

# Introduction

## 1. THE HOLY QUR'ĀN AND ITS DIVISIONS

### **Al-Qur'ān.**

The name *Al-Qur'ān*, the proper name of the Sacred Book of the Muslims, occurs several times in the Book itself (2:185, etc.). The word *Qur'ān* is an infinitive noun from the root *qara'a* meaning, primarily, *he collected things together*, and also, *he read or recited*; and the Book is so called both because it is a collection of the best religious teachings and because it is a Book that is or should be read; as a matter of fact, it is *the most widely read book* in the whole world. It is plainly stated to be a revelation from the Lord of the worlds (26:192), or a revelation from Allāh, the Mighty, the Wise (39:1, etc.), and so on. It was sent down to the Prophet Muḥammad (47:2), having been revealed to his heart through the Holy Spirit (26:193, 194), in the Arabic language (26:195; 43:3). The first revelation came to the Holy Prophet in the month of Ramaḍān (2:185), on the 25th or 27th night, which is known as *Lailat al-Qadr* (97:1).

### **Other names and Epithets.**

The Holy Book speaks of itself by the following additional names: *al-Kitāb* (2:2), a writing which is complete in itself; *al-Furqān* (25:1), that which distinguishes between truth and falsehood, between right and wrong; *al-Dhīkr* (15:9), the Reminder or a source of eminence and glory to mankind; *al-Mau'izah* (10:57), the Admonition; *al-Hukm* (13:37), the Judgment; *al-Hikmat* (17:39), the Wisdom; *al-Shifā'* (10:57), that which heals; *al-Hudā* (72:13), that which guides or makes one attain the goal; *al-Tanzīl* (26:192), the Revelation; *al-Raḥmat* (2:105), the Mercy; *al-Rūḥ* (42:52), the Spirit or that which gives life; *al-Khair* (3:104), the Goodness; *al-Bayān* (3:138), that which explains all things or clear statement; *al-Ni'mat* (93:11), the Favour; *al-Burhān* (4:174), the clear Argument or manifest proof; *al-Qayyim* (18:2), the Maintainer or Rightly-directing; *al-Muhaimin* (5:48), the Guardian (of previous revelation); *al-Nūr* (7:157), the Light; *al-Haqq* (17:81), the Truth; *Ḥabl-Allāh* (3:103), the Covenant of Allāh. In addition to these, many qualifying epithets are applied to the Holy Book, such as *al-Mubīn* (12:1), one that makes manifest; *al-Karīm* (56:77), the Bounteous; *al-Majīd* (50:1), the Glorious; *al-Ḥakīm* (36:2), full of Wisdom; *al-'Azīz* (41:41), the Mighty or Invincible; *al-Mukarramah* (80:13), the Honoured; *al-Marfū'ah* (80:14), the Exalted; *al-Muṭahharah* (80:14), the Purified; *al-'Ajab* (72:1), the Wonderful; *Mubārak* (6:92), Blessed; and *Muṣaddiq* (6:92), confirming the truth of previous revelation.

### **Divisions.**

The Holy Qur'ān is divided into 114 chapters, each of which is called a *sūrah* (2:23). The word *sūrah* means literally *eminence* or *high degree*, and also *any step of a structure*, and in the Book itself it is applied to a chapter of the Qur'ān either

because of its eminence or because each chapter is, as it were, a distinct degree or step in the whole Book, which is thus compared to a structure. The chapters of the Holy Qur'ān are of varying length, the largest comprising fully one twelfth of the entire Book — 286 verses — and the smallest containing only three verses. Each chapter is, however, complete in itself and is, therefore, called a book, and the whole of the Qur'ān is said to contain many books: “Pure pages wherein are (all) right books” (98:2, 3). The longer chapters are divided into *rukū's* or sections, each section generally dealing with one subject, the different sections being interrelated. Again, each section contains a number of *āyahs* or verses. The word *āyah* means, originally, an *apparent sign or mark* and, in this sense, it comes to mean a *miracle*, but it also signifies a *communication or a message from God* and is applied as such to a verse of the Holy Qur'ān as well as to a revelation or a law. Each chapter, with the exception of the concluding 35 chapters, is divided into sections, the largest number of sections in a chapter being 40; and each section, as also each single-section chapter, is divided into a number of verses. The total number of verses in the Holy Qur'ān is 6237, or 6350, if we add to each chapter the common opening verse of *Bismillāh*. For the purposes of recitation, the Holy Qur'ān is divided into 30 parts of equal length, each called a *juz'*, to enable the reciter to complete its recitation in one month, every part being again sub-divided into four parts. Another division of the Book, traceable to the Prophet himself, is into seven *manzils* or portions to enable the reciter to complete its recitation in seven days. These divisions, however, have nothing to do with the subject-matter of the Qur'ān.

#### **Revealed piecemeal but collected and arranged from the first.**

The Qur'ān was revealed piecemeal (25:32) during a period of 23 years, the shorter chapters generally, and some of the larger ones, being revealed entire and at one time, while the revelation of the majority of the larger chapters and some of the shorter chapters extended over many years. The practice was, as will be shown later on, that when a chapter was revealed in parts, the Holy Prophet specified, under Divine guidance, the place of the verse revealed, and thus the arrangement of verses in each chapter was entirely his work. Similarly, later on when a considerable portion had been revealed, the arrangement of the chapters was also the work of the Holy Prophet himself. It is in one of the earliest revelations that the Holy Qur'ān speaks of its collection as well as its revelation as being a part of the Divine scheme: “Surely on Us rests the collecting of it and the reciting of it” (75:17). The collection of the Holy Qur'ān — which means the arrangement of its verses and chapters — was, therefore, a work which was performed by the Holy Prophet himself under Divine guidance, and it is a mistake to think that either Abū Bakr or 'Uthmān was the collector of the Qur'ān, though both of them did important work in connection with the dissemination of the written copies of the sacred text. Abū Bakr made the first complete written copy, by arranging the manuscripts written in the time of the Holy Prophet, in the order of the oral recitation of the Prophet's time. 'Uthmān's work, on the other hand, was only the ordering of copies to be made from the written manuscript of Abū Bakr's time and the placing of these copies in the various centres of Islamic learning, so that those who wrote the Holy Qur'ān might be able to follow the standard copy. The text of the Holy Qur'ān has thus been safeguarded from all alterations or corruptions in accordance with the Divine promise contained in one of the earliest revelations: “Surely We have revealed the Reminder, and surely We are its Guardian” (15:9). The subject of the purity of the text of the Holy Qur'ān has been fully discussed further on.

**Makkan and Madinan Revelations.**

Another division of the Holy Book concerns the Makkan and Madinan revelations. Of the 23 years over which the revelation of the entire Book is spread, 13 years were passed by the Holy Prophet at Makkah and 10 were passed at Madinah, to which city he had to flee for the safety of his own life and the lives of his followers. Of the entire number of chapters, 93 were revealed at Makkah and 21 were revealed at Madinah, but the 110th chapter, though belonging to the Madinah period, was revealed at Makkah during the well-known farewell pilgrimage. The Madinan chapters, being generally longer, contain really about a third of the entire Qur'ān. In arrangement, the Makkan revelation is intermixed with the Madinan revelation. Thus the Holy Qur'ān opens with a Makkan revelation which is entitled the "Opening", and is followed by four chapters revealed at Madinah, which take up over one fifth of the whole Book. Then follow alternately Makkan and Madinan revelations.

As regards the dates of the revelation of the various Makkan chapters, it is difficult to assign a particular year to a particular chapter, except in rare cases, but broadly they may be divided into three groups: those revealed in the early Makkan period, i.e., during the first five years; those revealed in the middle Makkan period, i.e., from the sixth to the tenth year; and those revealed during the late Makkan period, i.e., from the 11th year to the Flight (*Hijrah*). The dates of the Madinan chapters, on the other hand, are tolerably certain and definite, but in this case the difficulty is that the revelation of the longer chapters extended over lengthy periods, and a chapter which undoubtedly belongs to the earliest days at Madinah sometimes contains verses which were revealed in the closing days of the Holy Prophet's life.

Subject to the remarks made above, the following dates may approximately be assigned to the different chapters or groups of chapters:

Early Makkan period .....	60 chapters:	1, 17–21, 50–56, 67–109, 111–114.
Middle Makkan period .....	17 chapters:	29–32, 34–39, 40–46.
Late Makkan period .....	15 chapters:	6, 7, 10–16, 22, 23, 25–28.
A.H. 1–2 .....	6 chapters:	2, 8, 47, 61, 62, 64.
A.H. 3–4 .....	3 chapters:	3, 58, 59.
A.H. 5–8 .....	9 chapters:	4, 5, 24, 33, 48, 57, 60, 63, 65.
A.H. 9–10 .....	4 chapters:	9, 49, 66, 110.

