjoy the good which it hath acquired, and shall bear the evil for the acquirement of which it laboured.”.....

“ O Lord punish us not if we forget or fall into sin, O our Lord! and lay not on us a load like that which Thou hast laid on those who have been before us, O our Lord! and lay not on us that for which we have not strength: but blot out our sins and forgive us and have pity on us.”

“ The patient and the truthful the lowly and the charitable, and they who seek pardon at each daybreak:” ... “ who give alms, alike in prosperity and in success, and who master their anger, and forgive others ! God loveth the doers of good ; ” [Theirs a goodly home with their Lord.]

“ O our Lord! forgive us then our sins and hide away from us our evil deeds, and cause us to die with the righteous : ” “ And their Lord answereth them, ‘ I will not suffer the work of him among you that worketh, whether of male or female, to be lost, the one of you is the issue of the other.’ ” “ And fear ye God, in whose name ye ask mutual favours,—and reverence your mothers—at their feet is paradise.”

“ Covet not the gifts by which God hath raised some of you above others.”

“ Be good to parents, and to kindred, and to orphans, and to the poor, and to a neighbour, whether kinsman or new-comer, and to a fellow-traveller, and to the wayfarer, and to the slaves whom your right hands hold ; verily, God loveth not the proud, the vain boaster.”

“ He who shall mediate between men for a good purpose shall be the gainer by it. But he who shall mediate with an evil mediation shall reap the fruit of it. And God keepeth watch over everything.”

“ All the foregoing is from the Koran.

“O ye Moslems ! stand fast to justice, when ye bear witness before God, though it be against yourselves, or your parents, or your kindred, whether the party be rich or poor. God is nearer than you to both. Therefore follow not passion, lest ye swerve from truth.”

Brotherly love : mutual assistance.

Brotherly love and mutual assistance are inculcated in emphatic terms:—

“Moslems are brothers in religion ; and they must not oppress one another, nor abandon assisting each other, nor hold one another in contempt. The seat of righteousness is the heart ; therefore, that heart, which is righteous, does not hold a Moslem in contempt ; and it is wicked to hold a Moslem in contempt ; and all things of one Moslem are unlawful to another, his blood, property and reputation ; he must not act or speak that by which the blood of a Moslem might be spilt, and his property destroyed, and his reputation lost.” “The people for Paradise are three ; the first, a just king, a doer of

good to his people, endowed with virtue ; the second, an affectionate man, of a tender heart to relations and others ; the third, a virtuous man.”¹

Again, “ The duties of Mussulmans to each other are six.” It was asked:
Duties of Mussulmans to each other. “ What are they O Prophet ? ”

He said, “ When you meet a Mussulman, *salâm* to him ; and when he invites you to dinner, accept it ; and when he asks for advice, give it to him ; and when he is sick, visit him ; and when he dies, follow his bier.”

But help to the suffering and the weak is not preached in an exclusive spirit, nor is it confined to Moslems, for it is declared incumbent to assist every oppressed person, whether Moslem or not. “ Verily, God will say, at the Day of Resurrection, ‘ O sons of Adam I was sick, and ye did not visit Me,’ and the sons of Adam will say, ‘ O our Protector how could we visit thee ? for thou art the Lord of the universe,

¹ From the Prophet ; Bokhâri.

and art free from sickness.' And God will say, 'O men ! Did you not know that such a one of My servants was sick, and ye did not visit him ? Did you not know that had you visited that servant, you would have met with favour and pleasure near Me ?' And God will say, at the Resurrection, 'O sons of Adam, I asked you for food, and ye gave Me not ?' And the sons of Adam will say, 'O our Lord, how could we give thee food, seeing thou art the Cherisher of the universe and art free from hunger and eating ?' And God will say, 'Do not ye know that such a one of My servants asked you for bread, and you did not give it him ? Did you not know that had you given him victuals, you would have received its reward from Me.' And God will say at the Resurrection, "O sons of Adam ! I asked you for water, and ye gave Me not.' They will say, 'O our Cherisher ! How could we give thee water, seeing thou art the Cherisher of the universe, and not subject to thirst !' God will say, 'Such a one of

“Whoever is kind to His creatures, God is kind to him; therefore be kind to man on the earth, whether he be good or bad; and being kind to the bad, is to withhold them from badness, so that those who are in heaven may be kind to you.”

