

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_158786

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

The Degeneracy of Muslims:
Its Causes and Remedies

With a Foreword by

Nawab Sir Nizam Jung Bahadur, Kt.,

C.I.E., O.B.E., M.A., Bar-at-Law
62

(Formerly Political Member of H.E.H. The Nizam's Government.)



BY

Zahir Ahmed, B. A.

FOREWORD.

Any effort, however slight, to dispel error is a contribution to truth and therefore a service to humanity. If it relates to any matter concerning the higher interests of life the service is all the more valuable.

My young friend Mr. Zahir Ahmed showed me some time ago an *essay of his on the "Degeneracy of Muslims", in which he has attempted to prove that Islam, as rightly understood, is in no way opposed to human progress on modern lines, but may, on the contrary, be regarded as its spiritual guide and support. It was on the whole a creditable performance and impressed me as an honest expression of the views of an educated young Muslim who was seeking the truth with an unbiassed mind, trying to maintain a sane balance between the narrow, un-

*This essay was written in 1926 for the All India Essay Competition organised by the Milad Committee, Secunderabad, and secured the first Prize.

reasoning orthodoxy of the old type of "Maulavi and the more unreasonable freedom of thought claimed by the imperfectly westernized and partially educated young man prone to question and doubt what he does not take the trouble to understand. The chief merit of the essay seemed to lie in its power to correct this attitude and to suggest a course that may lead an open enquiring mind to juster and more reliable conclusions than hasty assumptions or preconceived opinions — themselves the result of following too blindly the mis-statements of the antagonists of Islam.

Mr. Zahir Ahmed has *expanded his original essay to some extent by filling in the weaker parts with matter that helps to elucidate his meaning and purpose and to support his arguments. He has quoted liberally from European authors of repute whose opinion is entitled to respect on the ground of impartiality. In this, I think, he has followed a judicious instinct, for, any well grounded opinion of a Western writer favourable to Islam as a great civilizing force in the world's history is the best means of counterbalancing those prejudiced mis-statements, ill tempered aspersions or subtly malicious 'Critical' appreciations that disfigure the otherwise useful contributions of European writers on Islam and its teachings and its tendencies.

* It was done in 1927.

I hope Mr. Zahir Ahmed's example will serve to excite emulation among his compeers and induce them to make a closer study of Islam which is after all their most precious patrimony. I am eagerly looking forward to the time when an Urdu translation of the essay will be in the hands of every school boy in Hyderabad.

Hyderabad-Deccan, }
January 1933. }

NIZAMAT JUNG.

INTRODUCTION.

My competence to write upon so great a subject may be questioned, but I wish it understood that I do not for a moment profess to be either a scholar or a theologian. What I have written, or compiled is the result of my own readings on Islam and it is to be judged on its own merits. In the Islam I understand, it is not mere belief that counts, nor is it the wish to do certain things, which remain undone. It is essentially service. Islam speaks not in words, but in actions and manifests itself in the temper and life of the individual, in honesty of purpose, in uprightness of judgment and in patience under trial. "Many think that it is doing as our fathers did, instead of asking if the words we use or the ideas we express are the dictates of an intellectual grasp of a faith, if honestly believed, makes our lives more in harmony with the infinite." Islam is certainly not "a mere creed ; it is a life to be lived in the present"—
a religion of right-doing, right-thinking, and right-

speaking, founded on divine love, universal charity and the equality of man in the sight of the Lord. However much the modern professors of Islam may have dimmed the glory of their Prophet, the religion which enshrines righteousness and “ justification by works ” deserves the recognition of humanity.

I am aware that I have used a considerable number of quotations without adequate acknowledgment. This is due to the fact that this essay is based upon my scribbled notes taken in my studies at different times. So far as my memory has aided me, I have followed the usual practice by means of footnotes but there are places where insufficient acknowledgment has been made. I hope I may be forgiven, if only on the ground that my own motives and those of the authors to whom I am indebted are the same.

I take this opportunity of expressing my gratitude to Mr. Mohammed Ahsan, B.A. of the Nizam College for his revision of the proofs.

Hyderabad-Deccan, }
February 1933. }

ZAHIR AHMED.

Degeneracy of Muslims : Its Causes and Remedies

THE present degeneracy of the Muslims, its causes and possible remedies is engaging the serious attention of many thinkers. Here I shall merely try to throw light upon some of the salient points of this great problem.

It has been said that the Muslims of the present day are suffering from a sort of “creeping paralysis” and are degenerating from day to day; but the situation is not so gloomy as it appears to be at first sight: there are rays of light in the prevailing darkness. The Muslims are passing through an unhappy time and the prospect is still clouded, but they have passed through unhappy times before.

In the present adversity one cannot but recall those palmy days when the Muslims were the accepted leaders of the civilised world. Time was when, as Dr. Andrew Crichton puts it: “Their schools and academies were the shrines at which the barbarised nations of the

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

West rekindled the torch of science and philosophy. In the colleges of Cordova, Seville and Toledo the scholars of France, Germany and England drank from the copious fountain of their (the Arabs') literature."

It will be injustice if the obligations of the world at large to the Muslims are forgotten. Here I cannot help quoting at length the testimony of Draper to the contributions of the Spanish Muslims in particular: * "Scarcely had the Arabs become firmly settled in Spain when they commenced a brilliant career. Adopting what had become now the established policy of the Commanders of the Faithful in Asia, the Emirs of Cordova distinguished themselves as patrons of learning and set an example of refinement strongly contrasting with the condition of the native European princes. Cordova under their administration at its highest point of prosperity, boasted of more than a million of inhabitants. After sunset a

* John William Draper, M.D., L.L.D., Intellectual Development of Europe.

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

man might walk through it in a straight line for ten miles by the light of the public lamps. Seven hundred years after this time there was not so much as one public lamp in London. Its streets were solidly paved. In Paris, centuries subsequently, whoever stepped over his threshold on a rainy day stepped up to his ankles in mud. Other cities, as Granda, Seville, Toledo, considered themselves rivals of Cordova."

Draper goes on to tell us about their palaces and gardens, their literature, their school system, their taste for practical science, their inclination for the study of medicine, their surgery, mathematics, astronomy, and finally deplores "the systematic manner in which the literature of Europe has contrived to put out of sight our scientific obligations to

Speaking of concrete examples Draper says: "What should the modern astronomer say, when, remembering the contemporary barbarism of Europe he finds the Arab, Abul Hassan speaking of tubes to the extremities of which ocular and object diopters, perhaps sights, were attached as used at Meragha?

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

the Mahomedans." "Surely" he adds "they cannot be much longer hidden. Injustice based on religious rancour and national conceit cannot be perpetuated for ever." Somewhere else, referring to the advance of astronomy under the Arabs, Draper says:—"The Arab has left his intellectual impress on Europe, as, before long, Christendom will have to confess; he has indelibly written it on the heavens, as any one may see who reads the names of the stars on a common celestial globe."

It should be well noted that the supre-

What when he reads of the attempts of Abdur Rahman Sufi at improving the photometry of the stars? Are the astronomical tables of Ebn Junis (A. D. 1008) called the Hakunitetables, or the Ilkanic tables of Nasser Eddin Tasi constructed at the great Observatory just mentioned, Meragha near Tauris, (A. D. 1259,) or the measurement of time by pendulum oscillations and the methods of correcting astronomical tables by systematic observations,—are such things worthless indications of the mental state?"

Alhazen corrects the theory of vision and determines the function of the retina, explains single vision and traces the course of a ray of light through the air.