**Chronological order.**

The first five verses of the 96th chapter were undoubtedly the first revelation, and these were equally certainly followed by the first part of the 74th chapter, which again was, in all probability, followed by the first chapter, after which came the first part of the 73rd chapter. Beyond this, it is impossible to give a tolerably certain order. The attempt to give a chronological order is an undoubted failure, as even the shorter chapters were not revealed entire. For instance, chronological order would place the 96th chapter first, while, as a matter of fact, every historian of Islām knows that only the first five verses were revealed first, vv. 6–19 coming long afterwards, when persecution of the Prophet had actually begun, as is made clear by vv. 9, 10, which speak of the Prophet being prohibited from saying his prayers, and must be referred to about the time when Arqam's house was chosen for saying prayers, an event belonging to the fourth year of the Call. If, then, we are confronted with such a serious difficulty in giving the first place to a chapter with which the

revelation of the Holy Qur'ān undoubtedly began, what about the later chapters, and especially the longer ones? Take the second chapter in the present order as another example. There is not the least doubt that its revelation began in the first or, at the latest, in the second year of the Hijrah, but it is equally certain that it contains verses which were revealed in 10 A.H. A chronological order of the different chapters is, therefore, an impossibility, and all that we can say with tolerable certainty is that the greater part of a certain chapter was revealed during a certain period, and this is my reason for assigning particular periods to particular chapters.

### **Makkan and Madinan Revelations intermingled in the final arrangement.**

The first thing that strikes us in the present arrangement is the intermingling of Makkan and Madinan revelations. Surely there must have been some reason underlying this arrangement and to discover this we must find the chief features which distinguish the Makkan from the Madinan revelations. A contrast of the two makes it clear that, while the Makkan revelations grounded the Muslims in faith in God, the Madinan revelation was meant to translate the faith into action. It is true that exhortations for good and noble deeds are met with in the Makkan revelations and that faith is still shown in the Madinan revelations to be the foundation on which the structure of deeds should be built, but, in the main, stress is laid in the former on faith in an Omnipresent and Omnipotent God Who requites every good and evil deed, while the latter deals chiefly with what is good and what is evil; in other words, with the details of the law. Another feature distinguishing the two revelations is that, while the Makkan revelation is generally prophetic, the revelation that came down at Madinah deals with the fulfilment of prophecy. Again, if the Makkan revelation shows how true happiness of mind may be sought in communion with God, the Madinan revelation points out how man's dealing with man may be a source of bliss and comfort to him. Hence, a scientific arrangement of the Holy Qur'ān could be made to rest only on the intermingling of the two revelations — the intermingling of faith with deeds, of prophecy with the fulfilment of prophecy, of Divine communion with man's relation to and treatment of man.

### **A cursory view of the present arrangement.**

A detailed view of the order in which the chapters follow one another shows the truth of the remarks made above; and for this the reader is referred to the introductory notes prefacing each chapter. A brief outline, however, may be given here.

The Holy Book is prefaced with a short Makkan chapter which, in its seven short verses, contains the essence of the whole of the Qur'ān, and teaches a prayer which is admittedly the most beautiful of all prayers taught by any religion, and which sets before man an ideal greater than any other which can be conceived. If the preface is the quintessence of the Qur'ān and places before man the highest ideal, the commencement of the Book is equally scientific, for the second chapter opens with a clear statement as to its aims and objects. The first four chapters all belong to the Madinan revelation and, occupying as they do over a fifth of the whole Qur'ān, deal in detail with the teachings of Islām, comparing them with the previously existing teachings, particularly Jewish and Christian, which had by that time become the prototypes of error in religion, the former laying too much stress on outward ritual, while utterly neglecting the spirit, and the latter condemning law itself, trusting to faith in Christ alone. The greater part of Islamic law dealing with the individual, home and civic life of man is contained in these four chapters.

These are followed by two of the longest Makkan chapters, the first of which deals in detail with the doctrine of Divine Unity, and the second with that of prophethood. This latter chapter illustrates the doctrine of prophethood with reference to the histories of some well-known prophets. These two are again followed by two Madinan chapters, which fit in with the context, as they show how opposition to Truth as revealed to the Holy Prophet was dealt with: the first of these — the 8th — deals with their discomfiture in the first struggle in the battle of Badr and the second — the 9th — with their final vanquishment.

Then follows a group of seven Makkan chapters, the *Alif Lām Rā* group, dealing with the truth of the Holy Prophet's revelations, internal evidence, evidence from man's nature, from the histories of the previous prophets and from external nature, being produced to establish that truth. Another group of five Makkan chapters follows it, all dealing with the greatness to which Islām was destined to rise, with special reference to Jewish history in ch. 17, to Christian history and doctrine in ch. 18 and ch. 19, to the history of Moses in ch. 20, and to the history of prophets in general and their deliverance in ch. 21. Two more Makkan chapters follow, the first showing that the Prophet's cause must triumph, though the faithful would be required to make great sacrifices for the cause of Truth, and the second showing that the foundation on which the greatness of the Muslim nation rested was moral, not material. A Madinan chapter — the 24th — is then brought in to show how the prophecies of the Makkan revelations were being brought to fulfilment by the establishment of a Muslim kingdom and the dissemination of the spiritual light of Islām. The 25th chapter is again a Makkan revelation, which shows, as its name indicates, that the distinction between truth and falsehood which the Holy Qur'ān was to establish was witnessed in the lives of the Companions of the Holy Prophet.

A group of three more Makkan chapters, the *Ṭā Sim* group, is then introduced, prophesying the ultimate triumph of the Holy Prophet with special reference to the triumph of Moses over a powerful enemy who was bent upon destroying the Israelites. Another group of four Makkan chapters, the *Alif Lām Mim* group, follows and shows that the state of helplessness and utter weakness in which the Muslims were at the time would soon be changed. A Madinan chapter — the 33rd — is again inserted showing how the combined forces of the enemies of Islām in the Battle of the Allies failed to crush Islām. The utmost simplicity of the Holy Prophet's domestic life is here brought in to show that the attractions of this world, such as wealth or kingdom, had no charm for him, notwithstanding that he then ruled Arabia, and that thenceforward he was a model for all nations and for all ages, no prophet being needed after him, and emphasizing that it was only short-sighted carpers who found fault with one who led a life of such unexampled purity and simplicity. A group of six Makkan chapters follows, showing that the rise and fall of nations are brought about by the good and evil which they do, and that nations which rise to greatness can retain their eminent position only if they are not ungrateful for the favours conferred upon them.

The next group of seven Makkan chapters is known as the *Hā Mim* group, and it lays stress on the fact that Truth must overcome opposition and that no temporal power with all the temporal resources at its back can annihilate Truth. This is followed by a group of three Madinan chapters; the 47th, which was revealed in the first year of the Hijrah, showing that those who had accepted the truth as revealed to the Holy Prophet, though in great distress, would soon have their condition ameliorated; the next, which belongs to the sixth year of the Hijrah, predicting in the clearest words the final triumph of Islām over all the religions of the world;

and the last of this group, which was revealed towards the close of the Holy Prophet's life, enjoining on the Muslims the duty of respect for one another. From the 50th to the 56th, is another group of seven Makkān chapters pointing out the great spiritual awakening which was to be brought about by the Holy Qur'ān. Then comes the last group of Madīnan revelations, ten chapters in all, from the 57th to the 66th, which supplement what has already been said in the previous Madīnan chapters, the last of these, the 65th and 66th, being clearly a supplement to the second chapter, *al-Baqarah*, and dealing with the subject of divorce and temporary separation.

Then follow 48 short Makkān chapters, showing how men and nations can rise to eminence by following the Truth which is revealed in the Holy Qur'ān, and how they suffer loss by rejecting the Truth. The Holy Book ends with a concise but clear declaration of Divine Unity, in chapter 112; the last two chapters tell a man how to seek refuge in Divine protection against all kinds of mischief.

## 2. WORLD'S GREATEST SPIRITUAL FORCE

### **Object to bring humanity to perfection.**

The Holy Qur'ān claims to be the greatest spiritual force which is ultimately destined to bring the whole of humanity to perfection. Anyone who will simply cast a glance at its opening and closing verses will not fail to see this. It opens thus:

“Praise be to Allāh, the Nourisher of the worlds to perfection (‘Lord’ of the worlds)” (1:1).

And it ends thus:

“Say: I seek refuge with the Nourisher of mankind to perfection (‘Lord’ of men)” (114:1).

And this is the theme of the Holy Book throughout. It calls itself *al-Rūh* (42:52) or *the Spirit* which gives life to humanity, and time and again compares itself to the water which gives life to a dead earth:

“And of His signs is this, that thou seest the earth still, but when We send down water thereon, it stirs and swells. He Who gives it life is surely the Giver of life to the dead” (41:39).

This giving of life to the dead earth is a constant theme of the Qur'ān and it is full of repeated assurances that the dead earth will be raised to life spiritual:

“Know that Allāh gives life to the earth after its death. Indeed, We have made the signs clear for you that you may understand” (57:17).

