BETWEEN
EAST AND WEST

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The well-known English poet Rudyard Kipling has said:

'East is East and West is West
And never the twain shall meet.'

Even though these are the words of a poet of our own century, the idea they embody has been a dominant one for many years both in the East and in the West, and has rooted itself deeply in their respective philosophies and literature. What has happened in this case is just what happens everywhere else: certain ideas and trends of thought emerge in a society, play their part in orienting its attitudes and predilections, and then comes forward a poet or a writer who expresses them in words of lasting beauty so that they gain currency and are referred to again and again by the people. This seems to have been exactly the case with Kipling's famous couplet: he epitomized the idea so long accepted in the East as well as the West, and in doing so emphasized even further the East-West dictum.
I would even venture to say that I have not come across any literary or poetic expression which has caused so much harm to the good of humanity and to the concept of the unity of mankind as this idea of a perpetual division of the human family into East and West. No matter how simple and seemingly innocent Kipling’s words may be, nor how accurately they may describe an historical situation, expressions such as this have gone a long way towards leading people all over the world to regard the East and the West as two hostile entities which can never be reconciled. If the East and the West were to meet, it could be only on the battlefield and if they were to come together anywhere else it would only be for mutual abuse.

This is what the East and West have felt for many centuries. They have remained apart, either in complete ignorance of each other or else possessing only an extremely superficial knowledge, seeing only those aspects of their rival’s life which reveal weakness and ugliness, rather than strength and beauty. Their mutual behavior has been determined by doubt and suspicion, contempt and scorn.

The first serious encounter between East and West took place during the Crusades. This encounter could not lead to an appreciation of each other’s good qualities, nor to an understanding of each other’s beliefs, and ethical attitudes. This was due primarily to the blind hostility of the Crusaders, which made them believe indiscriminately all kinds of fantastic reports about the beliefs and practices of the Muslims. In fact, it was their readiness to believe all sorts of travesties of the truth, such as, for example, that the Muslims were pagan brutes, that had helped the instigators of the Crusades to lead Christian fighters to battle for the liberation of the Holy Land. It is understandable that the atmosphere in which these wars were fought inhibited the growth of mutual appreciation, not to mention the urge for any serious study of each other’s religious and ethical concepts, and prevented each benefiting from the other’s accomplishments and experiences. Nevertheless, the Crusades were not altogether useless, for they reduced, even if they did not bridge, the gulf between these two groups of nations and continents.

To refer to more recent times, an encounter between the East and the West took place during the 19th century. This was the time when the West, driven by political and economic considerations, began to spread its influence and authority over the lands of the East. The West invaded the East with all it had—its civilization and industries, its sciences, its culture, its scheme of state organization—the good as well as the bad. The East, which had been left behind by the fast-moving West in its march towards scientific and economic development and towards a more efficiently organized order of things, was dumbfounded by the onslaught from the West and naturally could not be expected to be in the right frame of mind to attempt any effective understanding of the West, or to benefit by its accomplishments.

Another factor which prevented any appreciation of the West, if I might be excused for saying so, was the fact that despite its many healthy aspects, the Western civilization was on the whole the result of a materialistic view of the world and contained more or less all that is characteristic of a civilization whose religious impulse has suffered atrophy. Still another factor standing in the way of the proper appreciation of the West was—and here again I ask your indulgence—the strong feeling among Westerners that they were the masters of the East. This was coupled with a feeling of racial superiority which manifested itself in their individual behavior as well as in general policies which were incompatible with human dignity and the spirit of democracy; those very ideas for which the Westerners were celebrated and for which they had struggled in their own lands.

Another phase of the impact of the West on the East was the development of an attitude of slavish surrender and abject subservience among the peoples of the East. They began to cherish Western values and ideas, adore
the modes and manifestations of Western life and Western civilization. There arose a trend of blinding imitation of the West, which robbed the peoples of the East of their distinctive personality as well as of their self-respect. This aping of the West in all walks of life pushed the Easterners into the background, reducing them to the position of mere camp-followers. Consequently the West could not look upon the East with any sense of equality and respect, much less of admiration and esteem; nor could it look to the East for inspiration or guidance or anything original or creative. Eventually matters came to a pass where complete dissolution threatened the fading away of the East into the West.

