

# CAUSES OF THE RISE AND DECLINE OF ISLAM

By Marmaduke Pickthall

*What follows is a speech that was delivered by Marmaduke Pickthall in Madras, India in 1927 and was entitled "Causes of the Rise and Decline of Islam."*

The particular cultural aspect of Islam of which all I have to speak today is its humanity, by which I mean not only its goodwill and beneficence towards all men, but also, and especially its world-wide outlook. There is not one standard and one law for the Muslim and another for the outsider. In the Kingdom of Allah there are no favourites. The Sacred Law [*Shar'iah*] is one for all, and non-Muslims who conform to it are more fortunate and confessed Muslims who neglect or disobeyed its precepts

*"Lo Allah never changeth the grace He hath bestowed on any people until they first change that which is in their hearts . . ." [Qur'an 8:53]*

The test, as I have said before, is not the profession of a creed, but their conduct. All men are judged by their conduct both in this world and the next.

I suppose all of you have in mind at least an outline of the course of Muslim History. It may be divided into three periods - named after the three great nations and languages of the Muslim World - the Arab, the Persian and the Turkish. And I suppose everyone of you has heard it said that Islam was in its early days propagated by the sword.

The holy Qur'an says,

*"Let there be no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error. And he who rejecteth vain superstitions and believeth in Allah hath grasped a firm handle which will not give way. Allah is All-seeing, All-knowing." [Qur'an 2:256]*

There are many other texts that I could quote to prove that Muslims are forbidden to use violence towards anyone on account of his opinions, and I cannot find a single text to prove the contrary. Such injunctions were

not likely to be disobeyed in days when the Qur'an was the only Law. Whatever may have happened later on in Muslim lands, the Qur'an was obeyed by great and small with passionate devotion, as the word of God.

The 'wars' of Islam in the Holy Prophet's lifetime and in the lifetime of his immediate successors were all begun in self-defence, and were waged with a humanity and consideration for the enemy which had never been known on earth before. It was not the warlike prowess of the early Muslims which enabled them to conquer half the then known world and convert half that world so firmly that conversion stands unshaken to this day. It was their righteousness and their humanity, their manifest superiority in these respects of other men.

You have to picture the condition of the surrounding nations, the Egyptians, the Syrians, the Mesopotamians and the Persians - 90 percent of whom were slaves. And they had always been in that condition. The coming of Christianity to some countries had not improved their status. It was the religion of the rulers and was imposed upon the rank-and-file. Their bodies were still enslaved by nobles, and their minds were still enslaved by the priests. Only the ideal of Christianity, so much of it as leaked through to them, had made the common people dream of freedom and another life.

There was luxury among the nobles, and plenty of that kind of culture which is symptomatic, not of progress, but of corruption and decay. The condition of the multitude was pitiable. The tidings of our Prophet's embassies to all neighbouring rulers, inviting them to give up superstition, abolish priesthood and agree to serve Allah only, and the evil treatment given to his envoys, must have made some noise in all those countries. Still more, the warlike preparations which were being made for the destruction of the new religion. The multitude was no doubt warned that Islam was something devilish and that the Muslims would destroy them. And then the Muslims swept into the land as

conquerors, and by their conduct won the hearts of all those people.

In the entire history of the world until then, the conquered had been absolutely at the mercy of the conqueror. No matter how complete his submission might be [and] no matter if he was of the same religion as the conqueror. That is still the theory of war outside Islam. But it is not the Islamic theory. According to the Muslim Laws of War, those of the conquered people, who embraced Islam, became the equals of the conquerors in all respects. And those who chose to keep their old religion had to pay tribute for the cost of their defence, but after would enjoy full liberty of conscience [the freedom to choose one's own religion without any sort of coercion] and were secured and protected in their occupations.

An utterly false interpretation has been given to the alternatives 'Islam or the Sword' as if the sword meant execution or massacre. The sword meant warfare, and the alternatives really were: Islam (surrender, in the spiritual sense), Islam (surrender, in the ordinary sense) or continued warfare. The people who did not surrender, were not fully conquered and were still at war.