It calls itself *Shifā'* or *Healing* (10:57) to show that it heals all the spiritual diseases of humanity. It calls itself *al-Dhīkr* or *a source of eminence* to mankind (15:9; see 21:10a, 43:5a). It calls itself *al-Nūr* or *the Light* (7:157) which will ultimately dispel all darkness from the surface of the earth. It calls itself *al-Haqq* or *the Truth* (17:81) which will ultimately take hold of the minds of men and before which falsehood will vanish. It calls itself *al-Hudā* or *the Guidance* (72:13) which will make men ultimately attain the goal of life.

### **A spiritual force which will ultimately overcome all.**

It goes further and lays claim to the fact that it is the only spiritual force which will ultimately conquer the whole world and that the whole of humanity cannot produce a force like it:

“And if there could be a Qur'ān with which the mountains were made to pass away, or the earth were cloven asunder, or the dead were made to speak — nay, the commandment is wholly Allāh's” (13:31).

“Had We sent down this Qur'ān on a mountain, thou wouldst certainly have seen it falling down, splitting asunder” (59:21).

All opposition to it was to be swept away:

“Leave Me and the deniers, possessors of plenty, and respite them a little” (73:11).

Not the whole world could produce a book like it:

“If men and jinn should combine together to bring the like of this Qur’ān, they could not bring the like of it, though some of them were aiders of others” (17:88).

“And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a chapter like it, and call on your helpers besides Allāh, if you are truthful” (2:23).

And it is repeated thrice that the Qur’ān was ultimately to prevail over the whole world:

“He it is Who has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the Religion of Truth that He may make it prevail over all religions” (61:9; 48:28; 9:33).

### **Unparalleled transformation wrought by the Qur’ān.**

In fact, the transformation wrought by the Holy Qur’ān is unparalleled in the history of the world. No other reformer brought about such an entire change in the lives of a whole nation in his lifetime. The Qur’ān found the Arabs worshippers of idols, stones, trees, heaps of sand, and yet, within less than a quarter of a century, the worship of the One God ruled the whole country, idolatry being wiped out from one end to the other. It swept away all superstitions and gave in their place the most rational religion that the world could imagine. The Arab who prided himself in his ignorance had, as if by a magician’s wand, become the lover of knowledge, drinking deep at every fountain of learning to which he could get access. This was the direct effect of the teachings of the Qur’ān, which not only appealed to reason, ever and anon, but declared man’s thirst for knowledge to be insatiable, when it directed the Prophet himself to pray: “O my Lord, increase me in knowledge” (20:114). Not only had the Qur’ān swept away the deep vices and barefaced immorality of the Arab; it had also inspired him with a burning desire for the best and noblest deeds in the service of humanity. The burying alive of the daughter, the marriage with a step-mother, and loose sex relations had given place to equal respect for the offspring, whether male or female, to equal rights of inheritance for father and mother, son and daughter, brother and sister, husband and wife, to the chastest relations of sex and to placing the highest value on sexual morality and the chastity of woman. Drunkenness, to which Arabia had been addicted from time immemorial, disappeared so entirely that the very goblets and the vessels which were used for drinking and keeping wine could no more be found and, greatest of all, from an Arabia, the various elements of which were so constantly at war with one another that the whole country was about to perish, being “on the brink of a pit of fire” (3:103), as the Qur’ān so beautifully and so tersely puts it — from an Arabia full of these jarring and warring elements, the Qur’ān welded together a nation, a united nation full of life and vigour, before whose onward march the greatest kingdoms of the world crumbled as if they were but toys before the reality of the new faith. No faith ever imparted such a new life to its votaries on such a wide scale — a life affecting all branches of human activity; a transformation of the individual, of the family, of the society, of the nation, of the country; an awakening material as well as moral, intellectual as well as spiritual. The Qur’ān effected a transformation of humanity from the lowest depths of degradation to the highest pinnacle of civilization within an incredibly short time where centuries of reformation work had proved fruitless. To its unparalleled nature, testimony is borne by the non-Muslim, sometimes anti-Muslim, historian. Here are a few instances:

“From time beyond memory, Mecca and the whole Peninsula had been steeped in spiritual torpor. The slight and transient influences of Judaism, Christianity, or philosophical inquiry upon the Arab mind had been but as the ruffling here and there of the surface of a quiet lake; all remained still and motionless below. The people were sunk in superstition, cruelty and vice ... Their religion was a gross idolatry; and their faith the dark superstitious dread of unseen things ... Thirteen years before the Hejira, Mecca lay lifeless in this debased state. What a change had these thirteen years now produced! ... Jewish truth had long sounded in the ears of the men of Medina; but it was not until they heard the spirit-stirring strains of the Arabian Prophet that they too awoke from their slumber, and sprang suddenly into a new and earnest life” (*Muir’s Life of Mahomet*, ch. vii).

“A more disunited people it would be hard to find, till suddenly, the miracle took place! A man arose who, by his personality and by his claim to direct Divine guidance, actually brought about the impossible — namely, the union of all these warring factions” (*The Ins and Outs of Mesopotamia*, p. 99).

“And yet we may truly say that no history can boast events that strike the imagination in a more lively manner, or can be more surprising in themselves, than those we meet with in the lives of the first Muslims; whether we consider the Great Chief, or his ministers, the most illustrious of men; or whether we take an account of the manners of the several countries he conquered; or observe the courage, virtue, and sentiments that equally prevailed among his generals and soldiers” (*The Life of Mahomet* by the Count of Boulainvilliers, English Translation, p. 5).

“That the best of Arab writers has never succeeded in producing anything equal in merit to the Qur’ān itself is not surprising” (Palmer’s Introduction to *English Translation of the Quran*, p. iv).

“It is the one miracle claimed by Muhammad — his standing miracle, he called it — and a miracle indeed it is” (Bosworth Smith, *Mohammed*, p. 290).

“Never has a people been led more rapidly to civilization, such as it was, than were the Arabs through Islam” (*New Researches*, by H. Hirschfeld, p. 5).

“The Quran is unapproachable as regards convincing power, eloquence, and even composition” (*Ibid.*, p. 8).

“And to it was also indirectly due the marvellous development of all branches of science in the Moslem world” (*Ibid.*, p. 9).

“Here, therefore, its merits as a literary production should, perhaps, not be measured by some preconceived maxims of subjective and aesthetic taste, but by the effects which it produced in Muhammad’s contemporaries and fellow-countrymen. If it spoke so powerfully and convincingly to the hearts of his hearers as to weld hitherto centrifugal and antagonistic elements into one compact and well-organized body, animated by ideas far beyond those which had until now ruled the

Arabian mind, then its eloquence was perfect, simply because it created a civilized nation out of savage tribes, and shot a fresh woof into the old warp of history” (Dr. Steingass, in Hughes’ *Dictionary of Islam*, art. “Quran”).

### **Two other unique characteristics.**

The marvellous effect produced by the Holy Qur’ān on the minds of those who first came into contact with it, the unparalleled revolution brought about in the world, the uplift of not one but many nations from the depth of degradation to the height of civilization is, however, not the only characteristic which establishes its claim to uniqueness. It possesses two other characteristics equally unique — the wealth of ideas and the beauty of style — and these two combined with the effect it produced are the three things which raise the Qur’ān to an eminence to which no other book has ever aspired and which make an imitation of it impossible. In fact, the effect produced by the Holy Qur’ān is not a magical mystery. It was merely the greatness and reasonableness of the ideas clothed in the best of forms that appealed to the heart of man and, taking deep root in it, became the driving power to the great goal of life. A blaze of light was cast on all the great questions which had hitherto puzzled man, and the way was thus cleared for onward march and progress. Hence it is, that one of the names by which the Holy Book speaks of itself is *al-Burhān*, or the Clear Argument, showing that argument was the weapon which it used to conquer the heart of man; and, as it appealed to reason and not to sentiment, its conquests were so far-reaching and permanent that it swept away all mysteries and dispelled all darkness. It is also called *al-Bayān*, or the Explanation, indicating that it had removed all obscurities in religious problems. It claimed not only to have perfected religion (5:3), and thus to have stated all religious truths needed for the moral and spiritual advancement of man, but also to have dealt with all objections to its truth: “And they cannot bring thee a question, but We have brought thee the truth and the best explanation” (25:33).

### **Style and Diction.**

A few more words on the outer garb in which the grand life-giving ideas of the Qur’ān are clothed and I shall have done with this subject. The style and diction of the Qur’ān have been universally praised. In the introduction to his translation of the Holy Qur’ān, Sale says:

“The Koran is universally allowed to be written with the utmost elegance and purity of language in the dialect of the tribe of the Koreish, the most noble and polite of all the Arabians, but with some mixture, though very rare, of other dialects. It is confessedly the standard of the Arabic tongue.”

And again:

“The style of the Koran is generally beautiful and fluent ... and in many places, especially where the majesty and the attributes of God are described, sublime and magnificent.”

