

(In the nama of Allah, the Beneficient, the Merciful)

THE STRENGTH OF ISLAM

BY

AL-HAJJ KHWAJA KAMAL-UD-DIN

FOUNDER OF

THE WOKING MUSLIM MISSION, (ENGLAND)

www.aail.org

PUBLISHED BY

**The Woking Muslim Mission & Literary Trust,
The Shah Jehan Mosque, Woking, Surrey,
ENGLAND.**

THE STRENGTH OF ISLAM

THE power and forcefulness of an idea, and certainly its effectiveness, may often be measured by the time it is brought forward and the opportunities afforded. But to ensure effectiveness the idea must be sound in itself and be able to withstand the severest investigation—otherwise a specious and basically unsound theory may be able to gain credence and support.

In the case of Islam we observe truth, sincerity, toleration and simplicity. General Charles Gordon doubtless had this in mind when he said that he did not see the sect of Pharisees amongst the Mussulmans, who never assume, as the Christian Pharisees do, that A and B are doomed to be burned. This saintly man knew the East well, and had mixed with Muslims all his life ; he further said of the Muslims : “ You never see the very unamiable features which are shown by our Pharisees.”

“Believe or be damned ” is the slogan of certain Church parties, but not of Christ’s teaching. The Crusaders showed the aggressive sword

policy and millions of human beings perished through this insane and cruel method of enforcing religious views.

No one will deny that a certain class of Christian Missionaries have brought discredit on Christianity by persistently vilifying the Muslim Faith and pouring contempt on our Holy Prophet Muhammad, who is constantly misrepresented and alluded to as "the false prophet." These ardent but unscrupulous folk do not hesitate to spread false reports, well knowing them to be false, in order to advance their own views. I suppose they are quite well aware that their parrot-like cry about our worshipping Muhammad, having to have four wives, women having no souls and not being allowed inside the Mosque, are all figments of their own brains, and yet they go on in the cheerful belief that the Muslims, being a long-suffering and peaceful lot, will stand any amount of abuse without even a murmur of remonstrance. Possibly they twist the old "say," "All's fair in love and war," into "Any lies are fair in hate and religion." However this may be, I am safe in stating that the attitude of the Muslims in their courtesy and

forbearance has been most praiseworthy and Christ-like. Indeed, it would seem as though they were emulating the chivalry of the great Saladin, who, hearing that his enemy Richard II had lost his horse in a battle, sent him a present of a beautiful charger so that he might continue the fight suitably mounted. But, though I greatly admire chivalrous conduct in all cases where my Muslim brethren have politely ignored the most pointed insults, I cannot say that I feel myself, as a Western Muslim, bound to be equally indulgent to those who are forgetful alike of the ties which bind us to our greatest dependency and those other ties of affection and regard which exist between the branches of the Anglo-Indian Aryan family, and I consider that they should be reminded of the great disservice they do to India by their conduct and, generally, to the Empire to which they belong.

Many quite good Christians assume that their own religious views *must* be the only ones worth considering, quite oblivious of the fact that other people have intelligence, and that 220,000,000*, of the human family worship the

* The correct figure, recently ascertained, is 600 million.—Publishers,

One and Only God and follow the teachings of His Holy Prophets ; they also forget that our King, the Emperor of India, rules over more Muslims than Christians. Sacerdotalism is responsible for this most regrettable state of affairs. According to the majority of those who profess and call themselves Christians, and attend the Christian churches, there can be no salvation without a belief in the "Divinity of Christ," "a certain way of thinking of the Trinity," "the Sacraments," "the Atonement," and "the Immaculate Conception," that is to say, a disbelief in the *necessity* for such a belief spells a punishment which cannot be exceeded in severity, and which places the earnest inquirer, the honest man, the doubter and the unbeliever, in the same dock with the most hardened blood-stained criminal. And to call *that* "Religion" ! What a travesty ; what a reflection on the Almighty and All-Merciful and All-Wise !

Reason and Science.

There is nothing in Islam which is in any way revolting to our reason or our scientific discoveries, and I have been surprised and pleased in recent years to find so many people in

all classes in England who have entirely abandoned a belief in any *necessity* for the dogmas. I have, for example, frequently described our simple Faith, and I have been gratified by the remark: "Why, that is my belief. Is that really Islam? If so, then I must be a Muslim." My reply has been: "You certainly are one, though you may not like to openly avow it just at present, out of fear of adverse criticism." I have then usually repeated the unfavourable Christian animadversions which were passed on me at the time of my conversion to Islam.