More recently the peoples of the East have been engulfed by the idea of nationalism. The Western nations had resorted to nationalism as a substitute for the erstwhile bond of the Roman Church and for the religious sentiments which in the past used to arouse their enthusiasm. It may be pertinent, even though rather parenthetical, to remark that the West itself, having witnessed the disaster and destruction generated by narrow-minded nationalism, has endeavoured to extricate itself from this situation and is now on the way to appreciating and admiring concepts of humanistic and universal import.

As for the East, the imported concept of nationalism seems to have taken root so deeply and engrossed it so overwhelmingly that despite the fact that once in the past it carried the torch of Divine Mission, it now dares not think once again of extending a helping hand to the West by giving it light and guidance.

More particularly astonishing and distressing is the case of the Muslims. Destined to be the custodians of the Divine Message in its perfect and final form, and entrusted with the task of leading humanity towards good, it is indeed a great calamity that they should have fallen prey to nationalism and become lost in its by-ways, thereby narrowing down their spheres of interest and activity to limited geographical, racial or linguistic fields, and thus sealing to mankind as a whole the very source of those rays of light which would illumine all the world.

The emergence of Orientalism gave rise to many hopes. It was expected that the Orientalists would be able to bridge the gulf between East and West, and so bring about an understanding between these two branches of the human family and remove the barrier erected by ignorance and geographical remoteness. It was also hoped that they would be able to transmit to the West all that is best in the East in the way of prophetic teachings, moral values, examples of the noble life set by its prophets and its spiritual leaders, the treasures of Eastern wisdom, and its wonderful code of laws and precepts for the guidance of human conduct.

There is no doubt that the Orientalists have many achievements to their credit. They resurrected many Islamic works which had for centuries lain buried from the light of day. They wrote a vast number of books which testify to their scholarly acumen. No one who has one iota of fairness and any love of learning can deny their academic approach and painstaking labours, their keen perception and the scientific method of their work. The peoples of the East in general, and the Muslims in particular, feel nevertheless that many of the Orientalists were inspired more by religious prejudices than by scientific motives. They have therefore disappointed the lovers of truth, who expected from them greater immunity from emotional predilections and inherited prejudices, a greater love for reality, a greater searching for the truth, and a greater courage in acknowledging it. However, Orientalism has failed, despite its virtues and accomplishments, to fill this gap, and could not give the West what the soul of many Western men, disillusioned by the emptiness of a materialistic civilization, has been longing for, namely, a true and glowing picture of the religions of the East in general and of Islam in particular. I speak of Islam in particular because we Muslims believe it to be the last Heavenly Message—and therefore a message of everlasting value—
to mankind, the message which bears the stamp of finality, which is in tune with the spirit of the age, which seeks to carry human civilization forward, and not, as some religions tend to do, backward; which is free from all extremism and rigidity, which is endowed with a wonderful capacity for creating new moulds consistent with the spirit of its own teachings as well as the demands of our changing times.

Whatever may have been the reasons, it is clear that the East, with its distinctive personality and its message, remained isolated from the West, and vice-versa. Whenever the two came together, it was in an atmosphere of suspicion and doubt, of bitterness and hatred. Seldom is there a meeting of minds between the East and the West for the greater good of humanity and with a view to building an ideal civilization. And there is little readiness on the part of either to benefit from the other's characteristic capacities or to exchange skill and knowledge.