What, however, establishes the Qur’ān’s claim to uniqueness even in the outward form, apart from its subject and the effect produced, is the permanent hold that it has kept on the Arabic language itself, the fact that it remains forever the standard by which the beauty of style and diction may be judged in Arabic

literature. No other book in the world can be credited with even the achievement of keeping alive a language for thirteen centuries; the Qur'ān has done this, attaining to the eminence of being the standard of eloquence for so long, and of retaining that position while the nation speaking it emerged from oblivion to become the leader of civilization in the world, leaving its home to settle in far distant lands where Arabic became either the spoken language of the masses or at least their literary language. Such is the incredible achievement of the Holy Qur'ān. It is true that the Arabs had a literary language before the Qur'ān — the language of poetry, which, notwithstanding slight dialectic differences, conformed to one standard — but the scope of that poetry was very limited. Their most eloquent themes rarely went beyond the praise of wine or woman and horse or sword. In the condition in which Arabic was before the advent of Islām, it would soon have shared the fate of the sister languages of the Semitic group. It was the Qur'ān which made it the language of a civilized world from the Oxus to the Atlantic. Whatever changes spoken Arabic, like any other language, may have undergone, literary Arabic is to this day the Arabic of the Qur'ān, and the Qur'ān remains its one masterpiece.

### 3. RELATION TO EARLIER SCRIPTURES

#### **Previous Scriptures recognized.**

The Holy Qur'ān requires a belief not only in its own truth but also in the truth of previous scriptures delivered to the prophets of different nations of the world. At its commencement, it lays down clearly:

“And (those) who believe in that which has been revealed to thee and that which was revealed before thee” (2:4).

The universality of what was revealed before is clearly accepted:

“And there is not a people but a warner has gone among them” (35:24).

“And for every nation there is a messenger” (10:47).

Lest anyone should be misled by the names of a few prophets mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān, it is stated:

“And certainly We sent messengers before thee — of them are those We have mentioned to thee and of them are those We have not mentioned to thee” (40:78; 4:164).

Thus the Holy Qur'ān accepts the truth of the sacred books of the world, and hence it is again and again spoken of as a Book verifying that which is before it. The basis of the relation in which the Holy Qur'ān stands to other scriptures is, therefore, that they are all members of one family; they all have a Divine origin.

#### **Guardian of previous scriptures.**

The Verifier of the sacred books of the world, however, occupies a unique position among them. The relation in which the Holy Qur'ān stands to earlier scriptures is thus lucidly set forth by the Holy Book itself:

“And We have revealed to thee the Book with the truth, verifying that which is before it of the Book and a guardian over it” (5:48).

The Qur'ān is thus not only a verifier of the sacred books of all nations as stated above; it is also a guardian over them. In other words, it guards the original teachings of the prophets of God, for, as elsewhere stated, those teachings had undergone alterations, and only a revelation from God could separate the pure Divine teaching from the mass of error which had grown around it. This was the work done by the Holy Qur'ān, and hence it is called a guardian over the earlier scriptures. Of all the scriptures, it has particularly chosen the Gospels to show in what ways erroneous doctrines had almost entirely suppressed the truth preached by a prophet of God. They seem, moreover, to have been chosen as an example, for how could earlier scriptures escape alterations, if the teachings of so recent a prophet as Jesus Christ could not be handed over intact to posterity?

#### **The Qur'ān as a judge in existing differences.**

The Holy Qur'ān further claims that it came as a judge to decide the differences between the various religions:

“We certainly sent (messengers) to nations before thee, ... And We have not revealed to thee the Book except that thou mayest make clear to them that wherein they differ” (16:63, 64).

As already stated, the Qur’ān proclaimed that prophets had been raised in every nation, and, therefore, that every nation had received guidance from God, yet nation differed from nation even in the essentials of faith. The position of the Holy Qur’ān was, therefore, essentially that of a judge deciding between these various claimants.

### **It explains all obscurities.**

The most important point to be borne in mind in connection with the relation of the Holy Qur’ān to the earlier scriptures is that it makes clear what is obscure in them and explains fully what is there stated briefly. Revelation, according to the Holy Qur’ān, is not only universal but also progressive, and it attains perfection in the Final Revelation. A revelation was granted to each nation according to its requirements, and in each age in accordance with the capacity of the people of that age. As the human brain became more and more developed, more and more light was cast by revelation on matters relating to the unseen, on the existence and attributes of the Divine Being, on the nature of revelation from Him, on the requital of good and evil, on life after death, and on paradise and hell. It is for this reason that the Holy Qur’ān is again and again called a Book “that makes manifest”. It shed complete light on the essentials of the faith and made manifest what had hitherto of necessity remained obscure.

### **Perfect Revelation of Divine Will.**

Further, as a result of what has been said above, the Holy Qur’ān claims that it came as a perfect revelation of Divine will:

“This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favour to you and chosen for you Islām as a religion” (5:3).

The finality of the Quranic revelation is, therefore, based on its perfection. New scriptures were revealed as long as they were needed, but when perfect light was cast on all essentials of religion in the Holy Qur’ān, no prophet was needed after Muḥammad. Six hundred years before him, Jesus Christ, who was the last among these national prophets — the Holy Prophet Muḥammad being the prophet not of one nation but of the whole world — had declared in plain words that he could not guide the world to Perfect Truth, because the world at that stage was not in a fit condition to receive that truth:

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:12, 13).

Among the scriptures of the world the Holy Qur’ān, therefore, occupies a unique position as a perfect revelation of the Divine will.

### **A correct history.**

The idea that the Qur’ān has merely borrowed something from the earlier scriptures, especially from the Torah and the Gospels, must be examined in the light of facts. That the Qur’ān deals with the religious topics which are dealt with in those books goes without saying; that it relates the history of some of the prophets whose history is also related in the Bible is also a fact, but to say that it borrows

from those books is entirely wrong. Take first the essentials of religion as they are dealt with in the Holy Qur'ān. Neither the Old nor the New Testament, nor any other sacred book, makes any approach to the grand and noble truths that find expression in the Holy Qur'ān. Take next the histories of the prophets, as they are narrated in the Bible and as they are narrated in the Holy Qur'ān, and you will find that the latter corrects the errors of the former as it does in the matter of religious doctrines. The Bible speaks of many of the prophets of God as committing the most heinous sins; it speaks of Abraham as telling lies and casting away Hagar and her son; it speaks of Lot as committing incest with his own daughters; it speaks of Aaron as making a calf for worship and leading the Israelites to its worship; it speaks of David as committing adultery with Uriah's wife; it speaks of Solomon as worshipping idols; but the Holy Qur'ān accepts none of these statements, definitely rejects most of them and clears these prophets of the false charges against them. The unlearned Prophet of Arabia swept away the errors which were a blot on the face of prophethood.

## 4. LIBERAL VIEW OF OTHER RELIGIONS

### **Faith in all prophets.**

There is a very general and very deep-rooted misconception that the Qur'ān preaches intolerance, and that Muḥammad preached his faith with the sword in one hand and the Qur'ān in the other. Misrepresentation could go no further. The basic principle of Islām, a faith in all the prophets of the world, is enough to give the lie to this allegation. The great and liberal mind that preached not only love and respect for the founders of the great religions of the world but much more than that, faith in them, could not shrink to the narrowness of intolerance for those very religions. Tolerance is not, in fact, the word that can sufficiently indicate the breadth of the attitude of Islām towards other religions. It preaches equal love for all, equal respect for all, and equal faith in all.

### **No Compulsion in Religion.**

Again, intolerance could not be ascribed to a book which altogether excludes compulsion from the sphere of religion. "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256), it lays down in the clearest words. In fact, the Holy Qur'ān is full of statements showing that belief in this or that religion is a person's own concern, and that he is given the choice of adopting one way or another: that, if he accepts truth, it is for his own good, and that, if he sticks to error, it is to his own detriment. I give below a few of these quotations:

"We have truly shown him the way; he may be thankful or unthankful" (76:3).

"The Truth is from your Lord; so let him who please believe and let him who please disbelieve" (18:29).

"Clear proofs have indeed come to you from your Lord: so whoever sees, it is for his own good; and whoever is blind, it is to his own harm" (6:104).

"If you do good, you do good for your own souls. And if you do evil, it is for them" (17:7).

### **Why fighting was allowed.**

The Muslims were allowed to fight indeed, but what was the object? Not to compel the unbelievers to accept Islām, for it was against all the broad principles in which they had hitherto been brought up. No, it was to establish religious freedom, to stop all religious persecution, to protect the houses of worship of all religions, mosques among them. Here are a few quotations:

"And if Allāh did not repel some people by others, cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques in which Allāh's name is much remembered, would have been pulled down" (22:40).

"And fight them until there is no persecution, and religion is only for Allāh" (2:193).

“And fight them until there is no more persecution, and all religions for Allāh” (8:39).

