

## SEEN THROUGH MOHAMMEDAN SPECTACLES

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**A**LTHOUGH my father was a Muslim of the old Central-Asian school, a Hegirist, of mixed Arab and Moghul blood, he had sent me to England and the Continent for my school and university education. But boys are much more broad-minded than grown-up men, and so my schoolmates and I never worried about the fact that we had different customs, religion, civilization, and atavistic tendencies.

It was only after my return to the borderland of Afghanistan and India, and after I had assumed once more native garb and speech, that I began to feel myself an alien among those Europeans and Anglo-Indians with whom I was brought into contact.

For the first time in my life I felt the ghastly meaning of the words "Racial Prejudice," that cowardly, wretched caste-mark of the European and the American the world over, that terrible blight which modern Christianity has forced on the world. And it chilled me to the bone and I wondered. . . .

In Europe I had known many Asiatics who visited the universities there. And we were the equals of the Europeans, the Christians, in intellect and culture, and decidedly their superiors, being Muslim, in cleanliness and courage. We were not only familiar with the European classics which were the basis of their culture, but we were also thoroughly versed in the literature and history of India and Central Asia, things of which they knew less than an average Egyptian donkey-boy. We were polyglots: we had mastered half a dozen European languages, while even a smattering of Arabic or Turki or Chinese was a rare exception amongst them. We all of us knew at least three Asian languages to perfection. And finally we had a practical knowledge of English, French and German political ideals and systems, while to them the name of even such great Asian reformers as Asoka and Akbar and Aurangzeb were absolutely unknown.

In physical strength, virility, power of endurance and re-

cuperation we were immeasurably their superiors. And we were not picked men, but plain, average Asian gentlemen.

And yet, when I returned to my own land, there was that superior smile, that nasty, patronizing attitude, that insufferable "Holier than Thou" atmosphere about all of them whom I happened to meet.

They made me feel that I was of the East and they of the West; and they tried to make me feel—with no success—that they were the salt of the earth, while the men of my faith and race were but the lowly dung.

Not even the bridge of personal friendship seemed able to span this gulf, this abyss which I could feel more than I could define it; and so I folded my tent and travelled; I studied India from South to North, I visited Siberia, Egypt, Malta, Algeria, Turkey, Tunis, and the Haussa country, wandering in all the lands where East and West rub elbows, and I investigated calmly, I compared without too much bias.

Finally I bent my steps Northward, to see with my own eyes and according to the limits of my own understanding the working of Christian civilization, and to study the dominant Western Faith in the lands where it rules supreme.

I was looking for a bridge with which to span the chasm, and I failed miserably. Christian hypocrisy, Christian intolerance, savage Christian ignorance frustrated me right and left.

But I learned one thing, perhaps two.

They spoke to me of Europe which they knew, and they spoke of India which they did not know. They were what the world calls educated, well-read people: and indeed they had read many books by eminent Christian travellers, savants, and historians about the great Peninsula. But the mirror of their souls reflected only distorted pictures. They had no conception of the vastness of my land, they had never heard of the great Asian conquerors and statesmen, they were entirely ignorant of our wonderful literature.

But still they spoke of India . . . fluently, patronizingly.

They spoke of plague and cholera and famine and wretched sanitation and cruelties unspeakable. But they did not understand me when I told them that the teeming millions of Hindu

peasantry somehow manage to enjoy their careless lives to the full, and are really much more satisfied than the European peasants or the small American farmers.

I did not argue: I simply stated facts. But I discovered that it is a titanic, heart-breaking task to prove the absurdity of anything which the Christians have made up their minds to accept as true. I found arrayed against me an iron phalanx of preconceived opinions and misconstrued lessons of history. I began to understand that even amongst educated people there can exist opinion without thought, and that my two arch-foes were the Pharisee intolerance which is the caste-mark and the blighting curse of the Christian the world over, and the other Aryan vice: an unconscious generalization of those ideas which have been adopted for the sake of convenience and self-flattery, and in strict and delightfully naïve disregard of truth. The whole I found to be spiced with religious hypocrisy; and is there a lower form of hypocrisy than that which makes a man pretend for his own material or spiritual purposes that a thing is good which in his inmost heart he knows to be bad? The sincerity of such people is on a par with that of him who, being debarred by a doctor from constant drinking, proclaims that he is a reformed character and prates to his friends about the delights of temperance.