Kindness to human beings.

“Strive always to excel in virtue and truth.”
 “Help each other with generosity and piety. He who helps his fellow brethren and tries to do them good, will receive his reward from the Almighty equal to the reward of those who strive to repress wrong-doing.”

“All God’s creatures are His family; and he is the most beloved of God who tries to do most good to God’s creatures.”

“The best of men is he from whom good accrues to humanity.”

“He who tries to remove the wants of his brother, whether he be successful or not, God will forgive his sins.”

“He who helps his brother will himself be helped on the Day of Account.”

“ The Prophet was asked who was the most favoured of God’s creatures. He replied, ‘ He from whom the greatest good comes to His creatures.’ And then he was asked what actions are most excellent. He answered, “ to gladden the heart of a human being, to feed the hungry, to help the afflicted, to lighten the sorrows of the sorrowful, and to remove the wrongs of the injured.’ ‘ He who helps his fellow creature in the hour of need and he who helps the oppressed, God will help him in the Day of Travail.’ ”

“ Thus saith your Lord, ‘ whilst living, rely on Me for I am all sufficient ; do not be avaricious or covet the goods of your brethren ; love for them what you love for yourself ; guard yourselves from anger, passion and greed, for these are the worst of actions.’ ”

“ He who is subservient to his passions and desires, and forgets in their pursuits his duty to others, is the worst and weakest of God’s creatures.” “ Be persistent in good actions.”¹

¹ From the Prophet ; *the Mustatraf.*

“To gladden the heart of the weary, to remove the suffering of the afflicted has its own reward. In the day of trouble, the memory of the action comes like the rush of a torrent and takes away our burden.”

“No man is true in the truest sense of the word, but he who is true in word, in deed and in thought.”

“He is true who protects his brother both present and absent.”

“Fidelity and truth, purity and gentleness, generosity and sweetness are the best of qualities in man.”¹

A few of the aphorisms of the first Imâm, selected at random from the *Ghurrar-wa'd-Durrar*, will throw light on the teachings of the Mosque in the days of the Republic.

“He who is most dutiful to those to whom he owes duty is the wisest among you.”...“He who is the most learned is the best conducted and behaved in his life. He who is the most

¹ From the Caliph Ali; *the Mustatraf*.

intelligent is the most virtuous"... "No evil is worse than avarice." "To be kind is one of the best of virtues ; to tell falsehood one of the worst of vices. He who fulfils his word is one of the noblest of God's creations."

"A bad temper is the worst of afflictions." "To keep free from pollutions is the best of worship. To void evil actions is the best of actions."

"He who sees his own faults is the wisest of men. He who considers himself wiser than others, is the most foolish."

"The worship of God, without gratitude to man, is watering the sand of the desert." "Fidelity is the beacon which lights the way to heaven."

"Learning is of no value without work ; precept of no avail without practice."

"To be forbearing to the faults of your fellow-brethren is an act of charity."

"When you speak, speak the truth ; when you attain to power, deal gently and beneficently

with those subordinate to you. When you fall into affliction, be patient ; when you have to inflict a punishment, be merciful. When you commit a fault, ask pardon. When you are placed in the seat of justice, be just. When you commit sin, be ashamed. When you see the oppressed, render help.”

“ Be grateful to those who benefit you. Humility increases your worth. Remembrance of God brings down His mercy.”

“ He who imparts learning never dies.”

“ Do not look at the person who speaks, but look at what he speaks.”

“ For the envious, there is no peace. Where there is spite, there can be no true friendship.”

“ The untruthful knows no modesty.”

“ No provision [for the next world] is better than piety or doing good actions in this world.”

“ A man who is the slave of his passions, is the worst of all slaves ; and no man has a greater enemy than his own selfishness.”

“No action is good unless the intention is good; nor any word pure unless accompanied by pure action.”

“No evil is greater than evil propensities.”

“Avarice kills truth.”