Under what conditions was the permission to fight given to the Muslims? Every student of Islamic history knows that the Holy Prophet and his companions were subjected to the severest persecution, as Islām began to gain ground at Makkah; over a hundred of them fled to Abyssinia, but persecution grew still more relentless. Ultimately, the Muslims had to take refuge in Madīnah, but they were not left alone even there, and the sword was taken up by the enemy to annihilate Islām and the Muslims. The Qurʾān bears express testimony to this:

“Permission (to fight) is given to those on whom war is made, because they are oppressed. And Allāh is able to assist them — those who are driven from their homes without a just cause except that they say: Our Lord is Allāh” (22:39, 40).

Later, the express condition was laid down:

“And fight in the way of Allāh against those who fight against you, but be not aggressive. Surely Allāh loves not the aggressors” (2:190).

The Qurʾān, therefore, allowed fighting only to save a persecuted community from powerful oppressors, and hence the condition was laid down that fighting was to be stopped as soon as persecution ceased:

“But if they desist, then surely Allāh is Forgiving, Merciful. And fight them until there is no persecution” (2:192, 193).

If the enemy offered peace, peace was to be accepted, though the enemy’s intention might be only to deceive the Muslims:

“And if they incline to peace, incline thou also to it, and trust in Allāh. Surely He is the Hearer, the Knower. And if they intend to deceive thee, then surely Allāh is sufficient for thee” (8:61, 62).

The Holy Prophet made treaties of peace with his enemies; one such treaty brought about the famous truce of Ḥudaibiyah, the terms of which were not only disadvantageous, but also humiliating to the Muslims. According to the terms of this treaty “if an unbeliever, being converted to Islām, went over to the Muslims, he was to be returned, but if a Muslim went over to the unbelievers, he was not to be given back to the Muslims”. This clause of the treaty cuts at the root of all allegations of the use of force by the Holy Prophet. It also shows the strong conviction of the Holy Prophet that neither would Muslims go back to unbelief, nor would the new converts to Islām be deterred from embracing Islām because the Prophet gave them no shelter. And these expectations proved true, for while not a single Muslim deserted Islām, a large number came over to Islām, and, being refused shelter at Madīnah, formed a colony of their own in neutral territory.

It is a mistake to suppose that the conditions related above were abrogated at any time. The condition to fight “against those who fight against you” remained in force to the last. The last expedition led by the Holy Prophet was the famous Tabūk expedition, and every historian of Islām knows that, though the Prophet had marched a very long distance to Tabūk at the head of an army of thirty thousand, yet, when he found that the enemy did not fulfil the condition laid down above, he returned, and did not allow his troops to attack the enemy territory. Nor is there a single direction in the latest revelation on this subject, in ch. 9, *The Immunity*, that

goes against this condition. The opening verse of that chapter speaks expressly of “idolaters with whom you made an agreement”, and then, v. 4, excepts from its purview “those of the idolaters with whom you made an agreement, then they have not failed you in anything and have not backed up anyone against you”, thus showing clearly that the “immunity” related only to such idolatrous tribes as had first made agreements with the Muslims and then, violating them, killed and persecuted the Muslims wherever they found them, as v. 10 says expressly: “They respect neither ties of relationship nor covenant in the case of a believer”. Such people are also spoken of in an earlier revelation: “Those with whom thou makest an agreement, then they break their agreement every time, and they keep not their duty” (8:56). Further on, in ch. 9, the condition of the enemy attacking the Muslims first is plainly repeated: “Will you not fight a people who broke their oaths and aimed at the expulsion of the Messenger, and they attacked you first?” (9:13). So from first to last, the Holy Qur’ān allowed fighting only against those who fought the Muslims first; it allowed expressly only fighting in defence without which the Muslims could not live and it clearly forbade aggressive war. The waging of war on unbelievers to compel them to accept Islām is a myth pure and simple, a thing unknown to the Holy Qur’ān. It was the enemy that waged war on the Muslims to turn them away from their religion, as the Holy Book so clearly asserts: “And they will not cease fighting you until they turn you back from your religion, if they can” (2:217).

#### **Relations of friendship with others.**

It is sometimes asserted that the Qur’ān forbids relations of friendship with the followers of other religions. How could a Book which allows a man to have as his comrade in life a woman following another religion (5:5), say in the same breath that no friendly relations can be had with the followers of other religions? The loving relation of husband and wife is the friendliest of all relations and, when this is expressly permitted, there is not the least reason to suppose that other friendly relations are forbidden. The fact is that, wherever there is prohibition against making friends with other people, it relates only to the people who were at war with the Muslims, and this is plainly stated in the Qur’ān:

“Allāh forbids you not respecting those who fight you not for religion, nor drive you forth from your homes, that you show them kindness and deal with them justly. Surely Allāh loves the doers of justice. Allāh forbids you only respecting those who fight you for religion, and drive you forth from your homes and help (others) in your expulsion, that you make friends of them; and whoever makes friends of them, these are the wrongdoers” (60:8, 9).

#### **No punishment for apostasy.**

Another widely prevailing misconception may also be noted here. It is generally thought that the Qur’ān provides a death sentence for those who desert the religion of Islām. Anyone who takes the trouble to read the Qur’ān will see that there is not the least ground for such a supposition. The Qur’ān speaks repeatedly of people going back to unbelief after believing, but never once does it say that they should be killed or punished. I give here a few quotations:

“And whoever of you turns back from his religion, then he dies while an unbeliever — these it is whose works go for nothing in this world and the Hereafter” (2:217).

“O you who believe, should anyone of you turn back from his religion, then Allāh will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him” (5:54).

“Those who disbelieve after their believing, then increase in disbelief, their repentance is not accepted, and these are they that go astray” (3:90).

On the other hand, the Qur’ān speaks of a plan of the Jews to adopt Islām first and then desert it, thus creating the impression that Islām was not a religion worth having (3:72). Such a scheme could never have entered their heads while living at Madinah, where the Government was Muslim, if apostasy, according to the Quranic law, were punishable with death. The misconception seems to have arisen from the fact that people who, after becoming apostates, joined the enemy, were treated as enemies, or that, where an apostate took the life of a Muslim, he was put to death, not for changing his religion, but for committing murder.

## 5. LIFE AFTER DEATH

### **Death a stage in Evolution.**

Though this subject has been dealt with fully in the footnotes under appropriate verses, I am dealing with it in the Introduction for two reasons. In the first place, because there are many misunderstandings about it, and secondly, because it is in the Holy Qur'ān that full light is cast on this subject and no other sacred Book makes any approach to the wonderful disclosures made in the Qur'ān. According to the Holy Qur'ān, death does not bring the life of man to an end; it only opens the door to a higher form of life. Just as from dust is evolved the man, from the deeds which he does is evolved the higher man. As from the small life-germ grows up the man and he does not lose his individuality for all the changes which he undergoes, so from this man is made the higher man, his attributes being changed and he being made to grow into what he cannot conceive at present.

### **Connection between the two lives.**

The life after death, according to the Holy Qur'ān, opens out a wide vista of progress before man, a new world of advancement before which the progress of this life sinks into insignificance: "And certainly the Hereafter is greater in degrees and greater in excellence" (17:21). The connection between the two lives, the life on this earth and the life after death, is established in the clearest words. Heaven and hell are not places of enjoyment and torture to be met with only after death; they are realities even here. The Hereafter is not a mystery beyond the grave; it begins in this very life. For the good, the heavenly life, and for the wicked, a life in hell, begins even here:

"And for him who fears to stand before his Lord are two Gardens" (55:46).

"O soul that art at rest, return to thy Lord, well-pleased (with Him), well-pleasing (Him), so enter among My servants, and enter My Garden" (89:27-30).

"It is the Fire kindled by Allāh, which rises above the hearts" (104:6, 7).

"And whoever is blind in this (life), he will be blind in the Hereafter" (17:72).

For explanation, see the footnotes under these verses.

### **The Resurrection or the Hour.**

While the life after death is spoken of as a continuation of this life, a particular day is repeatedly mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān, under various names, as the day on which that life finds a complete manifestation. It is generally called *yaum al-qiyāmah* or the day of the great rising or the Resurrection (2:113), and is also spoken of as the day of Decision (77:13), the day of Reckoning (38:26), the day of Judgment (51:12), or the day of Meeting (with God) (40:15), the day of the Gathering together (42:7) etc.

The most frequently occurring word for the Resurrection is *al-Sā'ah*, which originally means *any portion of time*, and is, therefore, generally rendered as *the Hour*. Rāghib, the well-known lexicographer of the Qur'ān, says that there are three *sā'ahs* (hours) in the sense of resurrection, viz., (1) *kubrā* (or *the greater*), which is the rising up of the people for reckoning; (2) *wusṭā* (or *the middle*), which is the passing away of a nation; and (3) *ṣuḡhrā* (or *the minor*), which is the death of the individual. The word is used in all these senses in the Holy Qur'ān. An example of the last occurs in 6:31: "They are losers indeed who reject the meeting with Allāh, until when the hour comes upon them suddenly," where *the hour* clearly stands for the death of the person who gives the lie. As regards the use of the word in the other two senses, it is very frequent, and the two significances are often interchangeable, either sense being applicable.