The Muslims intermarried freely with the conquered people of Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia and all North Africa - something none of their conquerors (and they had known many in the course of history) had ever done before. The advent of Islam brought them not only political freedom but also intellectual freedom, since he dispelled the blighting shadow of the priest from human thought. The people of all those countries, except Persia, now claim Arabic as their native language and, if questioned as to their nationality, would say, 'we are sons of the Arabs.' They all still regard the empire of Islam as the Kingdom of God on earth.

The result was what might be expected from so great a liberation of people who had never really had a chance before: a wonderful flowering of civilisation that in the subsequent generations bore its fruit in works of science, art and literature. In spite of the incessant wars, this is the most joyous period in history. In judging it, you must not take every word literally that you may read from European writers. You must make allowances for enemy propaganda then and now.

In my youth, I saw a good deal of the Christian population of Syria, the descendants of such of the conquered people of those days as would not embrace

Islam. And they used to speak of the early Muslim period almost as the golden age, and of the Khalifa Umar ibn-ul-Khattab almost as a benefactor of their religion. Folklore is sometimes more enlightening than written history. Yet even from written history, with a little research, you will discover that fanaticism towards Christians is hardly found in Orthodox Islam until after the Crusades, though the Christians were not always easy subjects for toleration. Many of them thought it a religious virtue to insult the religion of Islam in public, and so court martyrdom from the natural indignation of the rulers. There were epidemics of this kind of religious mania at various times in different countries, and the sensible, calm manner in which the Muslim rulers dealt with them is one of the great things in Muslim history.

I shall have to speak to you at length upon the subject of religious tolerance; so at present I will only read to you an extract from Whishaw's "*Arabic Spain*." It runs: "The epidemic of religious hysteria which occurred at Cordova in the middle of the ninth century is no doubt the reason why we have more information about the state of the church at that date than at any other time during the Muslim rule. The Christians were forbidden to enter the mosques or to vilify the Prophet under pain of conversion to Islam or death. "This," says Florez (a Spanish writer), "was the most criminal offence of the martyrs at that time, so that, although they exalted the faith, the judges remained unmoved until they heard them speak evil of Mohammed or of his sect."

According to the *Cronica general* to "martyrs" of the time, Rogelio and Serviodes, entered the great mosque of Cordova and began not only "preaching the faith," but also "the falseness of Mohammed and the certainty of the Hell to which he was guiding his followers." It is not surprising to learn that this performance cost them their lives. Both Muslim rulers and the more sensible of the Christians do their best to prevent these fanatics from throwing away their lives, and Recafred, Bishop of Seville about 851 to 862, was distinguished by his commonsense in this matter. He forbade Christians to seek martyrdom when their rulers did not attempt to make them deny their faith, and imprisoned "even priests" disobeyed him. Abdur Rahman II appointed him Metropolitan of Andalusia that he might do the same at Cordova. And there he imprisoned a number of Christians, including St. Eulogius and the Bishop of Cordova doubtless to keep them out of mischief."

Similar outbursts of religious hysteria are recorded in Eastern countries, which the Muslims bore with even greater fortitude. The Christians as a rule were treated with the utmost toleration both in East and West.

Mr. G.K. Nariman, the well-known Parsi orientalist, has proved from his research that the story of the outright massacre and expulsion of the Zoroastrians from Persia by the Arab conquerors is without historical foundation. There are Zoroastrians in Persia till the present day. In Syria, the Christians used to speak of the times of the first four *Khalifas* and of the Omayyad dynasty as the golden age of Muslim magnanimity, which struck me then as curious, because the Omayyad's are generally given a bad name on account of the personal character of some *Khalifas* of that house, but especially of the cruel tragedies which marked its rise to power. But it is the fact that Islam owes much to Bani Umayya historically. They preserved the simple, rational character of Islam - its Arabic characters. They maintained, in Damascus, the intimate relations between the ruler and the subject which had characterized the *Khilafat* of Medina. In their days, the *Khalifa* himself climbed the pulpit and preached the Friday *khutba* [sermon] in the mosque. The anxieties of an exceptionally intelligent *Khalifa* of this house are depicted in a little anecdote in *Kitab-ul-Fakhri*.