When I openly avowed the Muslim Faith in 1913, members of my family came to me with expressions of the gravest concern because I had deserted the religion of my fathers, and they assured me most positively that salvation was impossible for me now that I had taken a terrible step. I pointed out that, though I was willing to admit that I might deserve to be damned for the sins which I had committed, I would never believe that the God of Mercy and Justice to whom I had prayed all my life would be so unjust as to pass such a terrible sentence

as "everlasting damnation" on me for being an honest man, and telling the truth about my beliefs to Him "to whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid."

Elasticity in Religion.

There must be nothing rigid in a universal Faith except only the *firm belief in the One and Only God and the Revelations made through His Holy Prophets*. God sees into the heart and those who worship Him in spirit and in truth are not to be cast from the fellowship of the Faithful merely on account of some set of conditions peculiar to climates or customs or particulars regarding habits ingrained by long use in certain nationalities.

I have always looked upon Islam as fitted for the *whole of the human race and for all times*, and I have thought that the spirit of the great Faith which we profess with so much delight and happiness soars far above petty conventionalities. Moses and Jesus were for the Jews, but Islam is for Humanity without any distinc-

tion as to race or climate, and it is this which, in my humble opinion, will make the reasonable teachings of Muhammad prevail in the end. It is much to be regretted that puritanical teachings have contributed so much towards the retardation of our efforts to spread the ideals of true Islam in the Western world.

The precepts to be found in Leviticus might have been desirable or necessary amongst a lot of savages thousands of years ago, but these teachings are quite out of place and ridiculous in the twentieth century.

In this age of reason it is intolerable to be asked to believe that certain forms and ceremonies are necessary to salvation. What I mean is this: that religion which insists that non-observance of forms or ceremonies is to be visited with the same punishment as the commission of sin, cannot be expected to find any favour with the mass of intelligent people.

For example, if you are going to tell the Esquimau that he must perform his ablutions with ice or snow, and take off his shoes before

going into his Mosque of block-ice, you will make but few converts to Islam in that direction.

What is very easy for the Arab, with his loose and inexpensive garments and ample sandy desert surroundings, will be impossible for the busy city man clad in expensive clothes. The idea of kneeling down and prostrating in wet and muddy streets is an absurd one. Such a man will have to consider his tailor's bill, and will not think this sort of thing can be necessary for his salvation—the surroundings are unsuitable, and the acquisition of eternal happiness should not depend upon whether a man is born in Makka or Old Bond Street.

If you take the puritanical line which forbid coffee and tobacco and looks upon all pleasure as sinful, you will find but little favour amongst those who wish to worship the One and only God and thank Him continually for the *use* of His wonderful gifts.

A religion which is hide-bound and bigoted can never become world-wide, as we wish Islam to be. There must be great elasticity, so as to

bring all the nations of the earth under that one beneficent canopy which I cannot help regarding as the protecting wings of the Almighty.

In advancing our Faith we should, I think, only insist upon the essentials in the first instance, for these constitute the spirit of Islam—firm belief in the One God and surrender to His Almighty Will, belief in the messages Divinely sent through His Holy Prophets, and the carrying into effect of the highest order of beneficence to all our fellow-creatures on this earth—and there is to my mind no reason to force any other belief on people if, by doing so, we run the risk of doing harm to our cause, turning them away from Islam. Win first the essentials, and the minor points will follow almost as a matter of course.

West meets East.

It has always seemed strange to me that my very earliest ideas about religion, crude though they doubtless were, and so utterly at variance with the strictly Christian and evangelical surroundings in which my youth was passed, coincided so nearly with the Muslim Faith as it

was revealed to me on many occasions in later life. It looks as though a spark of Islamic fire had been permitted to brighten up from the embers of forgotten or dormant truth ; and it has sometimes seemed, to my possibly over-fanciful vision, as though a slender ray of light had shot through the rather heavy spiritual atmosphere of the Western world and proclaimed the receptivity of the West for Islamic truths. I am unable to account for the origin of these ideas of my early childhood, because none of my people—parents, uncles and aunts and others—were in the least degree Eastern or well-informed about Eastern affairs. They probably had a sort of rough idea that the Muslims were to be found somewhere amongst the “Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Heretics” mentioned in one of the Christian collects ; and the truths of the Muslim Faith, with its beautiful precepts of resignation and beneficence as expounded by our Holy Prophet, were unknown to them. I have never been able to quite understand why the Eastern Faith of Islam should be less acceptable than the Orthodox Greek Church, the Romish, or the Protestant Churches, all of which were equally from the East.