### Resurrection in this life.

The different words which stand for the Resurrection are in some sense also applicable to this life; the rising of the dead is sometimes their spiritual resurrection which was to be brought about by the preaching of the Holy Prophet; *the day of Decision* also signifies the triumph of Truth and the vanquishment of falsehood; *the day of Reckoning* is equally the reckoning in this life, and so is *the day of Requital*. The law of the requital of good and evil affects this life as much as the next, a complete manifestation taking place when the limitations of the body of clay are removed by death, which thus becomes a starting-point for a new and higher life. It is a law that works every moment and will not come into operation on a particular day; even paradise and hell are spoken of as originating with this life. Hence God is repeatedly described as *Quick in Reckoning* (2:202; 3:19, 199, etc.), meaning that His reckoning is working every moment. Every evil deed leaves its impress on the human mind: "Nay, rather, what they earned is rust upon their hearts" (83:14), so that the consequence follows as soon as a deed is done. Still more plainly: "And We have made every man's actions to cling to his neck, and We shall bring forth to him on the day of Resurrection a book which he will find wide open" (17:13). Thus an action leaves its effect upon man as soon as it is done; only it is not seen by the human eye, but will be palpably manifest in the form of a wide-open book on the day of Resurrection, for the veil which covers the eye now, so that it cannot see the finer things, shall then be removed: "Thou wast indeed heedless of this, but now We have removed from thee thy veil, so thy sight is sharp this day" (50:22). The law of the requital of good and evil is thus working all the time; only the consequences cannot be seen by the physical eye, but the finer senses granted at the Resurrection will see them clearly: "On the day when hidden things are manifested" (86:9).

### The Balance.

The law of the requital of good and evil is a comprehensive one: "So he who does an atom's weight of good will see it. And he who does an atom's weight of evil will see it" (99:7, 8). So every good deed bears fruit, and every evil deed bears an evil consequence, whether the doer is a Muslim or a non-Muslim; but, owing to the preponderance of mercy in Divine nature, good brings tenfold fruit, even seven hundredfold; see 6:160; 2:261; 28:84; 42:30, etc.

A man is judged by the preponderance of good or evil in him and it is in this connection that the setting up of a *mizān*, or a *balance*, is spoken of. The words *wazn* and *mizān*, as used in the Holy Qur'ān in this connection, do not indicate weighing with a pair of scales; it is in the wider sense of fulfilling the requirements

of justice that they are used. For instance, 57:25 speaks of messengers being sent with the Book and the *mizān*, where the *mizān* clearly stands for rules of justice or principles of equity — “that men may conduct themselves with equity”. Again, 55:7 speaks of a *mizān* being set up in nature: “And the heaven, He raised it high, and He set up the *mizān*”. Here the *mizān* stands for justice, according to well-known commentators. A similar measure or balance is spoken of as being set up to judge man, whether it is good that preponderates in him or evil. Here are a few quotations:

“And We will set up a just balance on the day of Resurrection, so no soul will be wronged in the least. And if there be the weight of a grain of mustard seed, We will bring it. And Sufficient are We to take account” (21:47).

“And the judging on that day will be just; so as for those whose good deeds are heavy, they are the successful. And as for those whose good deeds are light, those are they who ruined their souls” (7:8, 9).

### The Book of Deeds.

A few words may be added as to *the book of deeds*. We are told that every action, however great or small, is written down:

“And the book (*kitāb*) is placed, and thou seest the guilty fearing for what is in it, and they say: O woe to us! what a book is this! It leaves out neither a small thing, nor a great one, but numbers them all” (18:49).

“So whoever does good deeds and is a believer, there is no rejection of his effort, and We surely write it down for him” (21:94).

“He utters not a word but there is by him a watcher at hand” (50:18).

“Or do they think that We hear not their secrets and their private counsels? Aye! and Our messengers with them write down” (43:80).

“And surely there are keepers over you, honourable recorders, they know what you do” (82:10–12).

“This is Our record (*kitāb*) that speaks against you with truth. Surely We wrote what you did” (45:29).

Not only has every individual his book of deeds, but even nations are spoken of as having their books of deeds:

“And thou wilt see every nation kneeling down. Every nation will be called to its record (*kitāb*). This day you are requited for what you did” (45:28).

It must, however, be borne in mind that the word *kitāb* (translated as *book* or *record*) or *kataba* (*he wrote*) is used in a very wide sense in the Holy Qur’ān. As Rāghib says, *kitāb* does not always mean a collection of written leaves; it sometimes signifies *the knowledge of God, or His command, or what He has made obligatory*. Nor does *kataba* always signify that he wrote certain words on paper with ink and pen; it also means *he made a thing obligatory, or decreed, ordained, or prescribed a thing*. Let us see now what is meant by the writing of the deeds and the book of deeds. The above quotations show that by the writing of the deeds is meant their preserving and guarding, the angels being called both *keepers* and *recorders*. The following verses throw additional light on this subject:

“And We have made every man’s actions to cling to his neck, and We shall bring forth to him on the day of Resurrection a book which he will find wide open. Read thy book. Thine own soul is sufficient as a reckoner against thee this day” (17:13, 14).

“For him are (angels) guarding the consequences (of his deeds), before him and behind him, who guard him by Allah’s command” (13:11).

“Nay, surely the record of the wicked is in the prison. And what will make thee know what the prison is? It is a written book” (83:7–9).

“Nay, surely the record of the righteous is in the highest places. And what will make thee know what the highest places are? It is a written book” (83:18–20).

The first of these quotations shows that the book of deeds which a man will find on the day of Resurrection is nothing but the effect of the deeds he has done. In the second, it is not what a man does that is spoken of as being guarded, but it is clearly the doer who is guarded, and, reading it with the first quotation, the conclusion is evident that man’s deeds are guarded by the impress which they make upon him. The third and the fourth quotations show that the book or record of deeds is identical with the place where it is kept; in the former, the book of deeds is in a prison and the prison is a written book; in the latter, the book of deeds is in the highest places and the highest places are a written book. The book of deeds is, therefore, within man because the deeds are preserved by the effect which they leave on man. It is said to be in a prison, in one case, because the evil deeds hamper a man’s progress, and keep his faculties for the doing of great and good deeds shut up, as it were, within a prison; and, in the other case, it is said to be in the highest places, because by good deeds the faculties given to man find their highest development. It is quite in consonance with this that we are told that a man himself will make his own account: “Read thy book. Thine own soul is sufficient as a reckoner against thee this day” (17:14). It is sometimes the doer that reads his own book, while on another occasion he invites others to read the same: “Lo! Read my book” (69:19). Such is the doer of good, while the evildoer is made to say: “O would that my book had not been given to me! And I had not known what my account was!” (69:25, 26). That each nation has also a book, as already pointed out, bears out the truth of what has been said here, for the impress of what a people do is equally left on their national life, and nations like individuals are judged by what they do.

### **Paradise.**

The life after death takes two forms: a life in paradise for those in whom the good preponderates over the evil, and a life in hell for those in whom the evil preponderates over the good. The word *paradise* (Ar. *firdaus*) occurs only twice in the Holy Qur’ān — in 18:107 and 23:11. It is the word *Jannah* (Garden) or its plural *Jannāh* that is generally used to indicate the abiding-place of the righteous, who are generally described as those who believe and do good deeds, while their abiding-place is generally said to be Gardens in which rivers flow, the rivers corresponding to faith, and the trees of the Garden corresponding to the good which a man does. The word *Jannah* is derived from *jann*, which means *to conceal a thing so that it is not perceived by the senses*, and *jannah* means *a garden* because its ground is covered by trees. The description of paradise as a garden with rivers flowing in it is, however, only a parable:

“A parable of the Garden which the dutiful are promised: therein are rivers of water” (47:15).

The blessings of paradise cannot be conceived in this life, and are not, therefore, things of this world:

“So no soul knows what refreshment of the eyes is hidden for them: a reward for what they did” (32:17).

An explanation of these words by the Holy Prophet is given in *Bukhārī* as follows: “Allāh says, I have prepared for My righteous servants what no eye has seen and no ear has heard, and what the mind of man has not conceived” (B. 59:8). Therefore paradise and what it contains cannot even be conceived by the mind of man. Ibn ‘Abbās is reported to have said that “nothing that is in paradise resembles anything that is in this world except in name” (RM., vol. 1, p. 172). For instance, the word *zill* (lit., *shade*) occurs very often in the Holy Qur’ān in connection with the blessings of paradise, but a shade is not what is really meant, for there is no sun: “They will see therein neither sun, nor intense cold” (76:13). The word is there, but the significance underlying it is different. According to Rāghib, it stands for *plenty* or *protection*. Such is also *rizq* (*sustenance*) in paradise; it cannot be what sustains the body here; in fact, prayer itself is called a sustenance in 20:131. Nor are the fruits of paradise like the fruits of this life, because these are the fruits of deeds done: “Whenever they are given a portion of the fruit thereof, they will say: This is what was given to us before” (2:25). Evidently the fruits of the deeds are meant here, and not the fruits that the earth grows, because the latter are not given to all the faithful here, while the former are. Similar is the case with the water, the milk, the honey, the cushions, the thrones, the clothes and the adornments of the next life; these descriptions are of the nature of similes as the Qur’ān expressly calls them a *mathal* — simile or parable.

