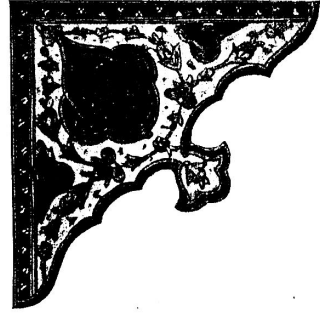
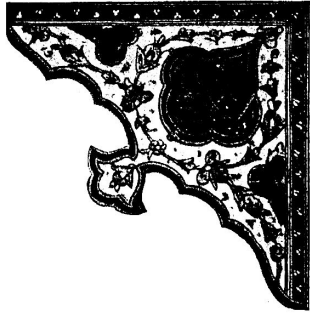


Why I am a Mohammedan



What matters it whether the words thou utterest in prayer are Hebrew or Arabic, or whether the place in which thou seekest God be called Jabalka or Jabalsa! SANAI.

THE principal reason why I am what the Western world calls—and wrongly calls—a Mohammedan, is very simply that the idea of not being one has never entered my brain or fluttered my soul.

I am a Mohammedan as naturally, perhaps in a way as unconsciously, as the average Christian is a Christian and the average Buddhist is a Buddhist. Like Christian and Buddhist, like Hebrew and Shintoist and Hindu, even like West African Fetishist performing his bloody Voodoo rite or Siberian Shamanist thumping his painted devil drum, I look at—and down at—followers of other religious beliefs and systems with a slightly self-righteous pity not unmixed with a slightly self-righteous scorn.

I am, in fact, orthodox. I am a fundamentalist, accepting the Koran in its entirety as the beginning, the middle and the end of all wisdom, inspired by the One God.

I have always been a Mohammedan. So have my people for centuries past—naturally, inevitably, since I am on my father's side a direct descendant of the True Prophet, a member of the Hashimite family of Meccan Arabs, of the ancient Semitic tribe of the Korashi. Nor have my Paris school years, supervised by those great scholars and fine gentlemen, the Jesuit fathers, and the years of my manhood largely spent in Christian and Buddhist lands, caused the faintest misgiving in me as to the sincerity, the simplicity, the beauty and the undying truth of Islam.

It is in the word "Islam," in its very significance, philological as well as philosophical, that I perceive the eternal rightness of my faith.

A Great Spiritual Democracy

FOR Islam—derived from the Arab *salaama*, meaning to be tranquil, at rest, patient and resigned, to have done one's duty, paid one's debt, and arrived at perfect peace; meaning, in its secondary sense, to surrender oneself without doubt or questioning to Him who has created all—contains the essence of all the ethical principles which the Prophet Mohammed preached during his lifetime at Mecca and Medina, and which he wrote down in that great civil, criminal and moral law code called the Koran.

And what are these basic principles

—adhered to more or less, since the flesh is weak and the spirit not often strong in the Orient, just as in the Occident—which the Prophet commanded? What, in other words, is Islam, Mohammedanism? Islam ordains:

- (1) Belief in the unity, immateriality, supreme power, supreme wisdom, supreme mercy, supreme love of the One God.
- (2) Charity and brotherhood.
- (3) Subjugation of the passions.
- (4) Outpourings in prayer of a grateful heart to the Creator.
- (5) Love for the great Saints: Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Jesus and Mohammed.
- (6) Accountability for human actions in another existence after death. Islam rigidly forbids idolatry. Islam is simplicity. It is strict rationalism. It denies the existence of miracles. It is a religion of nature; and invariably, throughout the Koran,

By ACHMED ABDULLAH

CAPTAIN Syed Shaykh Ahmed Abdullah Nadir Khan el-Iddris-syieh el-Durani, the author of this remarkable article, is a direct descendant of the True Prophet—Mohammed. He was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, and educated at Oxford, the University of Paris, and El-Azhar, Cairo. Veteran of several wars (once he fought with the Turks; again—as a captain—with the British), so talented linguistically that he can speak or understand forty languages, expert polo player, world wanderer, he is to-day one of the most interesting figures on earth.

At the present time, famous as a novelist, short-story writer, and dramatist, he is living in America.

the Prophet points to the familiar phenomena of the earth and the sky as proofs sufficient of the divine presence, and unswervingly addresses himself to the common sense and the inner consciousness of man, and not to his superstitious credulity:

"Fools! Do ye then need a sign to believe in God the Eternal, when all creation is filled with His signs?"