Not long ago, the Bishop of London, Dr. Ingram, speaking at the consecration of an addition to St. John's Church, Harrow, said that "people must realize that no other faith could be regarded as a rival to Christianity. Those who spoke of some of the religions of the East as alternatives, did not know what they were talking about. A certain British peer who had embraced Islam had attempted to discuss the matter with him, but that he (the Bishop) had closed the conversation by saying: 'Go and do something to induce your fellow Mohamedans in the Near East to set free the thirty thousand Christian girls whom they have forced into slavery, and then I will argue with you.'"

Thus were the Bishop's words reported in *The Times*, November 10, 1925, and I must say they have caused me some astonishment. How does Dr. Ingram know that no other Faith can be regarded as a rival? The fact that our King rules over more Muslims than Christians, and that there are over 220,000,000 Muslims in the world, should surely give him pause before making such an *ex-cathedra* statement. The Bishop is another example of those who are

oblivious of the fact that Christianity came from the East, just as did the Jewish and Muslim faiths. I do *quite* "know what I'm talking about" when I say that Christ was an Eastern man. From the way the Bishop puts it, an ignorant person might be led to believe that Christianity was a Western product, and that it was wrong to go to the wicked East for religious ideas!

With regard to the fiction of the slavery of thirty thousand Christian girls languishing in Turkish harems, the Bishop has proved himself very inaccurate—to say the least of it—and I deeply regret to have to point to the fact that the misstatements have been copied in the press of other countries as *truths* because of the exalted position of their author.

For a further elucidation of the facts about this thirty thousand-girl story I may refer my hearers to my recently published little work, *The Affinity between the Original Church of Jesus Christ and Islam*, where the matter is discussed in Chapter V. There is a well-merited rebuke

contained in a recent number of the *Islamic Review* as follows :—

We wish his Lordship could have realized how deeply he was paining the hearts of many Muslims by this inaccurate statement, and also what share he was contributing in laying the axe to the roots of the British Empire. From him we at least had expected a foresight, a fuller grasp of the situation ; for he was the Bishop of the Metropolis of the British Empire, the majority of whose subjects, next to the Hindus, who number about 245,000,000, unfortunately consists of Muslims. If he could not bring about mutual understanding and intelligence, good-will and tolerance, between the Muslims and the Christians—the two principal constituents of the Empire—then he ought to have at least refrained from making matters worse. We wish that he could have realized that tactics like these only help to rivet the fetters of prejudice every where....” Would that the Bishop of London had realized how many he would be misleading, and how far-reaching the effects of these statements would be !

The rebuke is severe, but not one whit more than it should be. Not very much less indiscreet was Dr. Ingram’s eulogy of a particularly offensive and vituperative work directed against Islam by Miss L. H. Sawbridge. In this book the author pours contempt on Islam and vilifies

our Holy Prophet, who is always spoken of as “the false prophet.” Other examples of unworthy detraction are the following: “Those who worship Allah and those who honour Odin are indeed brothers of the same family. They are alike animated by the same lust of aggression and sensuality, cruelty and lies.” “The Crescent of the false prophet is lifted over 222,000,000 of the human race, contending for the rule of the nations against the Cross of Christ—the faith that appeals to the worldly and sensual, through its impure mixture of religiousness and immorality. The lust of the world contends with the love of God.”

“Up to the time of Muhammad, the Arabian woman enjoyed a great deal of social freedom, and her relationship with the other sex was healthier and franker than it has ever been since.” Of course this nonsense would not take in anyone at all well informed, and yet we find the Bishop of London writing the “Foreword,” in which he says: “I have only had time to read the first two hundred pages of this beautiful little book, but I must no longer delay to write

a 'Foreword' commending it to the Church and Nation." Much of the worst abuse in the book comes well within the first two hundred pages, and therefore must have been read by the Bishop. The thing which astounds me is how this high dignitary of the Church allowed such an un-Christian, unholy, concatenation of vulgarly abusive inexactitudes to be published under his ægis. As I have said elsewhere, Dr. Ingram has a charming personality, and is a good conversationalist, but I think he rather readily accepts what he is told without always making sure as to its accuracy or authenticity.