"Someone said to a Abdul Malik, 'grey hairs have come to you very early.' He answered. 'what has turned me grey is climbing pulpits with the fear of making a false quantity in Arabic.' For to make a mistake in Arabic was with them anything most horrible."

They kept back the fanatical, 'ecclesiastic,' faction which even in those early days began to raise its head, and allowed time for the formation of a body of opinion which withstood the creeping paralysis of ecclesiasticism of scholasticism, and thus upheld the banner of Islam, for centuries. Next to the *Khulifa-er-Rashidin*, as a *Khalifa* of true Muslim character, comes Umar ibn Abdul Aziz of the Omayyads. And a scion of their house who fled westward after their downfall and massacre, founded a dynasty which made of Spain for many generations, the most progressive and enlightened country in the West.

It is important for the student of history to remember that the *Khilafat* of Bani'l-Abbas represented a compromise between the out-and-out *Sunnism* of the Omayyads and the out-and-out *Shi'ism* of the Fatemites. For the Omayyads, the Abbasids themselves were *Shi'a*.

When in the Spanish Muslim Chronicles you read of *Shi'as*, they are not those whom we call *Shi'a* but the people whom we regard as *Sunni*, the followers of Bani'l-Abbas, opponents of Bani Umayya. And it is important also to remember that the *Khilafat* of Bani'l-Abbas represents betrayal -- nay, a double betrayal. On the one hand, if they had persuaded *Ahl-ul-Beyt* (i.e., our Prophet's family) that they would set them out of the throne of the *Khilafat*. On the other hand, they had persuaded many earnest *Sunnis*, who until then had been supporters of Bani Umayya, but objected to the dynastic *Khilafat*, that they would restore the original custom of electing the *Khalifa* from among the Muslims most distinguished for their public service. They did neither. They set up their own dynasty, they massacred the whole house of Bani Umayya, except one member who fled to Spain, because that house had made itself beloved throughout Syria, Najd, Egypt and North Africa. And any member of it left alive would have been a formidable rival! They persecuted *Ahl-ul-Beyt* on account of their standing claim to the *Khilafat*. It is a mistake to impute a religious character to the strife between those factions. It was a tribal quarrel of North Arabia against South Arabia, dating from pre-Islamic times.

The simple, rational, Arabic character of Muslim government passed with the last of the Omayyad's to Spain. The *Khilafat* of the East was transferred to Bani'l-Abbas, who were already under Persian influence, and the capital was removed from Syria to Mesopotamia. The city of Baghdad - a much more glorious Baghdad than the present city - a triumph of town planning, sanitation, police arrangement and street lighting sprang into existence. There, and throughout the empire in the next three centuries, Islamic culture reached its apogee [climax]. But except in Spain, it had less and less Arab simplicity and more and more Persian magnificence. In the words of Mr. Guy le Strange: "at that period of the world's history, Cordova, Cairo, Baghdad and Damascus were the only cities in the world which had police regulation and street lamps. A reverence and a manner of address which the rightly guided *Khalifas* and the Omayyads would have repelled as blasphemous were accepted at first, and then expected, by the *Khalifas* of the house of Abbas.

The strict *zenana* [The part of the house in which the women and girls of a family are secluded] system was introduced and women in the upper class of society, instead of playing the frank and noble parts which they played among the earlier Muslims, instead became a tricky and intriguing

captive. There was a tendency to narrow down Islam to the dimensions of a sect, which the rational Muslims were able to restrain only by the way of their superior learning. The *Khalifa* learned that tendency, because it flattered him, exalting his position high above its proper Muslim status.

The people, in a long period of uninterrupted prosperity, became unwarlike. There were little wars within the empire now and then, but they did not affect the mass of the people for reasons which I shall explain when I address you on the laws of war. Many were the rational students of the Qur'an who pointed out the danger of this state of things, but the fanatical "ecclesiastic" faction flattered the *Khalifa* to a false sense of security, declaring that he was especially favoured and protected by Allah, and that the glory of his realm would last forever.