I learned that to fathom the murky depths of stupidity and intolerance of the Christians of to-day, we should have a latter-day Moses Maimonides amongst us, to write another *Moreh Nebukim*, another *Guide for the Perplexed*.

And then I made up my mind to attack that structure of ignorance and misunderstanding, that jumble of generalization and hyperdeduction, that idiotic racial self-confidence and national self-consciousness which breeds Pharisee intolerance, which destroys individual inquiry and unprejudiced opinion, and which sounds the death-knell of procreativity.

The Hindu peasants say that it is a mistake to judge the quality of a whole field of rice by testing one grain only. But the Europeans, the Americans, who judge us have never even tested a solitary grain and only know about its quality from hearsay.

Not that they are afraid to voice what they miscall their opinions. Only instead of having the courage of their own convictions, they have the courage of somebody else's convictions, not knowing that the most obtuse ignorance is superior to dangerous, second-hand knowledge.

They are eternally quoting the words of some writer whom they think infallible. And there was chiefly one clever little jingle which was on the lips of everybody with whom I tried to discuss the relations between Orient and Occident. They used it as the final proof to settle the argument and to preclude all further appeal to the tribunal of common sense and common verity, and it ran as follows:

“ East is East, and West is West,  
And never the twain shall meet.”

I admire Kipling, chiefly because he is one of the few Europeans who have studied the East with both intelligence and sympathy. From my Oriental point of view I class his books with those of Max Müller, Sir Alfred Lyall, Captain Sir Richard Burton, Pierre Loti, John Campbell Oman, Victoria de Bunsen, Colonel Malleon, W. D. Whitney, William Croke, and two or three other Pandits.

But I became sick to death of that smooth little jingle about the East and the West. I found it everywhere, until it haunted me in my dreams.

I would buy the gaudy Sunday edition of an American newspaper and I would read the gruesome story of how a high-caste Mandchoo had beaten and tortured his beautiful French wife . . . and, by the Prophet, the picturesque account would wind up with an appeal to the intelligent American reader not to wonder at the blue-beard Mandarin's cruelty, because the poet states that East is East and West is West.

In the morning I would see in the *Petit Journal* how the unspeakable Turk had invaded a peaceful Armenian settlement, had shot the males, outraged the females, and roasted the babes over an open fire, and how I should also suppress my natural indignation at such atrocities, because the East is naturally the East.

And at night, before smoking the farewell cigarette of the dying day, I would discover in *The Graphic* harrowing accounts of child-marriages in Hindustan, and would be instructed that the reason for such a barbarous custom was contained in the poet's statement that "never the twain shall meet."

Do you wonder that every night, in my dreams, I strangled Mr. Kipling slowly and deliciously with a thin silken cord? But of course you do not wonder; for I am an Afghan . . . and . . . well . . .

"East is East and West is West."

## II

Assumed racial superiority is a foregone conclusion in the minds of the so-called Aryans of Europe and of America.

I was in Paris when the world rang with the war-glories of Nippon, and afterwards, when for a while it seemed as if the bloodless Young Turk revolution would meet with success.

There we had at last two-specific instances of Oriental nations working out their own salvation against tremendous odds: Japan threatened by the Russian Goliath, and Turkey a prey to the wrangling and the selfish machinations of all Europe, of all lying Christendom.

But the effect on the conceit of the Aryans was less than nothing. The people of Europe and of America are blind to the Writing on the Wall. They have sealed their ears against the murmuring voices of Awakening Asia.

Are they afraid to listen?