“Knowledge is the best of blessings.”

“Purity of heart is the essence of all virtues.”

“Ignorance is the worst of all poverty.”

“Kindness and courtesy are better than conferring an obligation.”

“To overlook the faults of others is better than almsgiving.”

“To forgive when it is in your power to avenge an injury, to love when you are wronged, are the best of virtues.”

“Hypocrisy is the destruction of piety; to impose an obligation is destructive of charity; selfishness is destructive of wisdom.”

“The good you do alone goes with you into the next world.” “Good acts are the steps which take ye to God.”¹

¹ The Caliph Ali.

“The peace of the two worlds is a commentary on two words,—love for friends, charity towards enemies.”¹

“On the tablet of my heart I have engraved from the sayings of my father, may his memory be sacred to eternity,—‘My child, should you be in the company of one who is fallen, do not be impertinent and do not view him with the eyes of contempt ; if, in this world, you cannot make a heart glad, yet act not so as to make the humblest soul sorrowful,’ ”²

“O thou who hast experienced happiness and trouble from good and bad events, and who art in consequence full of thanks, and sometimes of complaints ! Do not take high ground, that thy efforts be not vain ; be rather like grass, that stands in the way of the wind, or like a bundle of grass, which others carry off on their shoulders.”³

Tenderness and affection for children and respect for age are emphatically inculcated. “He is not

Tenderness for children and respect for age.

¹ *Hafiz.*

² *Hazin.*

³ *Urfi.*

of us, who is not affectionate to his little ones, and does not respect the reputation of the old ; and he is not of us, who does not order that which is lawful, and prohibit that which is unlawful.”¹

“Every young person who honours the old, on account of their age, may God appoint those, in his years, to honour him.”² “Whoever puts his hand upon the head of an orphan, from kindness, shall have the blessings of God, for every hair his hand shall have covered ; and whoever does good to a boy or girl, being orphans, he and I shall be near each other in paradise.”³ “Whoever gives an orphan a dwelling, meat and drink, God will bestow him a place in paradise and forgive his sins.”⁴

“He who is not affectionate to God’s creation, and to his own children, God will not be affectionate to him.”

¹ The Prophet.

² The Prophet.

³ The Prophet.

⁴ The Prophet.

Sympathy with suffering and tenderness to the woe-stricken and lonely are taught as the highest duties.

Sympathy with the suffering.

“God is merciful to those who are merciful to His creatures.”¹

“Pardon the sins of others that you may be pardoned. If you seek for mercy, be pitiful to the sufferings of mankind.”

“He who is kind to an orphan will receive God’s blessing on the Day of Account.”

“Verily a man’s children are God’s gifts.”

“He who is merciful to others will himself receive mercy ; he who has pity for other’s wrongs will himself be pitied by the Lord of the Universe.”

“He who does not forgive, will not be forgiven himself.”

“‘O my servants,’ says the Almighty, ‘if you seek My mercy, be merciful to My creatures.’”

“They will enter the abode of bliss who have a true, pure and merciful heart”

¹ The Caliph Ali.

“ The best of almsgiving is that which springs from the heart, and is uttered by the lips to soften the wounds of the injured.”

“ Modesty and chastity are parts of the Faith.”

“ He who is modest and chaste, nobody should find fault with him.”¹

“ True modesty is the source of all virtues.”

“ Humility and courtesy are acts of piety.”

“ Forgive others, incite all to do good and abstain from wickedness.”

“ Avoid evil-doers and vain speakers and those who speak falsely.”

“ God loves those who suppress their anger when angry, and forgive people, and do what is right, and act piously and purely.”

“ The patient, the forbearing and those who forgive the faults of others, having the power to punish, will receive the reward from their Lord.”

“ Thus saith your Lord, ‘ Verily those who are patient in adversity and forgive wrongs are the doers of excellence.’ ”²

¹ The Caliph Ali.

² The Prophet.

“The faithful are those who perform their trust and fail not in their word and keep their pledge.”¹

“ He is not of me but a rebel at heart who,
 when he speaks, speaks false-
 Prophet. ly ; who, when he promises,
 breaks his promises ; and who, when trust is
 reposed in him, fails in his trust ”²

Meanness and slander, hypocrisy and untruthfulness are denounced.