The East continued to work on its own ground, guided by its own peculiar temperament which had been leavened by religion, inspired from time to time by noble prophets, and ceaselessly nourished by spiritual movements and the teachings of inspired religious leaders. The subject which interested the East was man himself, rather than that which is around man, or above his head, or beneath his feet. The East concentrated its attention and its intelligence, its genius and its will-power on man himself. It devoted itself to discovering the infinite secrets of man, and plumbing the very depths of his nature. It devoted itself to arousing the capacities and powers that lie dormant within him; to orienting man's tendencies and inclinations; to refining and reforming his morals, without which human life can have no sound basis.

Those prophets of God—peace be on them all!—came, and in the end came the last of the Prophets, Muhammad. These prophets concerned themselves with man and his moral refinement, and opened up the treasures that lay within him, receiving therefrom light and life and knowledge, love and confidence, strength of purpose, contentment and happiness, and thus enabled him to discover the real source of all life and power and order in the Universe.

This also enabled him to view the Universe not as divided into numerous elements all warring with one another, but as a domain governed by One Omnipotent and Merciful Will. “His, verily, is all Creation and Commandment. Blessed be Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.”

“The Lord of the East and of the West; there is no God save Him; so choose thou Him alone for thy defender” the Qur'an says. Thus the Prophets led to man's liberation from all forms of idolatry and dualism, from superstition and myth, from the authority of senseless tradition and legend, and from submission to all except the Creator and Ruler of the entire Universe.

Through this window opened by the prophets of God, man could also look at himself and his fellow men. It enabled him to see himself as the vice-regent of God in this world, as one in whom God had breathed a spark of His Divine Spirit, as one to whom He had entrusted a sacred mission, as one whom He had created in the best of moulds, as one whom He had chosen for the greatest honours, as one whom He had invested with His deanship, and upon whom He had placed the crown of government of this world; one for whom He had created all that is in the Universe, which He created for him and for His Own Self; before whom He had made the angels bow down, forbidding him thereafter to prostrate himself before any other creature. As God Himself says: “Suraely We created man of the best stature,” and: “We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things

1 Al-Araf 54.
2 Al-Muzzammil 9.
3 Al-Ain (The Fig) 4.
good and pure; and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of Our Creation."

Man looked through this window—the window opened by the Prophets—and cast a glance at his fellow men, at the human family scattered throughout the length and breadth of the world. This enabled him to look at it as one single family, as if it were one soul, originating from the same parents. Men were seen as one brotherhood in the light of the Prophetic teaching, the most worthy of affection in the sight of God being he who was most benevolent toward God's family. This teaching also enabled man to feel that the members of the human race were the same as the members of his own body, so that any feeling of pain in one automatically caused pain to be felt in the other. It further enabled man to see that all distinctions between the various members of the human family based on colour, territory, or nationality, or on material possessions, is a legacy of ignorance: for man heard the noble Prophet say to his Lord in the darkness of Night: "I bear witness: that all creatures are brothers," and also heard him proclaim in broad Daylight, before huge crowds of people: "Oh men! All of you are from Adam, and Adam is from clay. There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab, nor for a non-Arab over an Arab, nor for white over black, nor for black over white, except by virtue of piety." As God says: "Oh men. We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes in order that you may know one from another. Verily, the most honourable of you in the sight of God is the most pious among you".

All the Prophets in their respective times and climes, and the Prophet Muhammad at the end of them all, strove to purify man, to mobilize to the utmost his inherent capacities, which nothing else, neither philosophy nor psycho-

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1. Ibn Hisham (The Children of Israel) 20.
of purpose and earnestness, one can obtain greater achievements despite meagre resources, and inefficient tools and instruments, than can those who lack sincerity of purpose even though they possess tremendous resources. The reason for this is that when there is a strong and sincere will, the unknown is somehow discovered, resources are made available, difficulties are overcome, and man makes a way for himself even over mountains and across seas. On the other hand, if there is no higher end in view or no determination to serve it the resources are wasted, and the efforts of the inventors of the tools, and of the skilled labourers, are all brought to nothing. I do not wish to disparage the value of knowledge or of the instruments and machines invented by man to serve his ends. Nevertheless, I should like to stress that these are not so indispensable in comparison with some of the most elementary but strong urges of mankind. When, for example, a man is starving with hunger or dying with thirst, or when love swells up in heart of a mother, or when a lover is overcome by longing, the intensity of the feeling itself impels them to find a way of satisfying and fulfilling it.