The defence of the frontier was confined to the fighting tribes, chiefly the Turks, who also formed the bodyguard of the *Khalifa*. These people soon became the masters, from guardians of the nominal rulers. They were men of simple, downright brutal character, of energy and common sense, who did not hide their contempt of the luxurious and feeble princes who succeeded one another on the throne of the great Mamun and Harun-ar-Rashid. One after another, they murdered or put them away with every circumstance of ignominy, but they did infuse some manhood into the declining empire, which would have perished but for them, and keep at least its central provinces together in good order. Over the outlying provinces the *Khalifa's* rule was now purely nominal. As chief of the Muslims, he sanctioned the appointment of the local rulers - a ceremony which had religious value in the people's eyes - and that was all. Persia declared itself independent. Egypt was conquered by a family known in history as the Fatemites or Obeydites who were descended from the holy Prophet, though the *Sunnis* of those days denied their claim and said they were descendants of a to of Karbala. They set up a rival *Khilafat*, conquered Palestine and Syria twice, and Hejaz once.

Nominally, the Abbasid *Khilafat* of Baghdad lasted for a full five hundred years, but for the last three hundred and fifty years of its nominal duration, the real sovereign power had passed to the Turks already, and its political prestige was that of Turkish chiefs ( first of the Seljuks-Toghrul Beg and Alp Arslan, and Malik Shah) then of the Zenghis (Imad-ud-din and his son

Nur-ud-din), and then of the Ayubis (Salah-ud-din -- the Saladin of the Crusading period), Malik Adil, Malik Kamil and the rest. There was change of rulers, but the civilisation remained that of the Abbasids. Indeed it hardly, if that all, deteriorated and the condition of the common people throughout the Muslim empire remained superior to that of any other people in the world in education, sanitation, public security and general liberty.

It's material prosperity was the envy of the Western world, whose merchant corporations vied with one another for the privilege of trading with it. What that prosperity must have been in its prime, one can guess from the casual remark of a modern English writer with no brief for Muslims, with regard to Christian Spain: "Notwithstanding the prosperity which resulted from her privileged trade with the New World in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, her manufactures, and with them her real prosperity, began to decline under the Catholic kings, and continued to do so in fact, if not in appearance, until the expulsion of the Moriscoes," - i.e. the last remaining Muslims - "by Philip III, completed the destruction begun by Isabel in the supposed interest of religion."

In other countries, and even in Europe, in the same period, the peasantry were serfs bound to the land they cultivated. The artisans still had a servile status, and the mercantile communities were only just beginning, by dint of cringing and of bribery, to gain certain privileges. In the Muslim realm the merchants and the peasant and the artisan were all free men.

It is true that there were slaves, but the slaves were the most fortunate of people. For the Holy Prophet's command to "**clothe them with the clothes ye yourselves wear and feed them with the food which ye yourselves eat, for the slaves who say their prayers are your brothers**" was literally obeyed, and so was the divine command to liberate them on occasions of thanksgiving, and as a penalty for certain breaches of the Sacred Law [*Shari'ah*]. This was so that slavery would earlier have become extinct but for the spoils of war. Also there was no such thing as a condition of perpetual or hereditary servitude. The slave was regarded as a son or daughter of the house, and in default of heirs inherited the property. In the same way, the slaves of kings have often in Islam inherited a kingdom. It was not unusual for a man who had no male descendant to marry his daughter to his slave who then take his name and carry on the honour of his house. The devotion of the slaves to their owners and the favour of which the master

showed the slaves became proverbial. And when in later days the supply of slaves by warfare ceased, and purchase was restricted in some regions like the Caucasus, where it had been customary, many Muslims complained that because of the kindness to slaves and emancipation of them, being a duty enjoined upon them in the Qur'an, how could they perform that duty if no slaves existed. This, of course, was a complete misapprehension. It was a misinterpretation of the purpose of Islam, which was to abolish slavery without causing a tumultuous upheaval of society. But that is in the argument which I myself have actually heard adduced to justify the cruel slave trade with the Sudan. This slave trade was a horror which had no Islamic sanction. I do not say that there were no abuses in the Muslim world, but I do say that they were not what Europeans have imagined and had no comparison with things similarity named in Christendom; just as the slavery which existed in the Muslim world had no similarity with that of the American plantations.

