William ‘Abdullah’ Quilliam:

Modernity and Faith as lived by a Victorian Muslim

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A Thesis

in

The Department

of

History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts (History) at

Concordia University

Montréal, Québec, Canada

November 2018

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

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Entitled: William 'Abdullah' Quilliam: Modernity and Faith as lived by a Victorian Muslim

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (History)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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ABSTRACT

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William ‘Abdullah’ Quilliam, a British convert to Islam, was an oddity to his fellow countrymen and was looked upon with hope and expectation by Muslims around the world who saw his small community of converts as an Islamic outpost in the heart of the British Empire. Many of Quilliam’s countrymen, however, then, as now, understood Islam to represent the antithesis of the modern values which Britain was ostensibly spreading around the globe. Indeed, Muslim societies, it was argued, were undeveloped and required the fruits of modern, Western civilization; Muslims were superstitious, rigidly traditional, and irrational, conditions which could best be remedied by a strong dose of European education. At times, Quilliam’s contemporaries, as well as Quilliam scholars, have depicted him as existing within a framework of resistance, in opposition to this hegemonic, imperialist narrative. But as this thesis demonstrates, through archival research of Quilliam’s periodicals, one of the reasons why he is such a provoking historical figure is that he largely agreed with this ‘European’ account of the state of the world and its peoples. In fact, it was through this worldview that he justified his conversion to Islam and sought to convert others. Quilliam argued that Islam was, at its core, a purely rational, scientific, undogmatic religion. This secular, ‘Victorian reasoning’ for his conversion to Islam problematizes the relationship between modernity and religion. Furthermore, his life demonstrates that, rather than ushering in a secular homogeneity, modernity, like all of history, is messy, resists catchall theories, and defies easy categorization.

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INTRODUCTION

The fin-de-siècle was a tumultuous period for the bustling port-city of Liverpool. As one of Britain's largest cities – and its most important coastal city – it was in large part from Liverpool that the ideology, technology, and human capital of British imperialism was spread around the world. It was from its shores that the colonial administrator and the Christian missionary departed eastward; it was often off Liverpool's coast that British Protestants took their last look at their island nation before heading to their new homes in one of the empire's settler colonies. But as it was from Liverpool that British imperialism was exported, it was also through Liverpool that cultural imports, information, ideas, and people, travelled back along these same networks to Britain. It was to its shores that westward-bound trading vessels docked, oftentimes manned by Muslims and Hindus; it was to Liverpool that most emigrant Irish Catholics came to start life anew. In fin-de-siècle Liverpool, unlike much of the rest of the British Isles, except for a small handful of cities such as London, Manchester, and Cardiff, Britons regularly encountered people from Africa and Asia. In Liverpool, more so than perhaps anywhere else in Britain at the time, religious difference was an inescapable fact of life. It is by no mere chance that Britain's first community of native-born converts to Islam was founded in Liverpool.

In 1891, Rev. John J. Pool travelled westward along the busy sea-route from India to Britain so that he could see this community for himself. He had heard of its existence while in India, where he worked as a missionary, and found the prospects of Muslim Liverpudlians to be more intriguing and foreign than any neighbourhood of Irish Catholics or shipyard full of Asian, African, and Caribbean seamen. The rumour as he had heard it was that that an Englishman in Liverpool – a well-known solicitor – had not only converted to Islam, but opened a mosque,

formed an Islamic community of converts, founded an affiliated missionary organization, and was actively publishing weekly and monthly periodicals that were disseminated throughout the world, from the Americas to Australia, South Africa to South Asia. Apparently, fin-de-siècle Liverpool was home to native British-Muslims and was an exporter of its own brand of Muslim literature. Rev. Pool was astonished. Even for a cosmopolitan city such as Liverpool, the existence of such a community was beyond all norms and Pool decided to verify these bizarre facts for himself.