“ I heard the Prophet say,” says one of the traditionists, “ ‘ it is better to sit alone than in company with the bad ; and it is better to sit with the good than alone ; and it is better to speak words to a seeker of knowledge than to remain silent ; and silence is better than bad words. I advise you to be righteous to God, because it will adorn you in every work, withhold yourself from seeing the vices of mankind, and from giving them utterance. ’ ”

¹ The Prophet.

² The Prophet.

Self-abnegation and patience are laid down as supreme duties :—

“Love is the abnegation of self for another ; Divine love is complete self-absorption in the service of God’s creatures for His pleasure.”¹

“Patience is the recognition of God’s will in the wrongs of life. Thankfulness is the overflowing of the heart with the fullness of His mercy. Acquiescence (*raza*) is the acceptance with thankfulness of God’s will.”²

“He that is patient and thankful, loving and gentle to God’s creatures, and returns good for evil, and subdues his passion, and forgets his own self for others—will receive a great reward in that he will approach his Lord.”³

The Persian moralist Saadi speaks of the virtue of patience in these terms :—

“A great river is not made turbid by a stone ; the religious man who takes to heart an injury is as yet but shallow water. If any misfortune befall thee, bear with it, that, by forgiving

¹ The Caliph Ali. ² The Lady Fâtima. ³ The Lady Fâtima.

others, you may yourself obtain pardon. O my brother ! seeing that we are at last to return to earth, let us humble ourselves in ashes before we are changed into dust."

Fidelity and truth are most impressively inculcated :—

" When you speak, speak the truth ; perform when you promise ; discharge your trust ; commit not fornication ; be chaste ; have no impure desires ; withhold your hands from striking, and from taking that which is unlawful and bad. The best of God's servants are those who when seen, remind of God ; and the worst of God's servants are those who carry tales about, to do mischief and separate friends, and seek for the defects of the good."¹

Family love and affection are recommended as highly meritorious :—

" Verily there are some of God's servants, who are neither Prophets nor Martyrs, who will emulate Prophets and Martyrs on the day of Resurrection, on account of their high eminence

¹ The Prophet.

near God. They are a family loving each other, for God's favour, befriending each other to please God and to obtain His love."¹

The attainment of God's love is inculcated in the following words which the Almighty addresses to mankind :—

“Whoever seeks to approach Me by that which I have given as My divine commands, is most loved by Me, and My servant is always seeking to approach Me by holiness ; so that I love him : therefore, when I hold him as a friend, I am his hearing by which he hears, and I am his sight by which he sees, and I am his hand by which he holds, and I am his feet by which he walks ; if this servant supplicates Me, verily I give unto him ; and, if he seeks protection with Me from harm and ills, I give him protection.”²

It is laid down repeatedly that not only
 Humanity to living creatures. does God reward good done
 to human beings, but to all
 living creatures.

¹ The Prophet.

² The Prophet.

“ A woman who had sinned was passing by a dog which was holding out its tongue from thirst, and was near to dying. The woman drew off her boot and tied it to the end of her garment, and drew water for the dog, and gave it to drink ; the Lord forgave her sin.” The Prophet was asked, “ Verily are there rewards for our doing good to quadrupeds, and giving them water to drink ?” He said, “ there are rewards for benefiting every living creature.”

A man once came to him with a bundle and said : “ O Prophet, I passed through a wood and heard the voices of the young of birds, and I took them up and put them into my carpet, and their mother came fluttering round my head.” And the Prophet said : “ put them down ;” and when he had put them down, the mother joined the young. And the Prophet said : “ Do you wonder at the affection of the mother towards her young ? I swear by Him who has sent me, verily, God is more loving to His servants than the mother to these young birds. Return them

to the place from which ye took them, and let their mother be with them." "Fear God with regard to animals," used he to say; "ride them when they are fit to be ridden, and get off when they are tired. Verily, there are rewards for our doing good to dumb animals, and giving them water to drink."