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

macy of Muslims in the arts and their discoveries in sciences kept pace with their vast territorial conquests. Their religion unaided by any extraneous help, within a short space of its birth,* “manifested its inevitable destiny of overpassing the bounds of Arabia.” It spread from the Indus to the Tagus, from the Volga to the Arabian Sea. And “No Darius, Asoka or Constantine came to its assistance with royal mandates or imperial homage.”** It is very amazing how a congeries of warring tribes, suddenly consolidated into a nation, for centuries carried aloft the torch of knowledge for the enlightenment of the world.

The memory of their glorious past cannot but arouse the Muslims to a consciousness of their importance in the world as representing a great and distinctive civilization. It is a splendid heritage by itself and a torch held aloft by the past to light the way for the present and the future. But it is sad to find

*Draper.

**Syed Amir Ali.

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

that the virtues which once made the Muslims masters of the world are no longer moulding their collective life. Not only has their great Empire fallen, but their knowledge, their learning and all the great achievements of their once progressive civilization have disappeared. They have not only ceased to be the preceptors of mankind but it may be said that their aptitude to learn what is best in other systems has also become a thing of the past.

Look at the Muslims of the present day ! They seem to be almost oblivious of the practical truths underlying the teachings of their great Prophet; the practice of religion—which should mean the practice of virtue in all the walks of life—has given place to a mere mockery of profession; lazy literalism has usurped the place of faithful work; and empty ceremonialism has assumed the garb of devotion.

This degeneracy of the Muslims, I think, I have rightly attributed chiefly to their neglect to follow accurately that code of natural

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

ethical and social truths which the Prophet revealed to them in the name of the Creator. This code, the Shariat, aims at human progress and shows the proper way of attaining it in a number of injunctions and prohibitions covering the whole domain of man's existence: his individual actions, his relations with his family, his social life and his duties as a member of his community. It is a code intended to regulate man's conduct by guiding aright his mind and his spirit. In fact these laws are based on natural laws and cannot therefore be transgressed without peril. When a race becomes indifferent to these primary laws of human conduct, the era of its decadence begins.

The study of the history of the Muslims reveals the fact that their decline has coincided with the appearance of a certain scholasticism among them; and I cannot help thinking that this scholasticism is responsible, in a very large measure, for the melancholy state of affairs we see at present.

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

This scholasticism, among other things, propagated the erroneous belief that the urgent injunctions of the Prophet in favour of “علم” (Research and Science) related only to the truths contained in the Shariat and that meditation on these alone ought to engross all the energies of the human mind. Such an interpretation of the Prophet’s intentions seems wholly unjustifiable, for, having taught the Muslims great ethical and social truths in the Shariat, he never for a moment ceased to insist on the necessity of their acquiring “knowledge” of all kinds by their own efforts.

This is often the theme of his recorded discourse (Hadith) and he declares in the most emphatic terms that by the help of ‘Ilm’ (Science and knowledge) Muslims will be able to understand and practise their religion all the better.* Had his followers in all ages understood the true spirit of the Prophet’s teachings, they would have attained, in the region of

*He who leaves home in search of knowledge walks in the path of Allah. The Holy Prophet.

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

material progress, a pre-eminence worthy of the high ethical and social principles which the Prophet has inculcated for them in the Shariat. But a kind of perverted mysticism, to which the Muslim world fell a victim during certain periods in modern times, owing to the narrow bigotry of a self-constituted clergy, seems to have dominated the Muslim mentality and hindered progress. And as a result the Muslim world showed an increasing aversion to the study of natural phenomena and abandoned the study of natural science to which the early Arabs had been so strongly attracted by their desire for knowledge. Here lies the real reason why the later Muslim civilization has not tried to conquer and command the forces of nature—the conquest of which is the source of the advance made by Western civilization.

To the great misfortune of the present day Muslims, the full significance of the Prophet's teachings has been lost to them. They fail to recognise the exercise of reason as the highest

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

and noblest function of the intellect. The present stagnation of the Muslim communities is principally due to this notion which as fixed itself in the minds of the generality of Muslims, that the right to exercise private judgment ceased with the early legist, that its exercise in modern times is sinful, and that a Muslim in order to be regarded as an orthodox follower of Mohammed should belong to one or the other of the schools established by the schoolmen of Islam, and abandon his judgment absolutely to the interpretations of men who lived in the ninth century and could have no conception of the necessities of the twentieth.

The fact is that nothing can be more simple and more in accord with the advance of the human intellect than the teachings of the Arabian Prophet. The few rules for religious ceremonial which he prescribed were chiefly with the object of maintaining discipline and uniformity, so necessary to certain stages of society; but they were by no means of an inflexible character. "God wishes to make things easy for you" for, says the Quran,

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

“man was created weak”. The Prophet of Islam recognised no ritual likely to distract the mind from the thought of the one God; no law to keep enchained the conscience of advancing humanity. “The first thing created was Reason” said the Holy Prophet. Shall we follow him on the path of progress or shall we follow the narrow bigoted and ignorant leaders who make the exercise of reason a sin? When the Prophet himself allowed the widest latitude to individual reasoning shall Muslims close their eyes and their minds to the necessities of the age?

It is well known how the less liberal-minded Ulma—lovers of strict formalism—have often stood in the way of Muslim progress by misdirecting the wholesome spirit breathed into Muslims at the inception of Islam. They have almost crushed it by attempting to confine it within narrow, obscure and uncertain bounds. The sense of the individuality of the human soul so strongly emphasized by our religion has been enfeebled by their training and has become incapable of strenuous effort in the

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

common interest of the community. It is necessary to liberate it once more.

I may be blamed for referring to the influence of the Ulma in such strong terms, but without any ill-will to these high priests of stagnation and repression of thought, I have to speak the truth. For I cannot bear to think of Muslims as dead followers of a living faith. Again, in the sense of breadth, Islam has this advantage, that there is no generally recognised infallible authority able to stop now and then the progressive modernism of Muslims or any deviations from the trodden path with an imperative "Halt".

A large measure of free thought combined with belief in God is absolutely necessary for human progress; and we all know how in those centuries of triumphant progress when the Muslims were the masters of a large portion of the world, an intense faith in God and the Prophet was combined with free thought on every earthly subject. "Islam" it has been well remarked "holds nothing upon earth so

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

sacred as to be immune from criticism.” Just consider to what unseen bounds of enquiry this extends our mental horizon ?

Yes, the spirit of Islam is elastic and ameliorating; it advances with the advancing thought of each age; it is in perfect accord with each invention, with each scientific discovery, nor does it clash with the essential requirements of art and culture. A community which refuses to change with the changing times is doomed, and no one emphasized this truth more forcibly than the Prophet himself.

“Ye are in an age,” he warned them, “in which, if ye abandon one-tenth of what is enjoined, ye will be ruined. After this, a time will come when he who shall observe one-tenth of what is now commanded will be redeemed and blessed.”*

The mind of this great teacher, so far as intellectualism and progressive ideals (to use modern expressions), are concerned is essentially

*This authentic tradition is given in the Jam-ut-Tirmizi and is to be found also in the Mishkat.

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

modern. Eternal "striving" is in his teachings necessity of human existence. "Man cannot exist without constant effort." True Islam, then, as explained by him, is the most present of all living things, and let us remember that Islam requires all available light and knowledge for its growth and cannot thrive in darkness and ignorance.

Islam inaugurated the reign of intellectual liberty. And it has been truly remarked that so long as Islam retained its pristine character it proved itself the protector of knowledge and civilization, the zealous ally of intellectual freedom.

