

SACRIFICES AND ATONEMENT.

THE FEAST OF SACRIFICES.

IT was on the tenth of last month that the London Muslims met at Caxton Hall to celebrate the great Muslim Festival—the Feast of Sacrifices. The gathering was remarkable for its representative character, as well as for its numbers: English, Indian, Egyptian, Turkish, Persian, Muslims, and those from other countries met each other in true fraternal spirit to embrace and shake hands, and the spirit of peace, love and amity pervaded the hall. After the usual prayers, the following sermon was delivered by Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, of the *Islamic Review*. He was followed by Mr. Mohamad Ali, the editor of *The Comrade* (India), and Mr. Zaffar Ali Khan, the editor of *The Zamindar* (India). The former gentleman in an eloquent speech explained the necessity of establishing Anjaman Khuddam-i-Kaaba, and succeeded in enlisting the sympathy and fellowship of his hearers to the cause of the Said Anjaman. The young Nawab of Bahawalpoor, with his Muslim guardian and officials, was also among those present.

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“And they who respect the rites of God perform an action which proceedeth from *piety of heart*. And to every people have we appointed rites that they may commemorate the name of God, over the brute beasts which He hath provided for them. And your God is the One God. To Him therefore *surrender yourselves*, and have thou good tidings to those who humble them.”

“Whose hearts, when mention is made of God, thrill with awe and to those who remain steadfast under all that befalleth them, and observe prayer and give alms of that which we have supported them.”

“And the camels have we appointed you for the sacrifice to God: much good have ye in them; make mention, therefore, of the name of God over them when ye slay them as they stand in a row; and when they are fallen over on their sides, eat of them and feed him who is content and asketh not, and him who asketh. Thus have we subjected them to you, to the intent you should be grateful.”

“*By no means can their flesh reach unto God, neither, their blood, but piety on your part reacheth Him.* Thus hath He subjected them to you that

ye might magnify God for His guidance. Moreover, announce to those who do good deeds : That God will ward off mischief from believers, for God loveth not the false and the ungrateful.”—
The Quran.

In these verses the last Book of God deals with the subject of sacrifice. This human institution has its genesis as well as its evolution. It is as old as man himself, and obtains in all classes of men. It has been believed that sacrifices ward off mischief befalling mankind, and the Quran in the verses quoted above seems to support the current view. From time immemorial man has offered sacrifices to propitiate offended Deity for his misdeeds, which as it is believed incur evil. This caused confusion of ideas and generated false notions ; it led people to believe that slaughter of animal life only could appease Divine wrath excited on account of sin. Nothing could please Divine nostrils more than the sacrificial smoke saturated with animal gore. It weakened the sense of righteousness, and ultimately dispensed with the keeping and teaching of the Commandments. Thus

SACRIFICE BECAME ATONEMENT

for sin. To appease God through “blood and flesh” became a popular idea, and it began to evolve. Sin in every particular form demanded a particular kind of sacrifice. One has simply to refer to the ancient mythology to find how varieties of sacrifices were provided to meet varieties of sins. Great calamities coming in consequence of great sins called for slaughter of big animals. At length the category of lower animals available became exhausted, and human ingenuity had to propose human sacrifice. To ward off evil from the whole nation India, Greece and Rome sanctified manslaughter at the altar of the Deity.

It was under these circumstances that Christianity made its appearance. The “teaching and doing of the Commandment,” as taught and enjoined by Jesus, could not appeal to pagan Europe. The doctrine of Atonement, already known to and believed in by her, could alone befit her temperament. Adam committed sin, and God was just enough to condemn his whole race eternally. How to propitiate the incensed Almighty was a serious question. The whole animal life with all its species could not offer anything commensurate with the magnitude of this eternal human perdition. But God was the God of Mercy and Compassion. He loved man so much that, in order to save him from His own wrathful hands, He offered Himself for sacrifice. He sent His only begotten Son to pay the wages of sin. Great was the sin and great was the sacrifice. What an entertaining theology to suit the pagan disposition ! There is nothing to wonder at if the Greco-Romanised Christianity made progress by leaps and bounds in Europe. The 1,600-years-removed-Westerner had simply to make a

change in name and place. He had already heard of many a "God in man" in Greece and Rome, who used to participate in human affairs. Jupiter and Zeus now become antiquated, and some new god was naturally more appealing. Thus the old traditions were repeated, and they found their realisation again in the Holy Person of Jesus. Belief in