Now and then, when not engaged in discussing the latest tango or divorce case, they do read and talk about the awakening of China, the commercial conquests and aggressive policy of Japan, and the smouldering fires of United Islam, but without experiencing the least abating influence on their artificially nurtured racial and religious conceit. Peacefully and stupidly the Christians, the "white races," continue to misread the lessons of history and the signs of the times.

They are afraid to see the brutal, naked truth.

Once I watched an ostrich bury his head in the sand . . .

They have established the amusing dogma that the so-called White and Christian countries are the superior countries, just because they are White and Christian.

I have established a slightly different dogma, and, being a charitable and entirely guileless Oriental, I will make a present of it to my Aryan friends:

You Westerns feel so sure of your superiority over us Easterns that you refuse even to attempt a fair or correct interpretation of past and present historical events. You deliberately stuff the minds of your growing generations with a series of ostensible events and shallow generalities, because you wish to convince them for the rest of their lives how immeasurably superior you are to us, how there towers a range of differences between the two civilizations, how East is only East, and the West such a glorious, wonderful, unique West.

In *Tancred*, that brilliant Oriental, the Earl of Beaconsfield, in devoting a few lines to a great Bishop of the Church of England, really pictures the typical Christian such as he stinks in our nostrils from Morocco to Kharbin. For the noble Jewish Peer characterizes the Right Reverend Gentleman as a man who combined great talents for action with very limited powers of thought, who was bustling, energetic, versatile, gifted with an indomitable perseverance and stimulated by an ambition that knew no repose, with a capacity for mastering details and an inordinate passion for affairs, who could permit nothing to be done without his interference, and who consequently was perpetually involved in transactions which were either failures or blunders.

In material progress you have led the world for the last two or three centuries. By the True Prophet . . . all of three hundred years!

And like all parvenus, you are so astonished at your success, so pleased with yourselves, that you imagine your present hegemony in the race for material progress to be a guarantee for the future. But there is not even the shadow of an excuse for such an assumption, unless it be the fact that the Christian mind is diseased with racial and religious megalomania. There is not a single historical parallel which justifies your pleasant

superstition that your present leadership, which after all is of very recent birth, will show greater stability than any of those many alien, ancient civilizations which long ago came from the womb of eternity, to go back whence they sprang.

Nations as well as men are judged by two factors: by their virtues, and by their vices.

As to virtues, what have you Christians done for the general uplift of the world which could not be matched by a random look into the pages of Oriental history? And as to vices, is there any degeneracy rampant amongst us which is not equalled by the degeneracy of the Western lands?

History has an unpleasant knack of repeating itself; and the helot of to-day has the disagreeable habit of being the master of to-morrow, regardless of race and color and creed. I would like to return to earth about three hundred years from to-day, just to observe how my descendants, who will have intermarried with Chinese and Japanese, will succeed in ruling their colonies in Europe and in America. And I do hope that the Chinese blood of my descendants will not be too preponderant: otherwise, taking a leaf out of European and American colonization, and thus forcing their own food-laws on the subject races, they might force their White and Christian subjects to eat roast puppy-dog.

Human nature is the same the world over, and there never was an originally superior race or people. Some nations have founded powerful civilizations which lasted for a shorter or a longer period, but it was never the racial force which caused it, but rather the irresistible swing of circumstances.

It was Kismet.

### III

“But we are Aryans, don't you understand? . . . Aryans, the salt of the earth . . .”

“Aryans” . . . I know the word, I find myself on familiar ground.

My teachers at the universities of Oxford, Paris, and Berlin had taught me that the Aryans were a Central-Asian race, a

“white” race, who conquered Europe and India, and who were of such superior intellectual and physical fibre that they made themselves masters wherever they went. And when I inquired about those Aryans who invaded India, I was told that right there they showed their wonderful metal: for brought face to face with teeming millions of dark aborigines, they established a caste-system of which the higher strata represent to this day the descendants of the white-skinned and therefore high-minded invaders, while the sweeper, the menial, the village laborer is the scion of the dark-skinned, conquered Dravidians.