No colour or race prejudice existed in Islam. Black, brown, white and yellow people mingled in its markets and mosques and places upon a footing of complete equality and friendliness. Some of the greatest rulers, saints and stages in Islam have been men as black as coal, like Jayyash, the saintly king of Yemen in the period of the Abbasid decline, and Ahmad Al-Jabarti, the great historian of Egypt in the time of Arnaut Mohammad Ali, founder of the Khadivial dynasty. And if anyone thinks that there were no white people in that mighty brotherhood, be it known that there are no men whiter than the blonde Circassians and the mountain folk of Anatolia who very early found a place in the Islamic fraternity. It was a civilisation in which there were differences of rank and wealth, but these did not correspond to class distinctions as understood in the West, much less to Indian caste distinctions.

A notable feature of this civilisation was its cleanliness at a time when Europe coupled filth with sanctity. In every town there was a *hammam*, public hot baths, and public fountains for drinking and washing purposes. A supply of pure water was the first consideration wherever there were Muslims. And frequent washing became so much associated with their religion that in Andalusia in 1566, the use of baths was forbidden under severe penalties because it tended to remind the people of Islam. And an unfortunate gardener of Seville was actually tortured for the crime of having washed while at his work. I myself in the Anatolia have heard one Greek

Christian say to another, "The fellow is half a Muslim; he washes his feet."

Public food and water supplies were under strict inspection in all Muslim cities; and meat and other perishable food exposed for sale had to be covered with muslin as a protection from dust and flies. Communication was free between all classes of society and so was intermarriage, and everybody talked to everybody.

I am speaking now of something I have seen and known, for that civilisation still existed in the essentials when I first went to Egypt, Syria and Anatolia. When I read Alf Leylah wa Leylah (*The Arabian Nights*), most of the stories in which are of the period of the Abbasid *Khilafat* though they were collected and published in Cairo some centuries later - I see the key life of Damascus, Jerusalem, Aleppo, Cairo, and the other cities and I found it in the early '90s of last century [1890s]. But when I saw it, it was manifestly in decay. What struck me even in its decay and poverty was the joyousness of that life compared with anything that I had seen in Europe. These people seemed quite independent of our cares of life, our anxious clutching after wealth, our fear of death.

And then their charity! No man in the cities of the Muslim Empire ever died of hunger or exposure at his neighbour's gate.

They undoubtedly had something which was lacking in the life of Western Europe, while they as obviously lacked much which Europeans have and hold. It was only afterwards that I learned that they had once possessed the material prosperity which Europe can now boast, in addition to that inward happiness which I so envied. It was only long afterwards, after 20 years of study, that I came to realise that they had lost material prosperity through neglecting half the *Shari'ah* and that anyone can find that inward happiness who will obey the other half of the *Shari'ah* which they still observed.

Now let me go on with my story and tell you how the Muslims civilisation came to decay.

We have seen how it survived the decadence of the Abbasid *Khilafat*, upheld by the strong arms of Turkish slaves. For such was their position when they entered the *Khalifa's* service, though their chiefs soon gained the title of '*Amir-ul-Umara*' and later of '*Sultan*' and '*Malik*'. You may wonder how it happened that for centuries the civilisation of Islam was altogether unaffected by this

transfer of power from a cultured race, to a race of comparative barbarians - nay, continued to progress in spite of it. The comparative barbarians were ardent Muslims. If they treated the *Khalifa's* person often with a brutal disrespect, born of intense contempt for such a worthless creature, it was not as the *Khalifa* that they so ill treated him, but as a wretched sinner quite unfit to bear the title of *Khalifa* of the Muslims.