SACRIFICE AS AN ATONEMENT

was an old idea, and the Grace of the Blood was a palatable theory. And in my opinion, if sacrifices *ipso facto* do atone for sin, I am afraid Christianity is built upon a very strong basis. Sacrifices do obtain in all religions, and we Muslims also perform them, and to-day is the day reserved for the Feast of Sacrifices. The Quran also, while dealing with the subject, says that evils are thus warded off. But what a hideous, sickening idea that "Blood and Flesh" only can propitiate the Most Merciful God! Is it not a contradiction in terms? We do need enlightenment before we can swallow this bitter pill of theology. Was it not necessary that some Divine messenger should come to enlighten us as to the real object and utility of sacrifices? It ought to be so, yet it is in vain to turn the pages of old scriptures to find any rational exposition. Christ, perhaps, had a mind to teach something, but the low intellectual growth of His disciples could not afford Him an occasion to do so, and He had only to refer to the Coming *Spirit of Truth. Christians do admit that *Jesus left His teachings imperfect*, and the deficiency was to be made up by the Church when filled with the Holy Ghost, which descended on the day of Pentecost. But the Church theology hardly improves upon what was already in currency in pagan Europe on the question of sacrifice. No, the teachings of the Church do not and cannot fulfil the prophecy narrated by St. John, and I challenge all the Church dignitaries in the West to refer to any improvement made upon the teachings of Christ concerning various questions troubling the human mind; and one of them is sacrifice. The Spirit of God as prophesied by Jesus descended upon Mohammad, and brought the Quran, which in the following words refers to the prophecy in question:—

"The (Spirit of) Truth has come and the false has fled away."

The Quran came to explain on rational bases all the difficult questions in theology; and the verses cited (quoted above) by me explain the utility and object of sacrificial rites. That "the Blood and the Flesh" were not *essential elements of sacrifices*, nor that they in themselves could propitiate God, was clearly taught in the Quran when it said:—

"By no means can their flesh reach unto God,
neither their blood, but *piety on your part reacheth Him.*"

The beginning verse brings out the same idea. A Muslim with such clear teaching cannot prefer the new Dispensation of Blood to the old dispensation of "doing and teaching the Commandment" so laid special stress upon by Christ Himself. It is your righteousness and piety which reaches God, and is acceptable to Him. It is a lesson of piety which is imparted to you through your sacrifices. You are shown the way to become righteous. I cannot enter into the subject at length to show how sacrificial actions create piety in us within the short space of time at my disposal.* Here I would simply show what righteousness is, and what are its aims and objects. To be at one with God and to be nearer to Him is the ultimate object of the righteousness which man has to achieve. Does not everyone anxiously aspire to reach what is higher? In fact, there is a universal move towards progress in the whole universe. Everything in nature desires to be converted into a higher order. And who is higher than man—the lord of the universe—excepting God? It is quite natural, therefore, that we crave after God. But how to reach this, our highest goal? Let us see various kingdoms of God's creation lower than mankind, and observe the process under which things pass from one lower order to the higher. There is only one, and one only, universal rule of this evolution. Self-effacement and self-annihilation is the only course through which one must pass before reaching a higher stage. Can the elements of earth pass into the vegetable kingdom without losing their former identity? The animal kingdom is higher than the vegetable, and no blade of grass or weed can reach near animal life or become part and parcel of an animal body unless it sacrifices itself and becomes food of an herbivorous being. Whatever we eat when assimilated becomes man. Has not the lower order been ennobled thus? A corn, a vegetable, a sheep, a fowl, all become man, but at the expense of self-immolation. A sort of death should prevail over everything, and it should lose its individuality before it aspires to reach a higher order. To be nearer to the higher being comes only through sacrifice and immolation; and it is interesting to find that the Arabic word for it is very suggestive, and explains the whole thing in itself. The word for sacrifice in Arabic is "Qurbani," which has *Qurb* for its root. *Qurb* literally means nearness. No *Qurb Illahiah* (nearness to God) but through *Qurbani* (sacrifice). This is the real object of sacrifice as taught in the verses I read (quoted above):—

"And to every people have we appointed rites that they may commemorate the name of God, over the brute beasts which he hath provided for them. And your God is the One, to Him therefore *surrender*."

* In our next we will fully discuss this question.