To an Oriental this is of course a ridiculous and lying assumption. For even the purest of Aryan tribes in Hindustan, for instance the Rajpoots, have intermarried extensively with at least two other races. This superstition is not a new invention. It is as old as the beginning of things, and that much-praised work, the Veda, is only a chronicle of the ancient conceit of the Aryans, a conceit to which the lying and barbarous intolerance of modern Christianity has given a sharp and poisonous edge.

Yet even the Veda speaks of intermarriages between the Aryans and the original lords of the soil of India.

The caste system was not a bright invention to put a lasting stamp of inferiority on the conquered aborigines, but it is the outcome of a slow evolutionary process, due to the machinations of Brahmin priests who wished to preserve the profits arising from their sacerdotal profession within a restricted circle of families. These Brahmins had increased their ranks and influence by drawing recruits from the devil-worshipping priests of the aboriginal jungle tribes. Thus, how can there ever have been a question of preserving or establishing a permanency of racial superiority through the medium of caste, since at the very beginning of the system the race had lost its purity?

No. Your wonderful Aryan kinsmen in India were absorbed by the “inferior” races whom they conquered, just as the Normans were absorbed by the Saxon Englishmen, the Alexandrian Greeks by the Egyptians, the Mongols of the Golden Horde by the Chinese, just as the strong always absorb the weak, and just as, a few hundred years hence, we shall absorb you.

To-day Christian England is ruling India, and the English Raj is just, fair-minded, tolerant, and equitable. This is true, and it is also true that the last Moghuls disgraced the throne of Delhi and shattered Hindustan. But what can you prove by it?

Others have ruled India successfully before Asia had ever heard of England.

Akbar, the Moghul Emperor, enforced tolerance and justice in those barbaric days when the life of a Jew in Europe was at the kind mercy of an ignorant and brutal Christian rabble. He, the Muslim, built and endowed Hindu temples and charitable institutions while his European contemporaries were periodically burning down the synagogues and were trying to extend the sway of the gentle Christ with the effective help of murder and torture. He, and before him his father's successor on the throne of Delhi, Shir Shah, the Afghan usurper, attempted to found an Indian empire "broad-based upon the people's will," long before the days of Voltaire, Robespierre, Rousseau, and Beaumarchais. He settled land revenue on an equitable basis while the peasants of Europe were groaning under the heavy and humiliating burden of serfdom.

You say that his successors did not live up to the high standard established by this greatest of Moghul princes?

But we find fitting parallels in the history of Christian Europe. For were not the successors of Theodosius as degenerate as those of Akbar? Did not, in Macaulay's words, the imbecility and disputes of Charlemagne's descendants bring contempt on themselves and destruction to their subjects?

Or take the civilization of ancient Rome.

It was partially saved from ruin by the Asians, the Syro-Christians, who brought the word of the great Jewish Rabbi across the Adriatic. Judaism is an Oriental creed, and what is your famed European Christianity if not "Judaism for the Masses" ?

The Asian genius of Christ and his Hebrew apostles saved the Aryan genius from stagnation and stupidity, and brought the first faint glimmer of light into the barbaric darkness of Northern Europe.

The Asian Christians succeeded in Aryan Rome, and just as long as the Asians ruled, the traditional cupidity and cruelty of Aryan Rome were softened by the broadly tolerant humanity of Asia. But as soon as the Syro-Christians were in the minority and the Christians of European stock in the majority, persecution and intolerance commenced, and the word of the great Oriental Prophet Jesus Christ was sadly mutilated and misunderstood by that superior race, the "Whites."

But even then you could not rid yourselves of our subtle Asian influence. I know your gifts of energy and your spirit of progress; but we men of Asia have a power of resistance and a capacity for rapid recuperation which you can never fathom.

Could you break the spirit or the virility of the Jew? You have tortured him, you have exiled him, and you have burnt him on the stake for the greater glory of God . . . and he rules you to-day.