Conversions, Perversions, and Apostasy.

About fourteen years ago my apostasy was freely commented on and I was subjected to hostile and unfriendly criticisms, and nearly buried under letters from all parts of the world. A few hundred years ago tortures would have been applied to my vile body, and I should have had to tell lies in order to save my very life. Now that the popularity of thumb-screws, racks, and red-hot pincers as means of regeneration has died in this country, anyone is pretty safe from

actual violence, whatever his religious opinions may be. Since my return from South Africa about a year ago I have received a constant succession of letters from a well-meaning but fanatical Christian who will persist in loading me with platitudes, and saying that I have stepped into "heathendom." One difficulty is keeping this gentleman to the point. The following is an excerpt from my last letter to him :—

I have your letter of November 8th, and fear that you have not yet grasped the fundamentals of Islam in which are to be found charity and tolerance often wanting in Church Christianity. You can at present only see one side of the picture, whilst I am anxious to examine and probe into whatever God has revealed through the mouths of His Holy Prophets since the beginning of the world, which goes back to a period far greater than most of us suppose. You do not attempt to answer my statements and queries as to the necessity of the belief in the Christian dogmas, the cruelty of the Christian Deity, and the beautiful idea that it is through the exercise of our reason and the march of science that we are approaching daily nearer and nearer to the Truth which cannot be very far from the Throne of God. To my mind Science is the very greatest ally to true Religion ; our intelligence is given us to use, and I cannot help thinking that it should be the means whereby we may be enabled to detect foolish and

unnecessary dogmas, and lead us to the selection of a faith or Religion in which the fewest improbabilities and fairy tales appear.

The "virgin birth" and "dying God," for example, are not peculiar to Christianity; they are to be traced backwards to periods thousands of years before the time of Christ. Why, then, make a belief in them the most important foundation-stone in the Christian belief? Why allow such figments of paganism to be held up as "necessary to salvation"? I venture to say that if one could probe into the innermost thoughts of any congregation in any church one would find a very small percentage having faith in the truth of the words uttered by the lips. The parson, being an educated man, would hardly ever be found with a true belief that the Almighty and Merciful was daily dispensing injustice with the lavish hand suggested by the words of the Christian Creed. As a man he knows that the words are but a cloak to what is hollow and insincere, but, in his capacity as a priest, he is bound by his vows to pretend that he believes in the fables. You have spoken of my having "stepped into heathendom," and you use the analogy of the difficulty of "making a silk purse out of a sow's ear," and now you suggest that I should turn to Jesus in order to be able to talk about angels and bright shining garments. You have disregarded the fact that we altogether disclaim any pretensions to being "heathens." You have quite mistaken what Islam really is. We are devout and earnest believers in the One

and Only God. and as such cannot be ranked with the infidels and heretics. Your appellation of "heathen" does not apply to us at all.

Insistency on a blind acceptance of dogmatic teaching *outside Duty to God and Neighbour* is one of the weakest points in Church Christianity. The full use of Reason should be not only allowed, but encouraged, if a faith is to carry weight — there is no surer way of casting doubts than secrecy and forbidding inquiry. A man uses his eyes and brain to avoid falling into pits or over precipices, and no one finds fault with him for so doing, but directly he ventures to make use of his intelligence to detect fallacies and misleading dogmas there is a howl of indignation from all quarters. Depend upon it, there must be something shaky when you find that all inquiry is forbidden: when you *must*, like a naughty child, *believe* when you are told that you are "a child of wrath," and that you were "born in sin," and also accept without a murmur all that sacerdotalism has piled up during the last two thousand years and more. I must be allowed to ask any questions I may think necessary, otherwise I am distinctly committing as in of omission

in that I am neglecting the chance of obtaining fresh knowledge.

The idea of seeking wisdom from on High is expressed in the following verses ;—

When prostrate at Thy feet I fall,
Fresh wisdom to acquire,
All Thy past favours I recall,
Nor do I now desire
To ask from Thee what Thou must know,
In Thy omniscient mind,
Is really best for us below
And infinitely kind. 1

Here we have the injunction to pray for fresh wisdom from the Highest source, tempered by the admission that we cannot presume to ask for *specific benefit*, because God ordains all things, and must be the best judge of what is best for us.