If you make sacrifices and commemorate the name of God, it is to remind you that as the animals surrender to you and through this surrender become of you, you have to surrender yourselves to God if you wish to be of God and near to Him. So show the following words of God :—

“When ye slay them (camels) as they stand in a row and when they are fallen on their side eat of them. . . . Thus have we subjected them to you, to the intent you should be grateful. . . . Thus hath He subjected them to you that ye might magnify Him.”

God has subjected animals to you, and you have to subject yourself to Him. Through surrender to you they magnify you, and through similar surrender to Him you have to magnify God, and God will ward off all mischief from you.

It is not “*the blood and flesh*” which propitiate God, and He in compensation wards off evils befalling you. It is a heinous idea, an insult to the Muslim conception of Godhead. To think so is blasphemy. It can only satisfy ignorance and credulity to think so of the Most Compassionate God. The animal, by his self-immolation, has shown to you how one can achieve dignity and salvation. To be more explicit, I may refer again to the lower animals which, by becoming our food, are ennobled to humanity. Everything in Nature is beset with dangers peculiar to it, and so it is with the animal. He has mischief to befall him, but he becomes safe from further trouble when converted into our body. No wolf will run after a sheep when it has become man. By self annihilation the sheep has got a better and safer life, and is saved from all danger.

This was meant by Lord Budha when he preached that salvation can be attained only through *Nirvana*. Man has his own dangers, and he wishes to be saved. If members of the vegetable kingdom can enter into the kingdom of animal life through self-annihilation, and those of the latter class into the human kingdom, and through this process they attain aggrandisement and salvation from their respective dangers, is it impossible for us to be promoted through the same course to the Divine order and secure immunity from all sorts of evils and dangers? Evil cannot enter even unto the precinct of the Kingdom of God, and if through self-immolation we enter into it, the Divine element in us will thrive and will ward off all evils. Then you will be held by God as His beloved, and will become begotten of Him. Then your hands will be the hands of God; your sight, the sight of God; and your feet, the feet of God. This I say on the authority of no less a personage than your own Prophet. You possess attributes of God within the limitation of humanity. This he meant when the Prophet said: “*Equip yourself with the attributes of God.*” Ennobled to that high state, you begin to share even with God what is solely reserved for

the Most High. For instance, is not all glory and praise due to God? and yet glory follows self-sacrifice. You become idolised through self-abnegation. One who loses his own individuality in God is sure to share Divine glory with Him. And the world has seen many supermen of the type. Perhaps Jesus and Iman Husain, the grandson of our Prophet, are apt illustrations. Mohammad surpassed all others in his self-sacrificing spirit, and had it not been for the masterly, clear teaching of the Holy Prophet of Islam, which killed almost all polytheistic tendencies in Muslims, the world was sure to do him the worship due only to the Father. Notwithstanding this, Husain in a very limited circle of Islam is worshipped like Jesus. Look to the sacrifice of these personages. Do you wonder if they are taken as God? If Jesus is believed to save His followers through His blood, Husain is also believed by a very limited number to save them through his unique martyrdom. My object is not to deal with this question here. My sole object here is to establish this one truth: that through self-sacrifice in the way of God one becomes of God and wields Divine powers. And can you refer me to any moral attribute other than the sacrificial spirit in man which can command glory and respect to such an extent from our fellow-man? No, you cannot.

Look to Mr. Mohammad Ali, Wazeer-Hassan and Zaffar Ali Khan—humble, insignificant atoms in God's creation, and yet their brethren idolise them. God knows what lies in their heart of hearts, but apparently they have made sacrifice of time, money and comfort in the interest of the community according to their best intent, and they become idols of the community; and if, God forbid! some personal motive actuates them to do all this, very soon God will expose them, and they will be no more. Jesus preached self-sacrifice on the Cross and Husain in the sands of Kerballa. Jesus was not God by birth, but He became a Son of God through self-sacrifice. Budha, Ramchandra and Krishna did the same, and were worshipped like Jesus. They made sacrifices not for ATONEMENT to but ATONEMENT with God. But the door is not closed, it is as open to-day as it was before. Jesus was a Son of Man, as He called Himself, and you are also sons of man. What is true of one is true of another. Bear your own cross like Jesus, and share with Him the glory He enjoys through self-renunciation. He became a Son of God, and you can be the same. If such a Divine blessing was an impossibility, there would have been no Feast of Sacrifices in Islam, and we could not have met to-day in the Caxton Hall to magnify God. And let us magnify Him :—

“God is great, God is great,
 There is no other Deity but God.
 God is great, God is great,
 And to Him all praises are due.