The majority of professed Muslims to-day, nobody can deny, are ignorant and superstitious, accepting a vast mass of legends and absurd beliefs as an integral part of their religion. Such knowledge as exists among them represents the relics of the science of a bygone days. The true spirit of Islam demands that it should be replaced by the knowledge of to-day. The mind of a Muslim is free, it has to concern

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

itself with the affairs of this earth and, provided he complies with certain rules of conduct imposed on him to ensure his mental and spiritual health, it is his duty to explore freely the field of science and to accept all that his mind apprehends as truth revealing the ways of God.

It may be thought that, like some other great nations of antiquity, the Muslims too have fallen never to rise again; but it must be remembered that the success of the Muslims, even in the material world, unlike that of other nations, never rests wholly on a material basis. The Tartar invasions, the Crusades and the rise of Western materialism, supposed by many to be potent factors in the so-called disintegration of Islam, may have had some effect upon the stability of the Muslim Empire; but Islam itself is a system which does not depend for its existence or its growth on the life of empires or of men.

Again it seems to me an erroneous idea that attributes Muslim decadence chiefly to the

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

absolutism of rulers or to the aristocratic selfishness of men of high rank and position who had lost the sense of Islamic brotherhood and co-operation. Some writers have pointed to certain beliefs and practices that have grown up in Muslim society as the chief causes of its decay. They speak of the Baktashi doctrines (in Albania) preaching metempsychosis, a doctrine probably borrowed from their Greek neighbours; they refer to the so called Sufism among the Druses and Kurds, to undue reverence accorded to saintly personages among the Turkmans and Afghans, as cancers preying on the Muslim world.

Vambery, the well known Orientalist, writes in his *Western Culture in Eastern Lands*: "It is not Islam and its doctrines which have devastated the western portion of Asia and brought about the present sad state of things; but it is the tyranny of the Muslim princes who have wilfully perverted the doctrines of the Prophet and sought to find authority in the Quran as a basis for their despotic

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

rule.* They have not allowed the faintest suspicion of doubt in matters of religion and efficaciously distorted and crushed all liberal principles." Nobody can deny that this diagnosis is confirmed by facts.

I, for one, believe that all these are secondary causes. The primary cause is to be sought in the departure from the Shariat—from those natural laws the observance of which made the

*(1) The Shariat or canon law is fundamentally democratic and is opposed in essence to absolutism. Prof. Lybyer—Proceedings of the American Political Science Association.

(2) In this connection it is interesting to read the following passage taken from Alfred Guillaume's "The Traditions of Islam." He in his turn has borrowed it from an Indian writer:—

"The vast flood of traditions soon formed a chaotic sea. Truth and error, fact and fable mingled together in an undistinguishable confusion. Every religious social and political system was defended, when necessary to please a Khalif or an Amir to serve his purpose, by an appeal to some oral traditions. The name of Mohammad was abused to support all manner of lies and absurdities or to satisfy the passion, caprice or arbitrary will of the despots, leaving out of consideration the creation of any standards of test".

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

Arabs great, the neglect of which led to their decline and fall. That race, which had such an unprecedented rise, such a marvellous career of high achievement and has left such a glorious record, must have had some great impelling force behind it.†† That force came from the right understanding and the faithful observance of the Shariat, as the law of nature revealed by God to man**

(3) Amir Ali also observes: “.....Not a few were the servants of sovereigns and despots whose demands were not consistent with the precepts of the Master. Canons were invented, theories started, traditions discovered, and glosses put upon his words utterly at variance with their spirit. And hence it is that most of the rules and regulations which govern now the conscience of so many professors of the faith are hardly derived from any express and positive declarations of the Quran, but for the most part from the lego-religious books with which the Islamic world was flooded in the later centuries.”

†† Mr. Lothrop Stoddard, in his book, “The New World of Islam,” says:- “No subsequent distortions could entirely obliterate the fact that primitive Islam was the supreme expression of a freedom loving folk whose religion must necessarily contain many liberal tendencies.”

** “Then set your face upright for religion in the right state—the nature made by Allah in which He made men; there is no altering of Allah’s creation: that is the right religion, but most people do not know. The Quran Part XXI-chXXX Section 4-30.

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

Again I wish to make this point very clear : that this code of laws is not rigid, as is wrongly supposed by many ; nor is it against progress. Those who believe that Islam is not favourable to progress must be either ignorant of, or wilfully blind to, historical facts. If it was not Islam that made the barbarous hordes of Arabia, in an amazingly short space of time, not only a conquering but a cultured race, it has yet to be proved what other and totally different causes, operating in spite of the “unprogressive” spirit of Islam contributed to their success. It has also to be explained why those same Arabs had not been able, before the advent of Islam, to move towards and attain the same goal. On the hypothesis that Islam is a force that impedes progress, the Arabs should have moved on unhampered towards civilization and conquest when there was no Islam to hinder their progress. We admit that the potentiality of being great was in the Arab blood, in the Arab temper and the Arab traditions but it was nothing less than the impact of Islam upon the Arab mind that

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS

could so suddenly and so effectively develop and set in impetuous motion the great powers that lay slumbering within it. This is the one fact that stands out prominently in the early history of the Arabs—a fact noticed and dwelt upon by the greatest man of action that Europe has produced in the course of two thousand years. Napoleon, with his keen intelligence, and sure glance saw at once that Islam had accomplished what no other religion in the world has ever been able to do. He believed in the virile vitality of Islam and its effective potency as an extraordinary impulse to action because, as he said, it had conquered half the world in a few years.

Here again I must remove another misunderstanding on which some European writers* have ignorantly dwelt. They say that Islam

*Muir, Life of Mohamed Vol. 111-P-251. "It was essential to the permanence of Islam that its aggressive course should be continuously pursued and that its claim to an universal acceptance, or, at the least, to an universal supremacy should be enforced at the point of sword." The truth is Mr. Amir Ali rightly observes, "that every religion in some stage of its career,

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

was spread at the point of the sword.* An impartial student of history, reading it from original sources, can hardly fail to see that this is a creation of "legendary fancy". Islam always seized the sword in self-defence and held it in self-defence as it will ever do. But Islam never interfered with the dogmas of any faith, never persecuted, never established an Inquisition. It never invented the rack or the stack for stifling difference of opinion, or for strangling the human conscience, or for exterminating heresy.*

Muhammad did not merely preach toleration; he embodied it into a law. Proselytising by

has, from the tendencies of its professors, been aggressive. Such also has been the case with Islam; but that it ever aims at proselytism by force, or that it has been more aggressive than other religions, must be entirely denied."

*1. The passage in the Quran, "Let there be no compulsion in religion", (sura ii - 257) testifies to the principle of toleration and charity inculcated by Islam. "If the Lord had pleased, verily all who are in the world would have believed together. Wilt thou then force men to believe when belief can come only from God?"—"Adhere to those who forsake you;

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

justice; which affirms the principle of equality and social democracy among all mankind, the very principle which once so restlessly struggled for expression on the shores of Galilee; and, above all, which insists on direct individual responsibility for human actions. The only cause of the success of the early Muslims was the fact that they were the followers of true Islam, "a religion which alone combines the two conceptions which have in different ages furnished the mainspring of human conduct, the consciousness of a human dignity so valued in the

2. "Islam", says an able writer, "offered its religion, but never enforced it; and the acceptance of that religion conferred co-equal rights with the conquering body, and emancipated the vanquished States from the conditions which every conqueror, since the world existed up to the period of Mohammed, had invariably imposed." Amir Ali, "*Spirit of Islam*."