Most of the strength of Islam lies in the knowledge that God is ever near—nearer, as has been said, than our jugular vein ; it is the very spirit of the Faith. Call it madness, call it

fanaticism, or what you will, the fact of the real Presence of God is the very essence of the creed of the faithful followers of the Holy Prophet, and it is the chief reason why they have no fear of death or hell, which hold out such terrors to many whose beliefs are of a more complicated and less convincing character. Then there is no need of any outside aid, no introductions, no atonement ; the key to heaven need never be missing, and the Muslim communing with his God at least five times a day is less likely to be engaged in the planning of any serious crime or any outrage on his conscience than one who rarely gives a thought to the real Presence of the Almighty. Statistics show that Muslim communities are singularly free from crime, and especially from crime of a brutal and cruel character, and this is, I think, to a great extent due to the Muslim's conviction that God is always with him, and also to the fact that alcoholic stimulants do not find favour, and indeed are expressly forbidden. Most people will admit that something like 90 per cent. of the crime in most civilized countries is directly or indirectly due to the abuse of alcohol. It

may be said that where God is there the devil cannot enter, and where the brain is never inflamed by spirits or wines there is a much better chance of a peaceful solution to difficulties and disputes.

Can a person to whom God's mercy has been often shown fail to be touched by the truth and beauty of the following lines ?

O Thou whose bounties unto me are more than I
trow,

Whose favours lavished on my head are countless
as the sand,

No blow of all the blows of fate has ever fall'n on
me.

But I have found Thee ready still to take me by
the hand.

In all the beautiful religions of the world there are the evidences of that strong desire of the created to return to and be at one with the Creator, and a compassionate regard for the welfare and happiness of other is a characteristic feature of the Buddhist, Christian and Islamic Faiths, and the last named, being the simplest and most free from dogmatic encumbrances, is

most likely to be the universal religion of the world. There is, as far as one can see, no class in Islam which bids for temporal power. The grandeur of the religion is uninfluenced by any such sordid considerations. Every true Muslim looks to a reward which is as far above mere mundane advantages and riches as the light of the sun is above that of the *ignis fatuus*. I do not myself think that Islam has anything to fear from outside attacks, or even from the unworthy misrepresentations of which I have so frequently complained, for these will fade away as the Truth becomes evident. What may cause obstruction and delay is the attempt to establish fresh sects *within* the great fraternity of Islam. It has always been my great delight to point to the Muslim Faith as being so free from sectarian trouble which honeycombs modern Christianity. The Sunnis and the Shiahs and the Wahabis have all very decided views, and may almost be looked upon as "sects," and in very recent years the Ahmadis *Qadianis* followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad proclaim the advent of their leader, whom they regard as the "promised Messiah." These latest reformers insist that all those who refuse to

acknowledge Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as the Messiah shall be "deprived of the light of faith" and, further, that the rejection of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad "means the rejection of the Holy Prophet Muhammad himself." It strikes a blow at the solidarity of Islam which is greatly to be deplored. One cannot find fault with the Ahmadis (*Qadianis*) for thinking anything they like (it is a free country), but one may reasonably object to being excluded from the ranks of the Faithful at the behest of a small number of zealous adherents of a certain idea.

I do not propose to go into the question of the Messiahship of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, but I may be permitted to point out that the high-handed line now being followed by the Ahmadis (*Qadianis*) is hardly in accord with the true spirit of Islam, which places toleration very high amongst the virtues to be encouraged.

As must be admitted by any fair-minded person, the innovation is entirely from the Ahmadis, who can hardly complain because questions are asked concerning the new rules. According to these rules I am led to understand that

all Muslims who fail to recognize the claims of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad are to be placed outside the pale, and can no longer be regarded as true Muslims.

I look upon this as a very serious matter, for it seems like an attempt to bind the consciences of the whole Muslim world to the views of one particular sect ; indeed, it reminds one of a slogan used elsewhere : " No salvation outside the Church."

As I have said elsewhere, the Ahmadi declaration appears to my simple and, I hope, unbiased mind to be far too dictatorial. It must be evident even to the most cursory observer that such *ex-cathedra* declarations must prove distasteful to a large proportion of the great Muslim community. Not very long ago I informed my friend the Imam of the Southfield Mosque that I could not subscribe to the views he promulgated because they savoured too much of the intolerance we complain of in another Faith, and might almost be inspired by the spirit of the Athanasian Creed which most of us unite in condemning.