As a contemporary couplet, quoted by Ibn Khaldun in his first Muqaddamah, puts it:

"A Khalifa in a cage, between a boy slave and a harlot.  
Repeating all they tell him parrot wise."

But the *Khalifa* was not the *Khilafat*. Though the *Khalifa* might be worthless, the *Khilafat* as an institution was still redoubtable [formidable], and commanded the respect of every Muslim, particularly of the simple-minded Turkish soldiers.

The civilisation of the Muslims had another guardian whom the Turkish warders treated with most grave respect. This was the opinion of the *Ulama* (the learned men) expressed in the convocations of half a hundred universities, of which the delegates met together when required in council. You must not think of them as what we now call *Ulama*, by courtesy. The proper Arabic term for the latter is *fuquaha*, and it hardly came into general use in those days when the science which we now know as *Fiqh* was still in its infancy.

The Muslim universities of those days led the world in learning and research. All knowledge was their field, and they took in and gave out the utmost knowledge attainable in those days. The universities of those days were, of course, different from those of modern times, but then they were the most enlightened institutions in the world. They were probably the most enlightened institutions that have ever been a part of a religion.

The German professor, Joseph Hell, in the little book of the Arab civilisation which has lately been translated into English by Mr. S. Khuda Bukhsh, thus writes of them:

"Even at the universities, religion retained its primacy, for was it not religion which first opened the path to learning? The Qur'an, Tradition, jurisprudence therefore, all these preserved their pre-eminence there. But it is to the credit of Islam that it neither slighted nor ignored other branches of learning. Nay, it offered the very same home to them

as it did to theology - a place in the mosque. Until the fifth century of the *hijrah* the mosque was the University of Islam; and to this fact is due to the most characteristic feature of Islamic culture "perfect freedom to reach." The teacher had to pass no examination, required no diploma, no formality, to launch out in that capacity. What he needed was competence, efficiency and mastery of his subject."

The writer goes on to show how the audience, which included learned men as well as students, were the judges of the teacher's competence and how a man who did not know his subject or could not support his thesis with convincing arguments could not survive their criticism for an hour, but was at once discredited.

These teachers of the Arab universities were the foremost man of learning of their age. They were the teachers of modern Europe. It was one of them, a famous chemist, who wrote: "Hearsay and mere assertion have no authority in chemistry. It may be taken as an absolutely rigorous principle that any proposition which is not supported by proofs is nothing more than an assertion which may be true or false. It is only when a man brings proof of his assertion that we say 'your proposition is true.'

These *Ulama* were not blind guides nor mere fanatics. The professors of those universities were the most enlightened thinkers of their time. In strict accordance with the Prophet's teaching, it was they who watched over the welfare of the people and pointed out to the *Khalifa* anything that was being done against the rights of man as guaranteed by the Qur'an. Indeed it was they who kept down the fanatic element, discouraged persecution for religious opinion, and saved Islamic culture from deterioration in a thousand ways. They even forced ambitious Muslim rulers, in their un-Islamic strife, to refrain from calling on the people to assist them, to fight only with the help of their own purchased slaves and to respect all crops and cattle and non-combatants. They were able, by the enormous weight of their opinion with the multitude, to punish even rulers who transgressed the Sacred Law, in a way which brought them quickly to repentance; and they exacted compensation for transgression.

The hosts of Genghis Khan in their terrific inroad, destroyed the most important universities and massacred the learned men. This happened at a time when the Eastern boundaries of the empire were but lightly guarded, the forces of the Turkish rulers having been drawn westward by the constant menace of the Crusades. Once the frontiers were passed, there was practically no

one to oppose such powerful invaders. Then it was seen that another command, which is implicit in the *Shari'ah*, had been forgotten or neglected - that every Muslim must have military training. So strongly was that point impressed upon the public mind that it became the chief point of the *Shari'ah* in public opinion thenceforward until the remaining Muslim empire was partitioned by powers of Europe only the other day [remember this speech was delivered in 1927].