In fact, a little consideration would show that even our ideas of place and time are not applicable to the next life. It is said in the Qur’ān that paradise extends over the whole of the heavens and the earth: “And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a Garden, as wide as the heavens and the earth” (3:133; 57:21); and when the Prophet was asked where hell was, if paradise extends over the whole of the heavens and the earth, he replied: “Where is the night when the day comes?” (RM., vol. 1, p. 670). This shows clearly that paradise and hell are more like two conditions than two places. Again, notwithstanding that the two are poles asunder, the one being the highest of the high and the other the lowest of the low, they are separated only by a wall: “Then a wall, with a door in it, will be raised between them. Within it shall be mercy, and outside of it chastisement” (57:13). Elsewhere, speaking of the inmates of paradise and the inmates of hell, it says: “And between them is a veil” (7:46). Again, a vehement “raging and roaring” of hell-fire is mentioned repeatedly (25:12; 67:7), but those in paradise “will not hear the faintest sound of it” (21:102), while we are told that those in hell shall talk with those in heaven and the two shall hear each other; see 7:44–50. I quote only the concluding verse: “And the companions of the Fire call out to the owners of the Garden: Pour on us some water or some of that which Allāh has provided for you. They say: Surely Allāh has forbidden them both to the disbelievers”. Thus those in paradise shall hear the talk of those in hell, but they shall not hear the roaring of the fire of hell. This shows that hell is a condition which shall be perceived only by those in it, and similar is the case with paradise.

### **Paradise and Hell begin in this life.**

As I have already pointed out, the Holy Qurʾān says that paradise and hell begin in this very life. Read the following verses along with those already quoted:

“And give good news to those who believe and do good deeds, that for them are Gardens in which rivers flow. Whenever they are given a portion of the fruit thereof, they will say: This is what was given to us before; and they are given the like of it” (2:25).

“For them is a known sustenance” (37:41).

“And He will make them enter the Garden, which He has made known to them” (47:6).

The first of these verses shows that the fruits which the righteous shall find in paradise shall be the same as were given to them in this life; the second and the third show that the sustenance which shall be given to them in paradise is made known to them in this very life. It is clear that the sustenance and the fruits spoken of here are not those which the righteous have in common with the evildoers, the fruits and the sustenance that the earth grows, which is needed for the support of the body of both. The things meant are those which are granted specially to the righteous, to which the evildoers have no access; in fact, they remain quite blind to them in this life and are, therefore, deprived of them in the Hereafter: “And whoever is blind in this (world) he will also be blind in the Hereafter” (17:72). These are the fruits of good deeds and the sustenance which the righteous find in the remembrance of God; see further 20:130, 131.

It is in accordance with this that the soul that has found rest in God is admitted to paradise in this life: “O soul that art at rest, return to thy Lord, well-pleased (with Him), well-pleasing (Him), so enter among My servants, and enter My Garden” (89:27–30).

### **Highest bliss of Paradise.**

It is quite in accordance with this conclusion that we find that the highest bliss of paradise is plainly stated to be the pleasure of God, the greatest spiritual blessing which the righteous strive for in this life, and by attaining which they enter into paradise in this very life, as has just been shown:

“Allāh has promised to the believers, men and women, Gardens wherein flow rivers, to abide therein, and goodly dwellings in Gardens of perpetual abode. And greatest of all is Allāh’s goodly pleasure. That is the grand achievement” (9:72).

Those in paradise shall be occupied with and find delight in the praise of God and in His glorification; in what is declared to be a spiritual sustenance for the righteous in this life (20:131):

“Their cry therein will be, Glory to Thee, O Allāh! and their greeting, Peace! And the last of their cry will be, Praise be to Allāh, the Lord of the worlds!” (10:10).

There is no grief, fatigue or toil therein, and the heart is purified of all rancour and jealousy, peace and security reigning on all sides:

“Surely those who keep their duty are in Gardens and fountains. Enter them in peace, secure. And We shall root out whatever of rancour is in

their breasts — as brethren on raised couches, face to face. Toil afflicts them not therein, nor will they be ejected therefrom” (15:45–48).

“They hear therein no vain or sinful talk — but only the saying, Peace! Peace!” (56:25, 26).

“And they say: Praise be to Allāh, Who has removed grief from us! Surely our Lord is Forgiving, Multiplier of reward, Who out of His grace has made us alight in a house abiding forever; therein toil touches us not nor does fatigue afflict us therein” (35:34, 35).

### **Paradise is meant for further advancement.**

Notwithstanding all this, paradise, according to the Holy Qur’ān, is not a place for simple enjoyment or rest; it is essentially a place for advancement to higher and higher stages:

“But those who keep their duty to their Lord, for them are high places, above them higher places, built (for them)” (39:20).

This shows that not only does paradise admit the righteous to high places, but it is, in fact, the starting-point for a new advancement, there being higher and higher places still, and it is in accordance with this that they are spoken of as having an unceasing desire for attaining to higher and higher excellences, their prayer in paradise being:

“Our Lord, make perfect for us our light” (66:8).

This idea of a ceaseless advancement in paradise is one which is peculiar to the Holy Qur’ān, and not the least trace of it is to be met with in any other scripture.

### **Hell is meant for purification.**

Quite in accordance with the idea of paradise as a place of unending progress to higher stages of life is the idea of hell, where punishment is not meant for torture but for purification, in order to make a man fit for spiritual advancement. The idea underlying hell is that those who wasted their opportunity in this life shall, under the inevitable law which makes every man taste of what he has done, be subjected to a course of treatment for the spiritual diseases which they have brought about with their own hands. It is for this reason that the Holy Qur’ān makes a difference between the abiding in paradise and the abiding in hell, allowing a termination in the latter case but not in the former.

As I have already noted, punishment for evil deeds sometimes takes effect in this very life, and the Holy Qur’ān lays down the principle in clear words that every such punishment is a remedial measure:

“And We did not send a prophet to a town but We seized its people with distress and affliction that they might humble themselves” (7:94).

“And indeed We sent messengers to nations before thee, then We seized them with distress and affliction that they might humble themselves” (6:42).

It is clear from this that God brings down His punishment upon a sinning people in order that they may turn to Him; in other words, that they may be awakened to the higher life. The same must, therefore, be the object of the punishment in hell. That this is really so is made clear, in the first place, by giving the utmost

prominence to the quality of mercy in God, as already pointed out, and then by stating clearly that all men have been created for mercy:

“Except those on whom thy Lord has mercy; and for this did He create them” (11:119).

The purpose of God must be ultimately fulfilled and, though man may bring down punishment on himself by his deeds, yet as God has created him for mercy, mercy is the ultimate end in the Divine scheme. Elsewhere we are told:

“And I have not created the jinn and the men except that they should serve Me” (51:56).

They must, therefore, ultimately be made fit for the service of God, and that is the higher life. With all its fearfulness, hell is called a *maulā* (*patron*) of the sinners, in one place (57:15), and their *umm* (*mother*), in another (101:9). Both these descriptions of hell are a clear indication that hell is meant only to purify a man of the dross which he has accumulated with his own hands, just as fire purifies gold of dross. In fact, it is to point to this truth that the Holy Qur’ān uses the word *fitnah* (which originally means *the assaying of gold*, or *casting it into fire to purify it of dross*), both of the persecutions which the faithful are made to suffer (2:191; 29:2; 29:10) and of the punishment which the evildoers shall suffer in hell (37:63), where the food which those in hell shall be given is called *fitnah*, because the object in both cases is the same, the faithful being purified through persecutions and the evildoers by hell-fire. Therefore hell is called a *patron* of the sinners, because, through suffering, it will make them fit for spiritual progress; and it is called a *mother* of the sinners to show that its connection with them is that of a mother with her child, the sinners being brought up, as it were, in the bosom of hell. The fire is a source of torment, but it is also a purifier. The keenness of the torments of the other life is due to the keener perception of the soul, which is the necessary result of its separation from the earthly vessel. Bliss and torment, therefore, grow equally keener in that life.

### **Punishment of hell not everlasting.**

It is in consonance with its remedial nature that we find it stated that the sinners shall ultimately be taken out of hell. It is true that the word *abad* is thrice used in the Holy Qur’ān in connection with the abiding in hell (4:169; 33:65; 72:23), but *abad* indicates *eternity* as well as *long time*, and that the latter significance must be taken in this case is made clear by the use, in the same connection, of the word *ahqāb* (78:23), meaning *years or long years*. Besides this, a limitation is placed on the abiding in hell by the addition of the words *except as thy Lord please*, the exception clearly indicating the ultimate deliverance of those in hell. The following two verses may be noted in this connection:

“He will say: The Fire is your abode — you shall abide therein, except as Allāh please. Surely thy Lord is Wise, Knowing” (6:128).