The Prophet's definition of charity embraced the wide circle of kindness :
 Charity. "Every good act," he would say, "is charity. Your smiling in your brother's face is charity; an exhortation addressed to your fellow-men to do virtuous deeds is equal to almsgiving. Putting a wanderer in the right path is charity; assisting the blind is charity; removing stones and thorns and other obstructions from the road is charity; giving water to the thirsty is charity."¹

"A man's true wealth hereafter is the good he does in this world to his fellow-men. When he dies, people will ask, What property has he

¹ The Prophet.

left behind him ? But the angels who examine him [in the grave, will ask, What good deeds hast thou sent before thee ?”

He would often tell his disciples, “Do not think any good act done to you contemptible ; and I advise you, that you speak to your brother with an open countenance, because that is of the number of good acts and kindnesses. And if a man abuse you, and lay open a vice which he knows in you, then do not disclose one which you know in him, so that there may be no fault but on him.”

Charity to one's kindred is
placed in the first rank.

“Giving alms to the poor has the reward of one benefaction, but that given to kindred has two rewards ; one, the reward of charity, the other the reward for relationship.”

The following anecdote will show the value attached to family obligations and the merit of benefactions to one's children :—A man came to the Prophet and said, “I have got one dinâr.” He said, “Expend it upon yourself.” The

man said, "I have got another dinâr." The Prophet said, "Expend that upon your children." The man said, "I have got another dinâr." He said, "Expend that upon your wife and your parents and poor relations." He said, "I have got one other dinâr." The Prophet said, "Expend that upon your servants." The man said, "I have got another dinâr." "You know best the person most worthy of it; and whoever you know to be so, give it to him."

"Whatever we give" says the author of the *Akhlâk-i-Jelâli*, "should be given in the fulness of zeal and good-will, and never be the least regretted either in word or thought. For it would be the height of folly, when God, from the treasure-house of his bounty, has given a fortune to one of his servants, subject to the expenditure in a particular manner of an insignificant fraction, for him to consider the condition as burdensome to discharge. We should spend it simply to please God, and not mix up the act with any meaner motive, lest thereby it be rendered null and void.

We should bestow what we give on such as make a secret of their poverty; we should give in secret: for the ostentation of repute is folly. We find it among the *ahâdis*:—(the traditions of the Prophet) ‘Charity that is concealed appeaseth the wrath of God.’ And, again, ‘The best of alms is that which the right hand giveth and the left knows not of.’ From the Prophet we also have it, that when the just and holy God created the earth, it trembled and could not rest; whereupon He created the mountains to keep it still. At this the angels marvelled and inquired whether any created thing were stronger than a mountain? He told them, yes, fire. Again, they asked whether any thing were stronger than fire? He told them, yes, water. Any thing stronger than water? Yes, wind. Any thing stronger than wind? Yes, alms concealed, which the son of Adam giveth, so that the right hand gives, and the left knows it not. Of this the influence is greatest of any; for it averteth the scourge that is ready to fall.”

In the battle of life men and women have always felt the need of help from a Power above and beyond themselves whose love is boundless and universal. Is not the human soul better and purer for seeking the help of its Maker in the trials of life? The following prayer shows the value attached in Islâm to the outpouring of the human soul to the Giver of all good:—

“ We have reached the night, and so have all other inhabitants of God’s empire. Praised be God, one to whom there is no partner; for Him is dominion and praise, and He is powerful over all things. O God ! I supplicate Thee for the good of this night, and for every good that is in it ; and I seek protection with Thee, from the evils of this night, and from every evil that may be in it. O Lord ! Verily, I seek protection with Thee from sickness, from age and pride; and from the contentions and calamities of the world and from the punishment of the grave. O Lord ! I have resigned my soul to Thy commands and turned to Thee. I have made over my work to Thee,

and relied on Thee, and sought protection in Thee, to show my love to Thee ; and for fearing Thee, there is no asylum or redemption from Thy resentment but in Thee.”¹

“ O Lord ! Pardon my faults, and the works which I may have done through ignorance ; and forgive my lavishing away, and pardon my sins, which Thou knowest better than me. O Lord ! Pardon me my inconsiderate speaking, and blundering ; and forgive my wicked labours and intentions and all these are my characteristics. O Lord ! Pardon me the faults which I have done before, and shall do after, and those which I have discovered and concealed ; and those which Thou knowest better than me. Thou art the first and the last, and powerful over everything.”