The Muslim empire revived after the attack of Genghis Khan and even made fresh progress. A progress so remarkable that once more it threatened Europe as a whole, and so aroused the old crusading animosity in modern dress, which was the secondary reason of its downfall. I say the secondary reason for the main reason for the downfall must be sought in the *Shari'ah*, among those natural laws which must always control the rise and fall of nations.

The empire was apparently progressing but it was progressing on the wave of a bygone impulse. The *Ulama* who sought knowledge "even though it were in China" were no more. In their place stood men bearing the same high name of *Ulama* claiming the same reverence, but who sought knowledge only in a limited area, the area of Islam as *they* conceived it - not the world-wide, liberating and light-giving religion of the Qur'an and the Prophet, but an Islam as narrow and hidebound as religion always will become when it admits the shadow of a man between man's mind and God.

Islam, the religion of free thought, the religion which once seemed to have banished priestly superstition and enslavement of men's minds to other men, forever from the lands to which it came, had become - God forgive us! - priest-ridden.

The pursuit of natural science had already been abandoned. All knowledge coming from without was reckoned impious. For was it not the knowledge of mere infidels? Whereas the practice of the early Muslims was to **seek knowledge even unto China**, even though it were the knowledge of a heathen race. The growth of pride accompanied the cult of ignorance.

The Christian nations, which had been moved to the pursuit of science by the example of the Muslims, had advanced materially just as the Muslims had advanced materially so long as they obeyed that portion of the *Shari'ah* or Sacred Law which proclaims freedom of

thought and exhorts the pursuit of knowledge and the study of God's creation. The Christian nations threw off the narrow shackles of ecclesiasticism and espoused free thought, and their advance in the material field was as surprising in its way as were the conquests of the early Muslims in their way.

Before I come to my conclusion, I must mention one great assertion of the universal nature of Islam which occurred in the darkest hour the Muslims ever knew. You will find it narrated in the first chapter of *Kitab-ul-Fakhri*, where the author speaks of the importance of justice as a quality of the ruler according to the teaching of Islam, that when Sultan Hulaqu had taken Baghdad and held the unfortunate but worthless person of the Abbasid Khalifa as his mercy he put a question to the *Ulama* who had assembled at his bidding at the Mustansiriyah - a question calling for a *fatwa* of the Learned, a question upon which the answer to depended the fate of the *Khilafat*. "Which is preferable (according to the Shari'ah) the disbelieving ruler who is just or the Muslim ruler who is unjust?" The *Ulama* were all aghast, and a loss what to write, when Rizaud-din Ali ibn Tawas, the greatest and most respected *Alim* of his time, arose and took the question paper and signed his name to the answer: "The disbelieving ruler who is just."

All the others signed the same answer after him. All knew that it was the right answer, for the Muslim cannot keep two standards - one for the professed believer and the other for the disbeliever. When Allah, and His Messenger proclaimed, maintains one standard only. His standard and His judgment are the same for all. He has no favourites. The favoured of Allah are those, whoever and wherever they may be, who keep His laws. The test is not the profession of a particular creed, nor the observance of a particular set of ceremonies; it is nothing that can be said or performed by anybody as a charm, excuse in his or her shortcomings. ***The test is conduct.*** The result of good conduct is good and the result of evil conduct is evil, for the nation as for the individual. That is the teaching of Islam, and never has its virtue been more plainly illustrated than in the history of the rise and decline of the Muslim civilisation.

The last Abbasid Khalifa and his family were put to death most horribly, and for a little while the Mughal conquerors established their dominion over Western Asia. But in less than a generation, troubles in Persia called away the Mughals; the Turkish chiefs revived their principalities which the Sultan of Konya tried in vain to

bring back to their old dependency. It was then that the Osmanli Turks came upon the scene.