3. "The Muslim of yore, going through the world with Quran in one hand, and the sword in the other, giving unbelievers the choice between conversion or death, is a creation of legendary fancy. We can but hope that modern civilization will not be so fanatical against Muslims, as the latter were unjustly said to have been during the period of their power." Mohammedanism. By C. Snouck Hurgronje.

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS

ancient philosophies, and the sense of human sinfulness, so dear to the Christian apologist.”

The early Muslims fully realised that there was an irresistible force behind Islam—a spirit of unity, of truth, of selfless work, of honesty and greatness of soul. Thus it was that in spite of civil wars and dissensions within and invasions from without, the banner of Islamic progress floated aloft for centuries.

While dealing with the causes of decay, I might perhaps be expected to deal at length with such events as the invasions of Chinghiz Khan, Timur and others and their consequences. But, as I have hinted above, these were passing events which touched only the surface of things. The vicissitudes of war do not as a rule alter the inner nature of man. Only a few years after the memorable day when Turkey lay at the feet of the victorious “Tamerlane,” that same Turkey, resuscitated and rejuvenated, was seen advancing upon Vienna.

The causes of the decline and degeneracy of the Muslims, I repeat, are not to be found in these extraneous events.

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

The proper understanding of their faith (which is no mystery but common sense), that Islam is right conduct in life,* can remove all fears about the future of the Muslims. If to-day they follow the principles of Islam with true, loyal and courageous hearts, like their ancestors of old, their failure, instead of depressing them and frightening them with gloomy forebodings, will only nerve them to nobler action. It behoves them seriously to study their present condition. They will find that it is not an inscrutable destiny which has cast them into degradation and despair and has isolated them from all that is great and noble in the world of progress; but that their own apathy and misconceived resignation are the main causes of their decadence.

The future of the Muslims will depend chiefly on the revival of true Islamic ethics, which produce a sense of power, an essential

* “ Surely Allah is with those who guard (against evil) and those who do good (to others)” The Quran. Part XIV ch XVI section 16—128.

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS

pre-requisite of high endeavour and achievement. The revival of Islamic culture therefore is a need to which we are becoming keenly alive. We crave a more intimate knowledge of the Islamic past. We want to feed our souls on the inspiring deeds of the heroes of Islam to live up to their traditions and to follow their ideals. This will teach us self-respect, give us a deeper insight and a wider outlook, and enable us to resume once more our high place in the world's civilization. We must bear in mind that "no destiny whatever can prevent the Muslims from living up to the matchless renown of their past except their own inertia and want of ambition" These are the words of a well-known *Parsi writer and

"Trust in God but tie your camel."

(The Holy Prophet.)

*A. S. N. Wadia.

"Mohammed placed the acquirement and cultivation of knowledge before the worship of God. In his judgment, exploring in the realms of nature, with a view to bringing the various manifestations of Nature to subserve humanity, was the real glorification of God.

In this respect the Prophet says the following :-

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

they make it quite clear to us that the surest way for them to live is to revive the immortal past in their conduct of the affairs of life. The same writer continues : "If the Muslims only drew inspiration from the great heroes of the past and grasped the full significance of the great inheritance they have derived from them, they would ensure the future of Islam." Need I add anything to this ?

The Islamic ideal of education, rightly understood, is always modern ; it can never be out of date. The Prophet of Islam, with a keen perception of the necessities of this world of progress and its ever changing social

"To listen to the words of the learned and to instil into others the lessons of science is better than religious exercises."

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

Acquire knowledge. It enables the possessor to distinguish right from wrong ; it lights the way to heaven ; it is our friend in the desert ; our society in solitude ; our companion when friendless ; it guides us to happiness ; it sustains in misery ; it is an ornament among friends and an armour against enemies.

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS

conditions, has laid down a very elastic and comprehensive code which is for all times.

Here, I think, I owe an explanation as to what I mean when I refer to this Code as both 'elastic' and 'for all times'. The rigid interpretation of the Code which to-day finds acceptance with the ignorant, is obviously due to confusion of the temporary with the permanent and the universal with the particular. The guiding principles are for all time, but the actual regulations must be varied in accordance with the age in which we live, in order that the purpose of the ordinances may be achieved in that age. It would have been natural that in their admiration for the teacher, his early disciples had stereotyped his ordinary mode of life, crystallised the passing incidents of a chequered career, imprinted on the heart orders, rules, and regulations enunciated for the exigencies of the day in an infant society. But, as a matter of fact, they did nothing of the kind. The example of the Prophet left them reasonable. It was not until the third

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

Islamic century that the stereotyping process began, and not until the eleventh Islamic century that it became strong enough to overcome and paralyse that freedom of thought within wide limits which had been the motive-power of Islamic progress. My view is therefore historically orthodox, and has been confirmed by the facts of history.

It is no part of the teaching of Islam—which exalts Reason—that injunctions framed to meet the current necessities of a semi-civilized people, should become immutable till the end of the world.

Emphasising the need for education the Prophet said: “To obtain knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim—male and female;” and again: “Seek knowledge even though it is only to be found in China”; and again: “He who leaves his home in search of knowledge walks in the path of God.” He meant knowledge in the widest sense, and did not restrict or confine it to the field of religious research

The one great need of Muslims to-day, all the world over, is a sound system of education

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS

to dispel superstitions and ignorance and to lead them to wider growth and development. But it must be true Islamic education, free from prejudices and useless conventions, and conducive to free and sane thought. Such education should impart knowledge which is sustained by truth and is the result of truth. The supreme need is education that creates a sense of responsibility and at the same time creates capacity. To widen the Muslim outlook, to incite Muslims to the realization of their destiny, as foreshadowed by their great past, to move forward on the path on which their Great Leader had started them, should be the end and scope of such education.

Muslims should realise that only by modern methods can they accomplish the work they have to do in modern times, and that Islam is not opposed to this. On the contrary it is a religion that, entering into their daily life, will help them in acquiring modern education and making the best use of it. The great principles of Islam and the light they carry will shine

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

forth all the more brightly in association with the highest standard and the best methods of the modern world's system of general education. Muslims, then, for their regeneration and advancement, should modernise themselves in the true spirit of Islam and that of the early Arabs. Perhaps the only way at present to put a stop to Muslim decadence is to borrow from the West its positive science, and benefit by its technical progress. Let them do so, and let them assimilate the results as the old Arabs did. There was a time when Islam preserved Greek learning and gave it back to Europe, thus ending the dark ages of Christendom. That was a step in modernizing Europe ; so let us not, as Muslims, hesitate now to take from their best without being weak enough to imitate their errors and reproduce their defects. Mustafa Kamal Pasha, the leader of new Turkey, has very ably expressed this idea in the following words:—"You will see people suffer and struggle because they do not conform their thoughts and spirits to the changes that civilization demands. That is the cause of our backward-

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS

ness and of the misfortunes that have befallen us. If we have saved ourselves in the space of some years, it is thanks to the transformation of our thinking. We cannot stop, we must always advance. The nation must know that civilization possesses so great a force that she scorches up and destroys all those confronting her or who remain indifferent.”

Though it is obvious that working on modern lines is most essential to the advancement of Muslims; yet in trying to do this they have need to be very careful. As Mr. Pickthall justly remarks: “you need the learning and the practical example of the west, but you do not need the ethical, political and social system and ideals of the West. The systems and ideals of the West are always changing, still seeking for the synthesis which was revealed thirteen hundred years ago in Arabia. You have your own unchanging social and political ideals which have stood the test of centuries, and you should return to them, making that return to true Islam a great part of your modern education.