“ O Lord ! Make me a thanksgiver to Thee, and a repeater of Thy name, and a fearer of thee, and a great obeyor of Thee, and a great humbler of myself before Thee, and complainer and repentor to Thee. O Lord ! Accept my repentance and

¹ The Prophet.

wash away my sins and approve my supplications ; and strengthen my proofs, and make my tongue true ; and show my heart the straight road ; and remove away the wicked inclinations of my heart.”

A learned critic has called the virtues of Islâm, “stoical.” The expression was used in an invidious sense, but if patience, forbearance, charity, truth, purity and magnanimity were the distinguishing characteristics of Stoics, I am prepared to admit that the ethical duties of Islâm are stoical. In the *Akhlâk*, magnanimity is defined thus :—

“ That the soul take no note of honour or disrepute, pay no regard to affluence or adversity, but remain entirely unaffected by praise or censure, by wealth or want ; from the mutations of human affairs admitting neither alteration nor transition, nor impression, nor influence : a spiritual eminence whose heights are only attainable to the most advanced on the paths of research ; whose summits are not to be contemplated, but by the choicest of the accomplished.”

“He is a man,” says the Allâmah Abul Fazl, “of high understanding and noble aspirations, who, without the help of others, recognises a ray of the divine power in the smallest things of the world; who shapes his inward and outward character accordingly, and shows due respect to himself and to others. True greatness, in spiritual and in worldly matters, does not shrink from the *minutiæ* of business, but regards their performance as an act of divine worship.”

“Every man of sense and understanding knows that the best way of worshipping God is in allaying the distress of the times, and in improving the condition of man.”

“Have the religions of the worldly tendencies of mankind no common ground? Is there not everywhere the same enrapturing beauty which beams forth from so many thousand hidden places? Broad indeed is the carpet which God has spread, and beautiful the colours which he has given it.”

At the same time men are taught to be
 Humility. humble.

“O men ! be humble and lowly. He who guards his tongue from detraction, God will conceal his vices ; and he who suppresses his anger, God will withhold His punishments from him; and he who asks pardon of God, God will accept his supplication.”

“ Whatever jewels thou wearest on thy brow, only humility can give them their lustre. To that talisman paradise opens its gate, and to it opens the heart of man. Dear to all hearts is he whom lowliness exalts ; his bending is the graceful droop of the branch laden with fruit.”

Dignity of labour.

The dignity of labour is
 preached in emphatic terms.

“ There is a tradition from the Prophet,” says Tirmizi, “ that a man of the Ansâr came to him begging for some help ; and the Prophet said, ‘ Have you nothing at home ? ’ He said, ‘ Yes, there is a large carpet, with one part

of which I cover myself, and spread the other, and there is a wooden cup out of which I drink water.' The Prophet said, 'Bring me the carpet and the cup.' And the man brought them, and the Prophet took them in his hands and said, 'Who will buy them?' A man said, 'I will take them at one dirhem.' He said, 'Who will give more?' This he repeated twice or thrice. Another man said, 'I will take them for two dirhems.' Then the Prophet gave the carpet and cup to that man, and took the two dirhems, which he gave to the Ansâr and said, 'Buy food with one of these dirhems and give it to your family, that they make it their sustenance for a few days; and buy a hatchet with the other dirhem and bring it to me.' And the man brought it; and the Prophet put a handle to it with his own hands, and then said, 'Go, cut wood and sell it; and let me not see you for fifteen days.' Then the man went cutting wood and selling it: and he came to

the Prophet, when verily, he had got ten dirhems ; and he bought a garment with part of them, and food with part. Then the Prophet said, ‘ This cutting and selling of wood, and making your livelihood by it, is better for thee than begging.’”

Idleness reprehended. **Idleness is reprehended**

“ God is gracious to him who earns his living by his own labour and not by begging.”¹

“ He who is able and fit and does not work for himself or for others, God is not gracious to him.”