Again, look at the history of your Europeanized Christian Church, and observe what happened:

The Asian spirit flourished again in Protestantism and the Reformation. Many of your Protestant reformers were semi-Jewish, semi-Oriental in spirit. Anti-Trinitarianism was preached in Siena, and God ceased to be a mathematical problem. The Decalogue and the Apocalypse were studied. Chairs of Hebrew philosophy and philology were founded at French and German universities; and the Calvinists and the Presbyterians were altogether of the old Testament, of Asia, in spirit and sentiment.

Your famous Reformation was only a return to the Ebionism of the Asian Evangelists. One of the greatest events in your history, it was a most complete and vindicating triumph for the spirit of that Asia which you attempt to despise and patronize in your ignorance and intolerance.

Must we sit at your feet? Shall the pupil teach the master?

We taught you to read, to write, and to think. We gave you your religion and your few ideals. We have done more for you than you can ever do for us. We freed you from your ancient bondage of superstitions and idolatry. We gave you the

first sparks of science and literature. We paved the way for your material progress.

Without our help you would still be tattooed and inarticulate barbarians.

But you have been getting out of hand, and are sinking back into the old slough of ignorance and crass intolerance.

And so perhaps some day, after we Mohammedans have finished converting Asia and Africa to the Faith of Islam (and we are doing steady work in that direction), we may send another Tamerlane into Europe, reinforced by an army of a few million Asians who laugh in the face of death, and finish the job.

#### IV

You speak of Oriental mystery, of Oriental romance.

Are we Asians then like Molière's bourgeois who spoke prose all his life without knowing it? Is there really a veil of mystery about us?

No, no. The Most High God did not take the trouble to create two different types of human beings, one to work on the banks of the Seine, and the other to sing His praises on the shore of the Ganges. There is no veil, no mystery, no romance . . . except the veil of Christian ignorance, the romance of Christian imagination, the mystery of Christian want of desire to know.

There is perhaps a latent search after knowledge and truth in your hearts' souls. But your inborn selfishness forces you to believe that a healthy portion of ignorance is the best medicine against the ravages of the dangerous malady which is called Tolerance. Just a little effort would teach you that there is no mystery about us, no abyss which separates you from us. But your ignorance is your bliss and provides you with a sort of righteous bias. It also sheds a holy and therefore eminently Christian halo around your attitude of meddling interference in the affairs of Asia and North Africa. Of course you only interfere because of your laudable intention to show us the true path to civilization and salvation. And if accidentally you in-

crease your own power and wealth, if you impoverish the native whom you attempt to "save," if you incite strife where no strife existed before you imported soldiers and bibles and missionaries and whisky and some special brands of "white" diseases . . . well . . . Allah is Great . . .

The mystery which is supposed to shroud the Orient is a lying invention of Christendom destined to give a semblance of justice to your selfish, harmful meddlings in the affairs, religions, politics and customs of other countries.

If you wish to conquer with the right of fire and the might of sword, go ahead and do so, or at least say so. It would be a motive which we Muslim, being warriors, could understand and appreciate. But do not clothe your greed for riches and dominion in the hypocritical, nasal, sing-song of a heaven-decreed Mission to enlighten the poor native, a Pharisee call of duty to spread the word of your Saviour, your lying intention to uplift the ignorant Pagan.

Drop your mask of consummate beatitude in the contemplation of the spiritual joys, the Christian and therefore very sanitary plumbing you are endeavoring to confer upon us. Stop being liars and hypocrites: and you will cease being what you are to-day:

The most hated and the most despised men in the length and breadth of Asia and North Africa.

And I am not exaggerating. I am really putting it mildly so as not to hurt your feelings.

Let me point out just one instance: the Young Turk Revolution.

You, the apostles of freedom and constitutional government and half a dozen assorted fetishes, what was your attitude then?

You allowed Austria, your trusted steward of other people's property since the Berlin Congress of Thieves, to steal this property, the fertile provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. You looked on calmly while the Bulgar mountebank annexed Turkish territory in time of peace. You passed resolutions, full of blatant Christian hypocrisy and Christian lies; but you never raised a finger in our behalf, in behalf of that justice and humanity which you proudly claim as your caste-right. The whole

affair was a piece of brigandage, carried on under the much-patched cloak of that whining cant which has made modern Christianity an ugly by-word in Asia and North Africa.