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

Muslims must go to the school of the West for the scientific and material progress necessary to healthy growth; but for social peace and political security the West must come to the School of Islam.”

To carry such education into the rank and file of the community is a prime necessity, because it is the rank and file which make up the community and will make progress real. They must be furnished with the knowledge of the present day, so that their minds may be enlarged and filled with new ideas and may avoid stagnation. It is true, to some extent, that, in the past, education was not thought of for the people. “It had trained the scholar and let the masses go.” It should now reach the masses and raise them. The medium of education should be a language understood by the people at large; and its one great aim should be to develop character and make the people alive to the needs of the times they live in.

The great example of Turkey should teach the Muslims that an era of renaissance has

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

dawned. The reform of Turkey is being attempted from within. But it seems to be a daring experiment and one to be watched attentively. In the absence of certain knowledge,—and we are too far off to observe—it would be premature to judge. Time alone will show whether the result of the experiment will be a real national progress. At present I can only venture this cautious remark that new experiments should be slow and gradual, because sweeping changes are apt to lead to extremes and extremes to reactions. But anyhow, it seems to me that the modernizing spirit, which the Turk exhibits in introducing reforms in his new Republic, does not in any essential matter clash with the true spirit of Islam. The Islamic Code is capable of proper expansion and does not prevent its votaries from keeping pace with the progress of material civilization. The Turks want national power, commercial expansion, a place of pride among the peoples, a richer and fuller life. If symptomatic of anything at all, their present attempt to cast off worn-out social customs is symptomatic of a new attitude of

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

mind which judges every secular idea in terms, not of age, but of utility, in a world where sentiment has given place to value.

Egypt too, with its remnants of the old theological schools, has been of late trying to advance on modern lines. The Egyptians, though entangled in the web of their environment, seem to be moving forward. A considerable majority of them, in addition to being good agriculturists, are said to be “eager snatchers of the gift of civilization*” Though many of their primary schools are “in a confused state of transition, ††” it can fairly be stated that they are an advancing community. The basic need is for a rich development of really Egyptian manhood with far greater initiative, staying power and integrity.

The Muslims of Western North Africa and Tunis have limited their education to the Quran; They may be said to be enlightened,

* D. B. Mcdonald “Aspects of Islam ”

†† C. W. Bury “Pan—Islam ”

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS

for, unlike Indians they do not depend on Government employment. They have a large agricultural population and a variety of industries. Though agriculture and industries have brought them prosperity yet they must learn to keep their children abreast with the times in matters of education; and their conception of education ought to be changed. They have their warlike traditions behind them, and this is something to the good; but as the old methods will not stand the new tests, their education in all its aspects has to be more complete and up-to-date.

Sultan Abdul Aziz, Ibn Saud in Arabia appears to be striving to raise the condition of the Arabs. He is trying to put an end to the isolation of Arabia and to bring that country into contact with the rest of the civilized world. A. Andre Servier in his "Islam and the Psychology of the Musalmans" speaks of the Arab as "a persistently destructive, barbaric, narrow-minded, arid being who has been a principal cause of the decadence of the Muslim world." But one who really knows

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

the Arab will certainly agree with Paul Harrison when he says in his book *The Arab at Home*: "The Arab, with all his exasperating qualities of barbaric warfare, tribal separation, and shiftlessness, has qualities of dignity, courage, loyalty, endurance, hospitality and gratitude that win the head and heart." He rightly sees in the Arab "great possibilities when set in the larger liberty." It is, I think, only a question of time for the Arabs to become modernized on purely Islamic lines.

Even Persia, the land of luxury and genius, has broken loose from its worn-out traditions and seems eager to take its place in the modern world. The youth of Persia are awakening to the world of movement outside. There is a stirring, a desire, under the present monarch to get out of the old ruts and find new paths of fuller life and efficiency. Under the present conditions the diffusion of general education among the masses is more than ever necessary to widen their outlook. In Persia, (one cannot fail to observe,) the lives and conduct of a large

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

majority of the people are governed less by the spirit of the teachings of the Prophet himself than by the theories and opinions artfully inculcated by "Mujtahids" and "Imams" who are influenced by their own limited notions of human needs and progress. "Persians" says Bosworth Smith, "have complicated the simplicity of Islam with fables and with miracles. They have actually imported into it something of saint-worship and sacerdotalism." I do not know how far this is correct; but, in any case, Persia must realise that following the true spirit of Islam is for Muslims the only means of salvation.

The Muslims in China are considerable in number. They are "known by the peculiar term "Hui-choo". For a long time the Chinese Muslims have been striving to communicate with the rest of the world. They are striving for their material, social and religious improvement. *"Islam in China went pleading for the claims of this work-a-day world to

*Abdullah Yusuf Ali, I. C. S.

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

purity and righteousness. It went with merchants and navigators. It had no political pretensions or complications, but its practical virtues and evident sincerity won respect among people." This is the reason of its rapid spread there, in spite of a large number of Christian missionaries. With all their dignity and "blessedness", the Chinese Muslims, too, like Muslims elsewhere, have yet to assimilate a great deal of the practical knowledge of the West.

In India there is a large population of Muslims, but their condition is deplorable; for here, too, we find them steeped in gross ignorance and misled by superstitions. "An Indian Muslim is only half a Muslim," says a Turkish proverb. This may be largely due to their surroundings and to Hindu influences operating on their minds for ages; yet the fact remains that a large part of what they believe and practise is at variance with true Islam.

They show a tendency towards the caste system of Hinduism, which is quite contrary

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

to the teachings of Islam, and is in itself a great handicap to any social organisation. This tendency has to be eradicated. The Muslims of India, professing to have traditions of conquest and Government behind them, have utterly failed to adapt themselves to the needs of the times. They seem to have turned their backs on commerce and industries, by means of which their Arab ancestors became a prosperous nation, and their conventional system of education is capable of producing nothing but narrow-minded bigots with a distorted vision, while the only ambition of their more up-to-date representatives is to secure the blessings of Government employment. And worse than this, their narrow minded intolerance sometimes becomes a reproach to Islam itself. Their rabid fanaticism is excited on hearing music played before mosques, and malicious cow-killing appears to them in the light of a meritorious religious observance! Ignorance and folly cannot descend lower. Their periodical literature, for the most part, contains nothing now-a-days

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

but foolish communal controversies; and their popular books abound in the most demoralising and degrading ideas. Instead of wasting their energies in such vain pursuits, their earnest endeavour ought to be to train themselves on more useful lines in order to be good citizens, filled with the true Islamic spirit of tolerance. As Mr. Pickthall sagaciously observes, "it is more important for the welfare of Islam that twenty Muslims should provide a great example of Islamic conduct upon modern lines than that such and such a portion of the Government of India and the various provinces should be composed of so-called Mohammedans who have no views beyond the small concerns of their community".

Of course, this disease of the mind cannot possibly be cured in a year or two. It has become chronic and requires years of careful treatment. In this connection I should like to mention Dr. Iqbal's suggestion: "We must have an ideal Muslim University which must be conducted on Islamic principles and

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

in which there should be a harmonious blending of the old and the new. In such a cast should the Muslims be moulded.”*

Whatever the practicability of such a suggestion may be in existing conditions, the fact remains that, for the advancement of Muslims, such a course of study is essential as shall widen their outlook and make them respond to the needs of the day. It will then be revealed to them that Islam is the religion whose ideal is to merge all colours, ranks and races in the consciousness of a common brotherhood. As history will testify, the rise and growth of Islam as a world-system owed much to a very wide and comprehensive notion of the love of “Country”. Wherever they drifted, the Muslims imported their new-born conception of being the undisputed exponents of the equality of the rights of man, irrespective of colour, culture, creed or clime.