The role of the Prophets has been to place before man the right kind of objectives, and to fire him with the enthusiasm and devotion necessary to achieve them. Once this enthusiasm and devotion to goodness are present, men will find their own ways of self-fulfilment, even with the help of only limited resources and primitive tools, in the same way as a thirsty man or a mother burning with love for her child is driven to find the means of fulfilling that urge. It was this same intensity and sincerity of desire that led to the discovery of effective means of accomplishing those noble objectives which were given to mankind in their most perfect form by the last of the Holy Prophets. And these means were effective enough to bring forth a civilization that provided man with the utmost solace and comfort, honour and dignity. Surely enough, this was of a comparatively simple pattern, devoid of all complications and complexities. And yet it contained powerful seeds and rich ground for good growth and expansion in the future.

As for the West, it began to wake up around the period of time known as the Age of the Renaissance. At that stage, due to a number of reasons—the weakening of the bond of religious and moral values as a result of the misrepresentation of the Church, the pressure of economic and political factors, the struggle for life which the various European nations had encountered within the limited area of Europe, with all the problems arising therefrom—the attention of the West was turned from man himself to his external physical structure or to his environment; from the soul of man to the Universe, from the human heart to the physical world, and thus to sciences such as physics, chemistry, astronomy, mathematics, etc. And it is God's law that He gives to every man that for which he strives. As the Qur'ān says: "Of the bounties of the Lord We bestow freely on all—on these as well as on those: the bounties of the Lord are not denied to anyone!"

The West began to make strides in natural sciences, discovering one secret of nature after another, achieving one success after another, till it reached its present level of attainment, undreamt of in the past. This needs no elaboration, particularly here in this place which is rightly considered one of the pioneers of modern learning and Western civilization; and in this University, where I have the honour of addressing you, there has continued, as in so many other similar universities of Europe, the advance of modern science and the discovery of the means for these astounding achievements in the fields of science and technology which are a blessing from God, the value of which should not be underrated. These resources were in the nature of a 'means', or, an instrument. All this brought abundant wealth, tremendous power and energy and stunning speed, to such an extent that even considerably less

1 Bani Israel (The Children of Israel) 20.
than this would have sufficed for the well-being of mankind, for the establishment of world peace, for securing inner contentment and serenity and individual peace, for the spread of love and unity, and for mutual acquaintance and co-operation among the various branches of the human family scattered all over the globe. It could have removed the barriers that separate men from one another, so that they could extend the hand of co-operation and benevolence and sympathy to their fellow human beings in the remotest corners of the world; so that they could listen to the beating of their hearts and the whisperings of their souls, see their faces and hear their words, oppose the wrongdoer and help the wronged, feed the hungry and help those who are stricken. For all the preventive factors, which were the result of man's ignorance and weakness, and had plagued the life of man in the past, were gone. All kinds of instruments and machines were produced in order to help man to realize his objectives as quickly as possible, so as to leave no excuse whatsoever for any seeker after virtue, any lover of humanity and any standard-bearer of peace—neither individual, nor society, nor state.

These resources were enough to transform this world which is so full of wrongs and dangers and suffering into a paradise in which there would be no trouble, no fear, and no grief, no warfare and enmity, no poverty, and no disease. But was all that realized? Did we rid ourselves of fear and anxiety? Did poverty and misery end? Did wrong and tyranny cease to exist? Did peace and brotherhood prevail? Did confidence spread? Has the spectre of war been driven out of existence? I need not wait for your reply. For this great civilization has witnessed two great wars on a global scale, and has shared the consequences and sufferings. All of us are living in the Atomic Age, and thinkers have virtually written libraries of books which portray the waywardness of this civilization, and the misery of the human beings who are subjected to it, pointing out the laxity of morals and the loosening of social bonds, the disintegration of the family, the growing mental tensions and anxieties, the predominance of fear and anxiety, ominous developments in the life of modern man.