“ He who works for his own living and does not beg, when he can earn, is one of God’s favoured creatures.”

“ He who neither works for himself nor for others, will not receive the reward of God.”

“ Pray to God morning and evening and employ the day in your avocations.”²

The charge of obscurantism can hardly be laid against Islâm, when it is considered how

¹ The Prophet.

² The Prophet.

eloquently the Founder recommended the acquisition of knowledge to his followers :—

“Acquire knowledge,” he used to say, “because
 Knowledge. he who acquires it in the
 way of the Lord performs
 an act of piety ; who speaks of it, praises the
 Lord ; who seeks it, adores God ; who dis-
 penses instruction in it, bestows alms ; and who
 imparts it to its fitting objects, performs an
 act of devotion to God. Knowledge enables its
 possessor to distinguish what is forbidden from
 what is not ; it lights the way to Heaven ;
 it is our friend in the desert, our society in
 solitude, our companion when bereft of friends ;
 it guides us to happiness, it sustains us in
 misery ; it is our ornament in the company
 of friends ; it serves as an armour against our
 enemies. With knowledge, the servant of God
 rises to the heights of goodness and to a
 noble position, associates with sovereigns in this
 world, and attains to the perfection of happiness
 in the next.”

“The ink of the scholar is more holy than the blood of the martyr.”

“He who leaves his home in search of knowledge, walks in the path of God.”

“He who travels in search of knowledge, to him God shows the way to paradise.”

“One hour’s meditation on the work of the Creator [in a devout spirit] is better than seventy years’ prayer.”

“To listen to the instructions of science and learning for one hour is more meritorious than attending the funerals of a thousand martyrs,—more meritorious than standing up in prayer for a thousand nights.”¹

“To the student who goes forth in quest of knowledge, God will allot a high place in the mansions of bliss; every step he takes is blessed, and every lesson he receives has its reward. The seeker of knowledge will be greeted in heaven with a welcome from the angels. To listen to the words of the learned, and to instil into the

¹ The Prophet.

heart the lessons of science, is better than religious exercises.....better than emancipating a hundred slaves. Him, who favours learning and the learned, God will favour in the next world.”¹

“ He who honours the learned, honours me.”

“ Eminence in science is the highest of honours. He dies not who gives life to learning. The greatest ornament of a man is erudition.”

“ The world is darkness ; knowledge is light ; but knowledge without truth is a mere shadow.”²

Man’s responsibility was laid down in explicit terms.

“ Whosoever gets to himself a sin, gets it solely at his own responsibility.”

“ And let alone those who make a sport and mockery of their religion, and whom this present world has deluded, and thereby bring to remembrance that the soul perishes of what it has got to itself, and when they commit a deed of shame they say : ‘ We have found that our fathers did so, and God obliges us to do it : ’

¹ The Caliph Ali.

² The Caliph Ali

say thou : ' Surely, God requireth not shameful doing ; . . . they did injustice to themselves ; yonder will every soul experience that which it hath bargained for ; ' . . . so then, whosoever is directed, it is solely a matter pertaining to himself ; and whosoever goes astray, he himself bears the whole responsibility of his wanderings."¹

In the purity of its aspirations can anything be more beautiful than the following :—

“ The servants of the Merciful are they that walk upon the earth softly, and when the ignorant speak unto them, they reply ‘ Peace ! ’ They that spend the night worshipping their Lord prostrate and standing and resting, those that, when they spend are neither profuse nor niggardly, but take a middle course. . . those that invoke not with God any other God and slay not a soul that God hath forbidden otherwise than by right, and commit not fornication . . . they who bear not witness to that which is false ; and when they

¹ The Koran.

pass by vain sport, they pass it by with dignity, who say, ‘ Oh, our Lord, grant us of our wives and children such as shall be a comfort unto us, and make us examples unto the pious,’—these shall be the rewarded, for that they persevered ; and they shall be accosted in paradise with welcome and salutation :—For ever therein,—a fair abode and resting-place !”¹

¹ The Koran.

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