The Muslims of to-day must realize that there is no more deadly enemy of this ideal

ملت بیضا پر ایک عمر انی نظر*

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

than “aggressive patriotism.” Surely there will be no heart-burning at the music before mosques (about which there is so much to do in India at the present day) when they come to realize that their God is the God of all mankind and their religion is nothing but practice of virtue in all actions of life.*

*1. “Verily those who believe (The Muslims), and those who follow the Jew’s religious rule and the Christians and the Sabians, whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does good work—surely their reward is with their Lord and there is no fear for them, nor shall they suffer grief.” The Holy Quran. Part I Ch. II Section 6—62.

2. And again, “And they say: None enters Paradise unless he be a Jew or Christian. These are their vain desires. Say: Bring your proof (of that which you assert) if you are truthful. “Yes, but whosoever turns his face towards God *while doing good* (to men); surely his reward is with his Lord, and there shall be no fear for him, nor shall he suffer grief.” The Holy Quran. Part I. Ch. II Section—13—111 and 112.

3. “To every one have we not given a law and way. And if God had pleased, He would have made you all (all mankind) one people (people of one religion.) But He hath done otherwise that He might try you in that which He hath severally given unto you; wherefore press forward in good works. Unto God shall ye return and He will tell you that

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

The teacher of Islam preached, in a thousand varied ways, universal love and brotherhood as the emblem of the love borne towards God.*

††“How do you think God will know you when you are in his presence? By your love of your children, of your kind, of your neighbours, of

concerning which you disagree.” The Holy Quran Sura V. 48.

4. Why wrangle over that which you know not, try to excel in good works; when you shall return to God, He will tell you about that in which you have differed. The Holy Prophet.

The Prophet of Islam preached that salvation was not confined to our belief in this or that man but that it depended upon right beliefs. But he also said that it was not right belief alone but belief translated into actions that earned merit in the eye of the Lord irrespective of the creed or class to which the doer of the actions might happen to belong. But at this one may question why believe in the Prophet? Belief in a Prophet is belief in his capacity of messenger from Allah, which means belief in the Divine message which he brings.

††Mishkat, books XXII and XXIII. Chaps. XV and XVI.

* “Most surely the righteous shall be in bliss”
The Holy Quran.

“Surely the mercy of Allah is nigh to those who do good to others”.

The Holy Quran.

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

your fellow-creatures.” “Do you love your Creator? love your fellow-beings first.”†† “Do you wish to approach the Lord? love His creatures, love for them what you love for yourself, reject for them what you reject for yourself, do unto them what you wish to be done unto you.” He condemned in scathing words the foulness of impurity, the meanness of hypocrisy, and the ungodliness of self-deceit. He proclaimed, in unmistakable terms, the preciousness of truth, charity, and brotherly love.

It should not be forgotten that “it was not the warlike prowess of the early Muslims, but the example of their righteous conduct which converted half the world.” The tolerance of Islam — a tolerance which embraces all the world — will again be made manifest.

It is a lamentable fact that owing to the lack of proper education among Muslims, a sort of priesthood (not recognised by Islam) has

††Comp. Kastalani's Commentary on the Sahih of Bukkari P. 70.

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

gradually come into being. There now exists a class of so called spiritual leaders who profess to be intermediaries between God and man. But Islam recognises no caste of priesthood, allows no monopoly of spiritual knowledge or special holiness to intervene between man and his God. Each soul rises to its Creator without the intervention of a priest or hierophant. In Islam every man is his own priest and pleads for himself before the Most High for forgiveness and mercy. "No sacrifice,* no ceremonial, invented by vested interests," as Amir Ali says, "is needed to bring the anxious heart nearer its Comforter."**

The Muslim religion is simple in itself and clear in its injunctions. It does not admit of

*The annual sacrifice at the Hajj is a mere memorial observance.

**The door of the Lord is ever open to every striver after Him. The Quran says: "Those who strive after us, we show them Our way." "And when My servants ask you concerning Me then surely I am near; I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me, so they should answer My call and believe in Me, that they may find the right way."

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

excessive subtlety or quibbling in its interpretations, or of a complicated ritual in its observances. Hence the necessary absence of a priesthood in Islam ; which does not require the intervention of the shadow of a man between man's mind and his God. Ecclesiasticism, as history shows, is an enemy to human progress and opposed to the true spirit of religion, the aim of which, as the Quran proves, is the moral and material progress of humanity and its liberation from the stagnation and enslavement of ignorance and prejudice. Belief in an intermediary weakens our sense of responsibility and destroys self-reliance. The chief object of our belief in the unity of God is to create in us steadfastness of character and independence of judgment, thereby encouraging freedom of action. Who is not aware of the baneful influence of misguided and self-constituted priests who become the direct or indirect means of creating social distinctions and religious differences ? Can Muslims ever forget that the Great Prophet came to emanci-

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

pate human judgment from the bondage not only of idolatry but also of priestcraft ?

Even enlightened non-Muslims like Mr. Wadia regret that “the mixing up of dead theology with living religion has exterminated enthusiasm and earnestness among the Islamic masses, and their beautiful old pure-hearted devotion to Allah and His Prophet is now for all practical purposes reduced to mere interested worship of the Peer and the Dargah”. We Muslims ought to feel this poignantly.

A similar class of narrow-minded men who are self-accredited Wayaz, Moulvis, Moulanas and Shah Sahibs are sometimes responsible now-a-days for exciting the minds of the Muslim masses by advancing the unfortunate policy of “carrying the war into the enemy’s country.” Well-meaning they may be, zealous they are, but their zeal overshoots the mark and does more harm than good.

In India, as I have hinted above, the Muslims, through age-long contact with the old inhabitants of the country, have tended to

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

approximate their manners and customs to their practice. *They have accommodated the accessories of their pilgrimages, of their fasts and their feasts to the taste of the Hindus," **"whose religion speaks more to the senses than to reason, to the imagination than to the soul". Hence it is the first duty of every well-wisher to do away with these intolerant and narrowminded theologians and to lead the Muslim masses to realise the virtue of tolerance and to familiarise them with the great truths and the noble spirit of divine humanity pervading the Quran. They must take this truth to heart, that Islam is peace, and as such it must ever abhor quarrelling with other people's faith. The so called nationalism, which proclaims to stand for the preservation of a distinctive culture, is today leading merely to aggressive conduct without aiming at anything constructive as a useful basis of

*Mohammed and Mohammedanism by R. Bosworth Smith.

**M. Garsin de Tassy's *Islamisme*.

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

nativity. Muslims are indeed free to defend their secular and religious ideals against wanton attacks and to better their condition and their prospects; but the best way to accomplish this is to set an example first of Islamic tolerance. They have to set their own house in order, and for this patience and perseverance are required. They require the courage to bring about social reform in all directions, to give up the use of intoxicants, to discourage expensive marriages, to abolish unnecessary ceremonies, and above all to regard with contempt the un-Islamic love of display which enters so largely into their habits of thought.