Similarly, where a lesser man might have claimed divinity and, given the barbarous, superstitious times, might have succeeded in claiming it, Mohammed—we could best describe him as an evangelist, a blending of St. Francis of Assisi, Ignacio Loyola, Martin Luther and Billy Sunday—did not preach a new faith, but tried to purge and purify the ancient One-God creed and repeated over and over again that he was a man, conceived by man.

Islam, as preached by this man Mohammed, recognizes no priesthood; al-

lows no monopoly of special spiritual knowledge to intervene between man and his God. It permits each soul to rise to the Creator without the paid or unpaid intermediation of priest or hierophant. It thunders its contempt and wrath against religious middlemen. It repeats over and over again that no ceremonial invented by man and kept up by vested interests is needed to bring the anxious heart nearer to Allah. It declares that each human being is his own priest, that no man is higher than the other, that all men are brothers. It points out unmistakably that it is the spirit which matters in prayer, not the empty form.

Charity by Faith and Law

OF ALL the religions in the world, Islam was the first to enroll charity as a positive principle of its religious system. Jesus preached and recommended charity. So did the Lord Gotama Buddha. So does the Rig-Veda of the Hindus. But the Prophet Mohammed embodied it into definite laws, commanding that each man give away in charity each year 2½ per cent of the value of all his goods, chattels, moneys and mercantile profits; and, at the end of the month of Ramadan, on the day of *Id-ul-Fitr*, which celebrates the close of the Moslem Lent, give away in alms for himself, for every member of his family, and for each guest, a measure of wheat, barley, raisins, milk, or the value of the same. Further recipients are slaves who wish to purchase their freedom and debtors who are unable to pay.

Islam—with the oft-repeated purpose of allowing no leeway to professional spiritual middlemen and interpreters of the words of God—calmly and simply summarizes its ethical code in the fourth sura of the Koran:

"Come, I shall rehearse what God the Eternal 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, since verily for them and for you will the Lord provide; and that ye touch not pollutions, outward or inward, of the body or of the soul; and that ye slay not a human being, unless by the right of war or of capital punishment for the crimes which have been enumerated; and draw not nigh to the wealth of orphans, save so as to better it; and when ye pronounce judgment then be just, though it be the affair of a kinsman."

And again:

"Blessed are they who believe and humbly offer their thanksgiving to the Lord God; who steal not nor lie nor covet nor commit adultery; who are constant in their charity, and who guard



Ali, the Prophet's first rightful successor according to the Shiites

their chastity in deed and thought; and who observe their trust and covenants. Verily God bids you do justice and good, and to give to kindred as well as to strangers their due, and He forbids you to sin and to do wrong and to oppress."

Small wonder, given these ethical principles, that Islam is unique among religions in its strict preaching of tolerance. For—and it might be interesting to compare these lines with the Athanasian creed—it says in the Koran:

"Verily the believing Moslems, and those who are Jews or Christians or Sabaeans, whoever hath faith in God and future life, and is just and good—for them shall be the reward with their Lord; there shall come no fear to them, nor grief."

"An honorable man has adopted a certain religion. Why persecute him?" . . . "Unto God shall ye return; and He will tell you that concerning which ye disagree!"

Can anything be more noble, more simple, more tolerant and—well—more downright decent? And shortly before his death, the Prophet repeated:

"Say, O ye unbelievers, I will not worship that which ye worship; nor will ye worship that which I worship. Ye have your religion, and I have my religion."

Tolerance the Genius of Islam

WORDS of startlingly broad-minded, almost Wilsonian modernity! And it is this modernity which makes of Islam—the creed of the Moslems or believers in Islam, wrongly named Mohammedans—such an elastic faith, with an extraordinary adaptability that applies to all ages and all nations, which, through the simple law code called the Koran, has not merely influenced but literally remolded one fourth of the

human race and is to this day a living missionary force, counting its yearly converts in Asia and Africa by the tens of thousands, though it employs no organized proselytizing efforts nor ever, quite unlike western Europe, backs up its missionaries with gunboats and marines.