What has led to these results? The resources themselves were obviously innocent. The instruments and machines produced by modern civilization were capable of being used for the good of mankind, for they have no will or direction of their own.

The answer to this is no secret, nor does it require extraordinary intelligence. The cause of all these misfortunes is that man himself has not been able to keep pace with the progress of the sciences. His intentions, tendencies and inclinations have not made the same progress as that made by instruments and machines. Indeed it could be said that the sciences have progressed at the cost of man and his moralities, at the cost of his soul and of his heart. The reason for this is that unfortunately the West has confined its activity and devoted all its intelligence and its will-power to the external world. The West concentrated all its efforts on the outer world, withdrawing its attention from man himself who is the very soul of this Universe and the masterpiece of Creation. And even when it paid any heed to man's inner self, its approach was tainted by crass materialism which makes it impossible to plumb the depths of man's inner reality, to come to grips with the very solid facts of the inner life, and appreciate faith and belief and morality. It also could not point out the source that guides man and inspires him towards goodness: his heart, upon the soundness of which rests the soundness of his whole life.

Unfortunately, even if the West wants to profit from the heart and guide humanity by it, it will not be capable of doing so, for it has lost the key which could open this lock. And however impressive the industries of the West may be, however fine their products, and however great the geniuses of the peoples of the West, they are incapable of opening or breaking the lock, for it is not the lock of banks and factories: it is a human lock, and the only key that can be applied to it is "Faith". This key—the key of Faith—which
humanly obtained from the Prophets, has been lost, or lies buried amid the heavy burdens of modern civilization or the shambles of old religious centres.

The affliction of humanity lies in the separation of the West from the East, in the separation of knowledge from Faith, a separation which has led to great disasters in the past. Faith has been making strides and growing for long ages in the East, while in more recent centuries, knowledge has been making strides and growing in the West. And Faith continues to wait for the companionship of science, while science stands waiting to submit itself to guidance by Faith, and humanity is waiting for the two to come together and co-operate with each other in order to produce a new generation; and there can be no hope of peace and true happiness without this blessed co-operation between Faith and science.

As for the East, my friends of the West, its wealth does not consist of "oil", the black gold which you transport to your respective countries and there use to run aeroplanes and automobiles. The real wealth of the East is that Faith which sprang up and blossomed there. You already benefited from some of this wealth at the beginning of your Christian Era. Then again in the opening decades of the seventh century A.D., the same treasure of wealth opened itself up again, in the forlorn desert of Arabia, and burst forth with a force and speed unprecedented in human history. Springing up from a remote valley in Mecca, it reached in no time the farthest ends of the known world, showering its blessings everywhere and refreshing, revitalizing and enriching each and every nook and corner of the world, so much so that the entire earth blossomed forth with a whole new life. It can still be appropriated and made use of, if there are good intentions and creative boldness. It is still capable of overcoming all the problems confronting our modern civilization, and it can inject fresh vigour and vitality into our present civilization, giving it a new lease of life, by providing it with a fresh sense of purpose and renewing its message, and reorienting the instruments and institutions of science and technology to worthwhile purposes. This can lead to momentous results, and to the creation of a new society in the best interests of mankind, the society for which the present age is yearning. Upon you, who belong to this great country, lies a great responsibility, for you were the pioneers of modern world civilization, and your national life is, even today, seething with energy and bubbling with vitality.

The Qur'an addresses you all, saying: "There hath come to you from God a new Light and a perspicuous Book—wherewith God guideth all who seek His pleasure to ways of peace and safety, and leadeth them out of darkness, by His Will, into the Light, and guideth them to a path that is straight'."

1 Almaedah (The Table Spread) 15-16.
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