The rise of the Osmanli Turks, which brought the restoration of the Muslim empire on a larger scale than ever, has interesting analogies with the history of the House of Timur, another Turkish dynasty. The Ottoman empire, at its zenith, was no less glorious than that of Akbar, Shahjehan and Aurangzeb. It was then that the third great Muslim language blossomed in a literature which is utterly Islamic and yet definitely Turkish. It covered all fields except the modern-scientific, an exquisite literature in an exquisite but very difficult language, which latter point -- the language difficulty is perhaps the reason why as a rule the Orientalists of today ignore it to. It was then that germs of architecture, mosques and palaces, arose. It was then that all the remnants of Islamic learning flocked to Brusa, Adrianople and Istanbul (the successive capitals of the Osmanli Sultans), who were munificent patrons of every kind of literary and artistic merit, themselves generally poets of distinction.

The poetry of the Ottoman Turks is strangely appealing to me. It is usually sad, as it is but natural to a race of men who, when they thought a little deeply, always had to reflect that death was near to them. But it is never despondent, and the passionate (almost desperate) love of nature it displays is really a sincere characteristic of the people. The most characteristic productions of Turkish literature have an affinity with what I have read (though in translations only) of Chinese literature. But it is their beautiful home life to which I should point if asked to indicate the greatest contribution of the Turks to Muslim culture. It has, or had (for I am speaking of before the war) in common with their poetry, the nobility and depth which everything acquires for those who are prepared to die at any minute for a cost which they regard as worthy. And the way they went to death and the way their women bore it. The dignity . . . the grace of every action of their daily lives. Those are achievements every nation in the world might envy.

The Osmanli Turks were soldiers first, poets second, politicians third and theologians fourth. It was not their fault if they took the word of others in the matter of religion. The language of religion was Arabic, and only learned men among them knew Arabic, even though all were taught to recite the Qur'an "for a blessings." That is, without thought or understanding of the meaning, as a sort of charm. They were soldierly in all they did and

they trusted their spiritual experts as they trusted their military experts. The people were just as contented with the decline as they were in the prime of their civilisation. For the decline came gradually and imperceptibly, and it affected all alike. Nor were they conscious of the deterioration which had actually taken place, since all the accustomed paraphernalia still existed, with the shadow of its former pomp.

Primary and secondary schools still existed. So did universities. But they were now engaged in teaching the former Qur'an without the meaning. The latter with all the hair splitting niceties of *Fiqh*, (religious jurisprudence - a science of great use to every Muslim) but taught in such a way as to imprison the intelligence. The machinery of justice, sanitation, police and public works still existed, only it had ceased to function properly. It was not until some powers of Europe began to interfere in order to improve the status of the Christian subjects of the pope that the Turks became aware that they had dropped below the standard of the times. It was only after they had met a modern army in the field that they realised that their whole military system and equipment was now antiquated. And then, to do them justice, the Turks tried with all their might to recover the lost ground.

If they were all unconscious leaders in the decadence of Islam, they became afterwards the conscious leaders in the struggle for revival. The Turkish literature from the last 50 years is altogether different from the old Turkish literature. From the poetic works of Namiq Kamal and Ekrem, full of patriotic ardour, to the remarkable work of the late Prince Said Halima Pasha entitled "*Islamlashmaq*" (Islamise) in which the principles of the *Shari'ah* are expanded in modern terms and shown to be somewhat different from those taught by its related exponents. And leading to quite different consequences, the modern Turkish literature is progressive and constructive. It is full of hope in spite of the terrific ordeals that the Turkish nation and the Muslim Empire had to undergo. Alghazilar, the warriors of Islam, are still the heroes and "the bloody shroud" is still the guerdon [reward] of the bravest of the brave; but the *jihad* which is celebrated is no longer in defence of a dying empire. It is the true *jihad* of Islam, the *jihad* of human freedom, human progress, human brotherhood, in allegiance to Allah.

The Turkish revolution was the small beginning of a great revival of Islam, of which the signs can now be

seen in every quarter of the Muslim world. Everyone now sees that ecclesiasticism (or scholasticism, if you prefer the word - it is more accurate) was the cause of the decline, and that Islam, as planted in the world, requires all available light and knowledge for its sustenance. Muslims must seek knowledge even though it be in China. Islam can never thrive in darkness and ignorance.