After twelve centuries the creed preached by this man Mohammed is so vital that an Asiatic, be he as base as the lowest London cockney or Paris Apache, will, if appealed to in the name of the Prophet, become a hero and fling away his life with a laugh of exultation; and that fact, after many decades of European aggression and oppression—called variously Imperialism, colonization, civiliza-

After all, the proof of the pudding is in the eating—not in the predigesting by professors, missionaries, tourists, newspaper reporters employed by special interests, or other people with a national or religious ax to grind. And there is this incontrovertible proof that, after centuries of Moslem rule, we find in the Orient a large percentage of native Christians.

But where, on the other hand, are the Moslems of Spain and Portugal? To this day the ancient churches of the East are filled with Christian worshippers. But do we ever hear Islam's solemn "Yah abeyt Ullah, la ilah ill' Ullah" in the ancient mosques of Cordova and Granada?

Straight through its annals, often against its own national interest, has Islam followed this rule of tolerance.

The first war which Islam fought after it became a nation was against Persia in the year 642 A. D. The Persians were beaten at the historic battle of Nahawand. After the victory the caliph at once proclaimed liberty of conscience to everyone, and the Moslems were ordered not to interfere with the religion of the vanquished people. The sole inducement to proselytism, if inducement it can be called, consisted in the fact that whereas Moslems, who were liable at any time to be forced to serve in the army, contributed only a tithe to the state, the Zimmi—the

Mohammed, Prophet and Messenger of Allah, who purified the ancient One-God creed



tion and progress—is still able to cause the European poison-gas experts, dubbed diplomats, hours of troubled sleep.

The secret of this power of resistance against a mechanically superior civilization is tolerance—tolerance is indeed the genius of Islam.

We Moslems do not, nor did we ever, convert with fire and sword. We never had a Holy Inquisition, witch burnings, autos-da-fé, a Thirty Years' War. We have persecuted minor races—for reasons of greed, or for reasons of national aggrandizement. Which nation has not? But never in the name of religion. Unlike England, we never have an ace up our sleeve, and claim that God put it there; nor do we in Kipling style

*Take up the White Man's Burden—
And put it on the
Coon!*

"protected people," Christians and Jews and Sabæans and Zoroastrians—paid a higher tax in consideration of being exempted from military service.

Mohammed's Valedictory

AND the cause of these high ideals, these high achievements, was Islam—its tolerance, and, also, its splendid democracy.

Other prophets before Mohammed proclaimed equality of mankind, sounded the clarion note of freedom, exalted democracy. But Mohammed fulfilled it. Islam admits no caste, no aristocracy or privileged class. All men, under Islam, must fight for the faith if necessary; and, as war is not the privileged profession of one class, so labor is not the mark of degradation of another. Thus Islam has never suffered the humility of feudalism.

There is, in Islam, a noble Jeffersonian simplicity and directness. No obstacle of birth, of position, of cultivation stands in any man's path. Even slavery is no barrier. Over and over again a sultan has stooped among the crowd, has clutched a soldier, a slipper bearer, a pipe servant or a renegade, giving him limitless power and asking nothing of him but success.

The history of the grand viziers of Turkey, were it ever written, would be the history of men of obscure parentage who rose by sheer force of character and ability; and the history of central Asia shows us generations of slave em-

perors raised, because of their ability, to the purple by public acclaim.

Yes. I take pride in Islam. I believe in Islam—its simplicity, its beauty, its high idealism, its eternal truth, never better expressed than by the Prophet Mohammed himself when, returning from Medina to Mecca (7th March, 632 A. D.), he addressed the Arabs from the top of the Jabal ul-Arafat in words which, until the end of time, will ring in the hearts of all Moslems:

"Ye people! listen to my words.

"Your lives and property are sacred and inviolable among one another.

"Ye have rights over your wives, and your wives have rights over you. Treat your wives with kindness and understanding.

"And your slaves! See that ye feed them with such food as ye eat yourselves, and clothe them with the stuff ye wear yourselves; and if they commit a fault which ye are not inclined to forgive, then part from them, for they are the servants of the Lord, even as ye are, and not to be harshly treated.

"Ye people! listen to my words, and understand the same. Know that all Moslems are brothers unto one another. Ye are one brotherhood. Nothing which belongs to another is lawful unto his brother, unless freely given out of good will. Guard yourselves from committing injustice.

"Let him that is present here to-day tell this truth unto him that is absent. Haply he that shall be told may remember better than he who hath heard it from my lips!"