Another matter of very urgent necessity for the advancement of Muslims is the education of women. Women are the custodians of a nation's life and honour and the way in which they bring up their children decides the destinies of the race. As Plato* justly remarks:

*Plato: Laws,

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

“The most important part of education is right training in the nursery. The soul of the child in play should be trained to that sort of excellence in which, when he grows to manhood, he will have to be perfected.” Right training in the nursery, then, can never be had unless and until we emancipate our women from the bondage of ignorance and narrow-mindedness in which we are wrongfully holding them. We must grant them liberty of mind and then alone we can expect healthy and sane manhood. Unless our women become worthy companions of their husbands and intelligent educators of their children, there can never be real progress.

Here I wish to make it clear that the position of woman in Islam is very high — so high that the paradise of a Muslim is said to be beneath the feet of his mother. The Muslim law gives to woman as her separate property a share in the inheritance and also her dower. She is a free agent in the marriage contract, and in every respect, she is treated as a rational being

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

— the necessary counterpart of man.* Mohamad secured to women, in his system, rights which they had not before possessed; he allowed them privileges the value of which will be more fully appreciated as time advances. He placed them on a footing of perfect equality with men in the exercise of all legal powers and functions.

The reason why I devote a little space to make the status of women in Islam clear is that it is still the fashion with bigoted controversialists to say that the Islamic system lowered the status of women. Here it is best to quote Amir Ali. He says “No falser calumny has been levelled at the great Prophet. Nineteen centuries of progressive development working with the legacy of a prior civilization under the most favourable racial and climatic

* “O people! be careful of (your duty to) your Lord, who created you from a single being and created its mate of the same (kind) and spread from these two, many men and women; and be careful of (your rights), and (to) the ties of relationship; surely Allah ever watcheth over you,, .

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

conditions, have tended to place women, in most countries of Christendom, on a higher social level than the men,— have given birth to a code of etiquette which, at least ostensibly, recognises the right of women to higher social respect. But what is their legal position even in the most advanced communities of Christendom?.....If the Muslim woman does not attain, in another hundred years, the social position of her European sister, there will be time enough to declaim against Islam as a system and a dispensation. But the Teacher who in an age, when no country, no system, no community gave any right to woman, maiden or married, mother or wife, who, in a country, where the birth of a daughter was considered a calamity, secured to the sex rights which are only unwillingly and under pressure being conceded to them by the civilized nations of the twentieth century, deserves the gratitude of humanity. If Mohammed had done nothing more, his claim to be a benefactor of mankind would have been indisputable.”

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

With all this nobody can deny the comparatively backward condition of our women today. But this is due more to lack of culture in the community generally, than to any religious handicap. * “It is only utter ignorance of Islam and blind prejudice against it that comes to the surface when adverse critics assert that woman in Islam does not possess a soul.”

In India in particular the condition of women demands careful and immediate attention. The very first need is that girls should be taken away from insanitary and unhealthy surroundings and placed in a purer and more intellectual environment. If Muslims would only combine to raise the standard of the social well-being as also of the mental and physical attainments of their women, they would contribute largely to the general welfare and happiness of their community. But unhappily in India at the present day, contrary to all laws, nature and religion, the role of the mother and her powers are of no account. “Woman is,” as Atiya Begum rightly

*The Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din : ‘The Ideal Prophet’.

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

says, “a nonentity, a commodity, and an accident.” How different from her true position in Islam.

Let us hear what Mr. Pickthall says:— “Take the Quran-i-Sharif for your guide and the Holy Prophet for your example. Remember that Islam means liberation, not enslavement. Educate women in accordance with the Holy Prophet’s injunction. Strive always to advance and liberate, never to crush or enslave.”

Here I am not going to deal at any great length the muchdiscussed question of the seclusion of women. The system may undoubtedly possess many advantages in the social well-being of unsettled and uncultured communities, but this much I can safely assert that the Prophet of Islam in view of the wide spread laxity of morals among all classes of people recommended to the women-folk the observance of privacy. But to suppose that he ever intended that his recommendation should assume its present inelastic and absurd form, or that he ever allowed or enjoined the suffocating seclusion of women, is wholly opposed to

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

the spirit of his reforms. The Quran itself affords no warrant for holding this to be a part of the message.*

However much one may differ with the widely urged claim of the feminists that men and women are equal, and that, as a consequence, equal rights, equal opportunities and equal treatment should in every case be accorded them, there can be no denying of the fact that women should be educated and that then alone can we have sweetness and light in our homes.

Let us assure our conservative brethren that there is no danger at all in female education, if

* “ O Prophet ! speak to thy wives and to thy daughters, and to the wives of the Faithful, that they let their wrappers fall below. Thus will they more easily be known and they will not be affronted. God is indulgent, merciful. Sura XXXIII. 59.

“And speak to the believing women, that they refrain their looks and observe continence ; and that they display not their ornaments except those which are external, and that they draw their kerchiefs over their bosoms. Sura XXIV. 31.

Considerable light is thrown on the Prophet's commendation for female privacy, by the remarkable immunity from restraint or seclusion which the members of his family always enjoyed.

Amir Ali's Spirit of Islam-page 250.

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

it is conducted on really Islamic lines, if it is not merely an unintelligent and clumsy imitation of foreign methods. One may not agree with Atiya Begum when she says that Muslim women should be capable of conducting the affairs of the State, and that they should be authoresses of universal fame etc.— a somewhat daring flight of the imagination in an age of depression — but it will be no harm for the Muslims to think of such ambitious possibilities since the community at present lacks women capable even of managing their own households. They must first be educated, as Mr. Pickthall rightly observes, “for the simple work they have to do in life.” “The home is their country, and their education should be such as to bring light and health, good discipline and guidance into every Muslim home.” The present system of education is obviously incapable of accomplishing this. Our women should be taught the principles of hygiene and sanitation, nursing and domestic economy and the care of

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

children upon modern scientific lines; and they should be taught to take pride in this work.

In addition to this, they should be taught Islamic history to enable them to visualise the exploits of the heroes and heroines of the past, to be inspired by their selfless devotion, their high courage and their noble simplicity. They will thus be able to infuse the right spirit into the coming generations. On a sound and healthy generation depends all our progress.

Islam being essentially a progressive religion, its adherents must respond to the call of the new age and not get left behind. They must remember, as Mustafa Kamal would put it, that "civilization possesses so great a force that she scorches up and destroys all those confronting her or *who remain indifferent.*" In this age of commercialism and industry they must march with the times, not entirely forgetting their martial traditions and the cherished memories of bygone glory, but keep-

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

ing them in the background of their mental pictures.

They must not forget that the early Muslims, to whom they look back with reverence, were not merely good fighters but they had also been traders and good business men, and that it was commerce that first opened to them the gates of India.

Here again I am inclined to quote at length the testimony of Draper to show how the ancestors of the Muslims were deeply interested in all these sciences: He says:—

“Our obligations to the Spanish Moors in the arts of life are even more marked than in the higher branches of science, perhaps only because our ancestors were better prepared to take advantage of things connected with daily affairs. They set an example of skilful agriculture, the practice of which was regulated by a code of laws. Not only did they attend to the cultivation of plants, introducing very many new ones, they likewise paid great attention to the breeding of cattle, especially

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

the sheep and the horse. To them we owe the introduction of the great products, rice, sugar, cotten and also nearly all the fine garden and orchard fruits, together with many less important plants and spinach and saffron. To them Spain owes the culture of silk..... They introduced the Egyptian system of irrigation by flood-gates, wheels and pumps. They also promoted many important branches of industry; improved the manufacture of textile fabrics, iron, steel; the Toledo sword-blades were everywhere prized for their temper..... They also introduced inventions of a more ominous kind, gunpowder and artillery. *They introduced the mariner's compass.....* Such are some of the obligations we are under to them — obligations which Christian Europe, with singular insincerity, has ever been fain to hide.”