You united in your endeavors to establish an independent and constitutionally governed Roumania, a free Servia, a modern Greece and Bulgaria, and, more recently, an autonomous Macedonia, under the pretext that Turkey, being controlled with an iron rod by a despotic Sultan and an intolerably exalted Sheykhul-Islam, was not fit to govern Christian races.

But you obstruct Mohammedan Turkey's efforts to introduce and enforce the very principles of liberty and popular government which in former years you had been advocating as a *sine qua non* in the administration of your precious Christian protégés.

An ounce of baptismal water makes such a difference, does it not?

I believe that I am the mouthpiece of a great majority of my fellow-Muslim and my fellow-Asians when I state that the Jesuit policy of Europe during the political travail of Young Turkey, when the Osmanli attempted to crystallize his newly found liberty, will do more to fan the red embers of fighting Pan-Islam into living, leaping flames than any other political event since the Berlin treaty.

We have suffered long enough a series of deliberate moral insults and material injuries at the hands of selfish, canting, lying Christianity, and we are still capable of tremendous energies when Islam is in danger.

And who can deny that Islam is in danger?

Your attitude during the Balkan troubles proved to us that the liberty which you deem necessary to the Christian Balkans is a negligible quantity when applied to the followers of the Prophet Mohammed who inhabit the same peninsula.

And I could mention a dozen instances to prove that you yourselves are forcing on the world the coming struggle between Asia, all Asia, against Europe and America, against Christendom, in other words.

You are heaping up material for a Jihad, a Pan-Islam, a Pan-Asia Holy War, a gigantic Day of Reckoning, an invasion

of a new Attila and Tamerlane . . . who will use rifles and bullets, instead of lances and spears.

You are deaf to the voice of reason and fairness, and so you must be taught with the whirling swish of the sword when it is red.

## V

You claim that altruism and the virtues are the monopoly of your creed and your race.

But in reality the teachings of Jesus are not a particle more apt to lead his followers in the golden path than are the sayings of the Lord Buddha, the laws of Moses, the wisdom of Confucius, or the words of the Koran. True tolerance, true altruism teaches us that what is right in Peking may be wrong on the shores of Lake Tchaad, and what is wrong in a Damascus bazaar may be right at a Kansas ice-cream social.

Such true tolerance is far broader than the limits of professing Christianity, than the limits of any established, cut-and-dried creed. It is as broad as the Seven Holy Rivers of Hindustan and as vast as Time. The creed of mutual sympathy is a very old creed: even amongst the troglodytes chosen spirits must have known it, the red-haired barbarians of Gaul must have heard of it, and amongst the lizard-eating Arabs of pre-Islamic days it must have found adherents. It is a human truth, a human principle which is the common property of mankind East and West; but Christian hegemony in worldly affairs has killed it, has blighted it with the curse of the cross.

Intrinsic unselfishness and abstract goodness is older than the Gospel, the Koran, the Veda, or any other religious book. Being at the very core of that civilization from which all changes spring, it is in itself eternally unchangeable, be it clothed in the words of the Sermon on the Mount, the Prophet Mohammed's three great principles of Compassion, Charity, and Resignation, or the famed edict of the Emperor Asoka, who many centuries before the days of Jesus declared to the world that "a man must not do reverence to his own sect by disparaging that of another man."

## THE SHROUD

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

**D**EATH, I say, my heart is bowed  
Unto thine,—O mother!  
This red gown will make a shroud  
Good as any other!

(I, that would not wait to wear  
My own bridal things,  
In a dress dark as my hair  
Made my answerings.

I, to-night, that till he came  
Could not, could not wait,  
In a gown as bright as flame  
Held for them the gate.)

Death, I say, my heart is bowed  
Unto thine,—O mother!  
This red gown will make a shroud  
Good as any other!