“Then as for those who are unhappy, they will be in the Fire; for them therein will be sighing and groaning — abiding therein so long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as thy Lord please. Surely thy Lord is Doer of what He intends” (11:106, 107).

Both these verses show clearly that the punishment of hell is not everlasting. To make this conclusion clearer still, the latter of these occasions may be compared with the next verse which describes the abiding in paradise:

“And as for those who are made happy, they will be in the Garden, abiding therein so long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as thy Lord please — a gift never to be cut off” (11:108).

The two expressions are similar: those in hell and those in paradise abide in it as long as the heavens and the earth endure, with an exception added in each case showing that they may be taken out of it. The concluding statements are, however, different. In the case of paradise, the idea that those in it may be taken out of it, if God pleases, is immediately followed by the statement that it is a gift which shall never be cut off, showing that they shall never be taken out of paradise; while, in the case of hell, the idea of those in it being taken out of it is confirmed by the concluding statement — “Surely thy Lord is Doer of what He intends”.

The conclusion drawn above is corroborated by the sayings of the Holy Prophet. Thus a saying reported in the *Muslim* concludes:

“Then will Allāh say, The angels and the prophets and the faithful have all in their turn interceded for the sinners and now there remains none to intercede for them except the Most Merciful of all merciful ones. So He will take out a handful from the Fire and bring out a people who never worked any good” (Ms. 1:72).

Further, Bukhārī records a saying to the effect that, when the sinners are taken out from hell, they shall be thrown into “the river of life, and they will grow as grows a seed by the side of a river” (B. 2:15), which clearly indicates that they shall be made fit for a higher life. The *Kanz al-‘Ummāl* records the following: “Surely a day will come over hell when it will be like a field of corn that has dried up, after flourishing for a while” (KU, vol. vii, p. 245); “Surely a day will come over hell when there shall not be a single human being in it” (*Ibid*). A saying of ‘Umar is recorded as follows: “Even if the dwellers in hell may be numberless as the sands of the desert, a day will come when they will be taken out of it” (*Faṭḥ al-Bayān*).

## 6. THE POSITION OF WOMAN

### **Spiritually woman raised to the position of man.**

This is another subject on which great misunderstanding prevails. The belief that, according to the Qur'ān, woman has no soul is almost general in the West. Probably it took hold of the mind of Europe at a time when Europeans had no access to the Qur'ān. No other religious book and no other reformer has done one-tenth of what the Holy Qur'ān or the Holy Prophet Muḥammad has done to raise the position of woman. Read the Qur'ān and you find good and righteous women being given the same position as good and righteous men. Both sexes are spoken of in the same terms. The highest favour which God has bestowed upon man is the gift of Divine revelation, and we find women, to whom Divine revelation came, spoken of along with men:

“And We revealed to Moses’ mother, saying: Give him suck; then when thou fearest for him, cast him into the river and fear not, nor grieve; surely We shall bring him back to thee and make him one of the messengers” (28:7).

“When We revealed to thy mother that which was revealed” (20:38).

“And when the angels said: O Mary, surely Allāh has chosen thee and purified thee and chosen thee above the women of the world” (3:42).

Further, where the Holy Qur'ān speaks of the great prophets of God, saying: “And mention Abraham in the Book” (19:41), “And mention Moses in the Book” (19:51), and so on, it speaks of a woman in exactly the same terms: “And mention Mary in the Book” (19:16). No other religious book has given such a high spiritual position to woman.

The Qur'ān makes no difference between man and woman in the bestowal of reward for the good he or she does:

“I will not suffer the work of a worker among you be the lost, whether male or female, the one of you being from the other” (3:195).

“And whoever does good deeds, whether male or female, and he (or she) is a believer — these will enter the Garden, and they will not be dealt with a whit unjustly” (4:124).

“Whoever does good, whether male or female, and is a believer, We shall certainly make him live a good life, and We shall certainly give them their reward for the best of what they did” (16:97).

“And whoever does good, whether male or female, and he is a believer, these shall enter the Garden, to be given therein sustenance without measure” (40:40).

Also, 33:35, speaking of good women alongside of good men, enumerates every good quality as being possessed by women exactly as it is possessed by men, and ends with the words: “Allāh has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward”. With God, therefore, according to the Qur'ān, there is no difference

between men and women, and morally and spiritually they can rise to the same eminence.

### **Woman is the equal of man in rights of property.**

On the material side, too, we find no difference, except what nature requires for its own ends. A woman can earn, inherit and own property and dispose of it just as a man can, and the Holy Qur'ān is explicit on all these points:

“For men is the benefit of what they earn. And for women is the benefit of what they earn” (4:32).

“For men is a share of what the parents and the near relatives leave, and for women a share of what the parents and the near relatives leave” (4:7).

“But if they (the women) of themselves be pleased to give you a portion thereof, consume it with enjoyment and pleasure” (4:4).

Woman, in Arabia, had no rights of property; nay, she herself was part of the inheritance, and was taken possession of along with other property. She had no right to the property of her deceased husband or father. The Qur'ān took her from this low position and raised her to a position of perfect freedom as regards her property rights and her right to inheritance, a position which, among other nations, she has only partly attained and that after centuries of hard struggle.

### **Polygamy.**

It is, however, asserted that polygamy and the seclusion of women, as enjoined in the Holy Qur'ān, have done more harm to woman than the benefit conferred on her by bestowal of property rights. The fact is that a great misunderstanding exists on these two points. Monogamy is the rule in Islām and polygamy only an exception allowed subject to certain conditions. The following two verses are the only authority for the sanction of polygamy, and let us see how far they carry us:

“And if you fear that you cannot do justice to orphans, marry such women as seem good to you, two, or three, or four; but if you fear that you will not do justice, then marry only one or what your right hands possess. This is more proper that you may not do injustice” (4:3).

“And they ask thee a decision about women. Say: Allāh makes known to you His decision concerning them; and that which is recited to you in the Book is concerning widowed women, whom you give not what is appointed for them, while you are not inclined to marry them” (4:127).

Now the first of these verses allows polygamy on the express condition that “you cannot do justice to orphans”, and what is meant is made clear by the second verse, which contains a clear reference to the first verse in the words, “that which is recited to you in the Book is concerning widowed women”. The Arabs were guilty of a double injustice to widows: they did not give them and their children a share in the inheritance of their husbands, nor were they inclined to marry widows who had children, because the responsibility for the maintenance of the children would in that case devolve upon them. The Qur'ān remedied both these evils; it gave a share of inheritance to the widow with a share also for the orphans, and it commended the taking of such widows in marriage, and allowed polygamy expressly for this purpose. It should, therefore, be clearly understood that monogamy is the rule in Islām and polygamy is allowed only as a remedial measure, and that, not for the

sake of the man, but for the sake of the widow and her children. This permission was given at a time when the wars, which were forced on the Muslims, had decimated the men, so that many widows and orphans were left for whom it was necessary to provide. A provision was made in the form of polygamy so that the widow should find a home and protector and the orphans should have paternal care and affection. Europe today has its problem of the excess of women, and let it consider if it can solve that problem otherwise than by sanctioning a limited polygamy. Perhaps the only other way is prostitution, which prevails widely in all European countries and, where the law of the country does not recognize it, it is recognized in practice. Nature will have its course, and allowing illicit intercourse is the only other alternative to a limited polygamy.

### **Seclusion.**

As regards the seclusion of women, the Qur'ān never prohibited women from going out of their houses for their needs. In the time of the Prophet, women went regularly to mosques, and said their prayers along with men, standing in a separate row. They also joined their husbands in the labour of the field; they even went with the army to the field of battle, and looked after the wounded, removing them from the field, if necessary, and helped fighting-men in many other ways. They could even fight the enemy in an emergency. No occupation was prohibited to them, and they could do any work they chose. The only restrictions on their liberty are contained in the following verses:

“Say to the believing men that they lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions. That is purer for them. Surely Allāh is Aware of what they do. And say to the believing women that they lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions and do not display their adornment except what appears thereof. And let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms” (24:30, 31).

Now the real restriction contained in these verses is that both men and women should, when they meet each other, cast down their looks, but there is an additional restriction in the case of women that *they should not display their adornment* with the exception of “what appears thereof”. The exception has been explained as meaning “what is customary and natural to uncover”. That women went to mosques with their faces uncovered is recognized on all hands, and there is also a saying of the Holy Prophet that, when a woman reaches the age of puberty, she should cover her body *except the face and the hands*. The majority of the commentators are also of opinion that the exception relates to the face and the hands. Hence, while a display of beauty is forbidden, the restriction does not interfere with the necessary activities of woman. She can do any work that she likes to earn her livelihood, for the Holy Qur'ān says plainly, as already quoted, that women shall have the benefit of *what they earn*. A limited seclusion and a limited polygamy do not, therefore, interfere with the necessary activities of woman; they are both meant for her protection and as preventives against loose sexual relations, which ultimately undermine society.