The present apathy of the Muslims towards such enterprises and their exclusive attachment to that kind of education which leads not to wealth and prosperity, not to useful citizenship,

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

but to the glittering goal of government service, are distressing facts which we cannot afford to ignore.

Hence there is a great need to-day of cheap technical education for Muslim children. Their Anjumans, "Committees" and schools ought to provide for this and their leaders should give their best attention at once to the amelioration of the economic condition of the masses. There are to-day thousands of "Do-nothing" Muslims in every city who idle away their time. These should be made to work on productive undertakings. They should be made to remember that "a community which has no agriculture is not an independent community, but a parasite." There is ample room for this, and opportunities cannot always be wanting. All that is needed is a host of enthusiastic agriculturists. Muslims, as has been said above, in days gone by have been great farmers, great lovers of cattle and great gardeners. Then why not now? The educated Muslims should lead the way and the wealthy

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

Muslims should well remember that no religion of the world prior to Islam had consecrated charity, the support of the widow, the orphan, and the helpless poor, by enrolling its principles among the positive enactments of the system. By the laws of Islam every individual is bound to contribute a certain part of his substance towards the help and assistance of his poorer neighbours. If our charity is only conducted in an organized form, we shall be able to achieve much.

The existing farmer class should be methodically educated and special attention should be paid to agriculture and handicrafts, wherever possible, in country schools. Some of the local industries may at present be a natural supplement to agriculture; and until factories become possible, there should be village workshops scattered all over the country to co-operate with the tillers of the fields for the common benefit of the village community. Owing to the present insufficiency of communications manufactures must to a great extent be confined to the products of the neighbourhood, but this

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

should be no discouragement. All such work should be run on co-operative lines and to mutual benefit. Co-operative Agricultural Societies and banks should be started and worked to fit in with local conditions. To do all this we must learn, as Trotsky would put it; **“to work efficiently, accurately, punctually, economically.”* We need *“culture in work, culture in life, in the conditions of life.”*

In short to achieve permanent progress we need to create honest leadership and an educated public opinion ; to develop a solid trading class and a scientific agriculture ; to free and educate our womanhood and to fight our own diseases. The successful solution of every one of these problems is dependent on intelligence and character in human personality. And there is one way and only one way of creating these on a national scale—through education. Education that will create a developed spirituality, that will make us more honest, more

* L. Trotsky: Problems of Life.

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

efficient, more sincere—in a word, more human. By education I mean all the forces that develop the personality in mind, spirit, and body for citizenship—the service of God and man.

The Muslims of the present day, like their ancestors of yore, should follow the path indicated by the Prophet of “right doing and right thinking” and “of striving to excel in good works and seeking to please the Lord.” They must not allow themselves to stray into the easy bye-ways of opportunism and outward observance. They must gird up their loins and like true Muslims, give the lie to the charge that “Muslim institutions are an empty shell or that the prevailing stamp upon their institutions is fanaticism and intolerance.” However woeful the state into which they may have fallen, it is still for them to remember that the deepest darkness comes before the dawn.

The bewildering civilization of the West, with all its apparent material prosperity, need not make the Muslims think of their own progress on proper lines as a hopeless affair. They

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

should remember Said Halim Pasha's wise observation, when he says :—"The material prosperity of a society is the product of its activity in the domain of technical knowledge, and it does not constitute sufficient proof of the superiority of its social order."

I may have given some prominence in this essay to the idea that since the success of the Muslims, unlike that of other nations, does not rest upon an artificial and ever-changing basis, they should not become pessimistic as regards the future. It is my firm belief that however deplorable the condition of the Muslim peoples may at any time be, owing to ignorance against which the Prophet took especial care to warn them, it can never become hopeless. From the ethical and social points of view, the Muslim structure as designed by its Creator, is quite sound and contains within it the essential condition of vitality.

It is the distinctive characteristic of Islam, as taught by the Prophet, that it combines within itself the grandest and the most pro-

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

minent features of all ethical religions compatible with the reason and moral constitution of man. It is not only a system of positive moral rules, based on a true conception of human progress, but it is also “the establishment of certain principles, the enforcement of certain dispositions, the cultivation of a certain temper of mind, which the conscience is to apply to the ever-varying exigencies of time and place.”

Let the Muslims then take their religion as an impelling force rather than a compelling necessity. Let them bring back simplicity and directness into their life's work if the Islam of the future is to bear aloft the torch of reason, and follow the path of common sense indicated by the Great Founder.

One ought always to stand for a liberalized Islam—the Islam of the primitive gospel of Mohammad—the Islam which teaches one a tolerance which embraces all the world, which makes one an undisputed exponent of the equality of the rights of man, irrespective of caste, colour or creed, which pays no heed

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

to affinities of blood or to associations with a particular land of birth, but creates, as it were, an extraterritorial, unlimited, universal nationalism. I may be questioned as to how this can be possible, particularly at a time when nationalism is the order of the day. Cannot one be intensely national in feeling, and at the same time belong to a world-wide Muslim brotherhood? In the infinite variety one will find an essential unity.

It is our duty then, to “restore the Shariat in all its pristine purity as the temple of free thought and free enquiry, in the name of God; and raise the Muslims to a position where they shall once more lead the van of human progress.”

Professor Max Muller* has rightly remarked that without a constant reformation—that is to say, without a constant return to the fountain-head—every religion, however pure, must gradually degenerate. Muslims should

Max Muller “Chips”

DEGENERACY OF MUSLIMS:

remember this and their motto should be "Back to the Quran and the Prophet."

Industries and commerce may bring to Muslims wealth, and wealth is important—but it is not a primary factor. Physical strength is important, but men may be strong and yet be brutes, and perish like brutes. Learning, science, ingenuity, wit—all the nimblest tricks of the intellect—may be tricks and nothing more. It is the vital spark that Muslims want, and the life and energy (which are sure to follow) will bring all the rest.

Let them not be deluded by false remedies. Everything must be brought to the touchstone of their own knowledge and experience and tested till approved by the Islamic conscience. They should take neither the disease nor the remedy for granted till they have diagnosed the one and tried the other. As regards the treatment of social disorder they must recognize that social unity—the unity of brotherhood*—

* "The Church of Mohammed became rent by

ITS CAUSES AND REMEDIES

essential to organized life, is the sovereign Islamic remedy.

Let them, therefore, rise up with courage and discipline, and seek unity in action, unity of brotherly love and unity towards the spiritual ideal which will glorify God and be the light that guides them in this life and for evermore.

intestine divisions and strifes. The greed of the Ommeyyade, the unruliness of the Arab, and his spirit of individualism caused the overthrow of the stupendous fabric which the heroism and devotion of the early Muslims had raised."

Owing to this they lost Tours, even whilst victory was within their grasp and they were driven out of Spain because they could not forget the old jealousies of the desert. "Had the followers of Mohammed marched on the same lines of the Master and adopted the character of the early Caliphs," says D'Ohsson, "their Empire would have been still more vast and more durable than that of the Romans".

'Mohammed, Founder of Islam' by Draycott.

آخرى درج شدہ تاریخ پر یہ کتاب مستعار
لی گئی تھی مقررہ مدت سے زیادہ رکھنے کی
صورت میں ایک آنہ یومیہ دیرانہ لیا جائیگا۔