As Pool walked down Brougham Terrace towards the mosque, nothing he had heard could prepare him for what he saw. A bearded Englishman in a robe and fez stood on a balcony which overlooked passersby, an unusual sight to be sure, but it was his words that were the most out of place on an otherwise quiet English street: "Allah is Great! Allah is Great! I bear witness there is no God but God! I bear witness that Mohammed is the Prophet of God! Come to prayers! Come to salvation! Allah is Great!" The *adhan*, the Muslim call to prayer, which Pool had previously only heard in Arabic, was being chanted in the heart of the British Empire, in its second-largest city no less, in English, by an Englishmen, to a street of English onlookers. Englishness on Brougham Terrace, it seemed, had been turned on its head.[1]

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William Henry 'Abdullah' Quilliam (1856 – 1932), the solicitor in Turkish garb, converted to Islam in 1887. A few years earlier, in either 1882 or 1883, he had fallen ill, as he often would throughout his life, and on the advice of his doctor took a sojourn to a warmer climate. He sailed from Liverpool on the SS *Sidon* to Gibraltar and then onward to Morocco. There were several

[1] John J. Pool, *Studies in Mohammedanism, Historical and Doctrinal: With a Chapter on Islam in England*, (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Company, 1892), 394 – 404.

Muslims aboard the ship. Even though he had almost certainly encountered Muslims among the continuously shifting population of Liverpool, he had perhaps not spent much time with them in such a small, intimate setting. Almost two decades after he converted to Islam, he still remembered those Muslims on that small ship: "[I was] profoundly impressed by the behaviour of a number of [Muslim] pilgrims, who when the hour of devotion arrived performed their ablutions and said their prayers on deck regardless of the curious glances of the foreigners."[2] This show of unity and steadfastness, unaffected by peering eyes or unruly waters, was refreshing to Quilliam, who throughout his life as both a Christian and a Muslim often complained about Christian infighting and disunity. It is believed that this was the first of many visits that Quilliam made to North Africa between 1882 and 1887.

Following one such visit to Morocco in 1887, Quilliam returned to Liverpool and studied an English translation of the Qur'an, as well as works on Muhammad and Islam written by Thomas Carlyle, David Urquhart, and William Muir.[3] He converted shortly thereafter and made his conversion public the following year, in 1888. A year later he founded the Liverpool mosque and the affiliated Liverpool Muslim Institute (LMI). It was two years later, in 1891, that Rev. Pool heard Quilliam calling his fellow Liverpudlians to salvation from the balcony overlooking Brougham Terrace.

Over the years, some Britons heeded the call. They responded in the affirmative to Quilliam's calls to prayer and salvation, his speeches, public appearances, charity work, and writings found in his two periodicals, *The Crescent* and *The Islamic World*. These were constituent parts of his effort to spread the Islamic faith within Britain, and the West more

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[2] *Moslem Chronicle and Muhammadan Observer*, 23 January 1904, 55. Quoted in Jamie Gilham, *Loyal Enemies: British Converts to Islam, 1850 – 1950*, (London: Hurst, 2014), 53.
[3] Gilham, *Loyal Enemies*, 53.

generally. As Quilliam wrote at the beginning of each issue of *The Crescent*, he believed that his community's success would be demonstrated in its future growth, which in turn would justify its existence within Britain. And grow his community did! At the time of Pool's four-day visit in the Autumn of 1891, it was fifty-two converts strong. Quilliam would later claim to have converted over five-hundred people to Islam. Ron Geaves, in his biography of Quilliam, *Islam in Victorian Britain: The Life and Times of Abdullah Quilliam* (2010), states that this number is "supported to some degree" by Quilliam's own records of conversion which were published from week-to-week in *The Crescent*.[4] Although it is likely that this number was smaller than what Quilliam claimed, it is nevertheless true that throughout the two decades following his conversion, there was a growing, vibrant, dedicated Muslim community whose base was Liverpool, but with members who were mostly converts living throughout Britain. Quilliam's two periodicals, which ran from 1893 to 1908, had subscribers spanning the globe, in Canada, the United States, countries throughout Europe, the Maghreb, the West African coast down to South Africa, in Sudan, Afghanistan, India, Australia, and elsewhere. In 1894, Sultan Abdulhamid II took notice of Quilliam and his publications and appointed him Sheikh al-Islam of the British Isles, a position unique in history.

In 1908, Quilliam departed from Liverpool for Constantinople under mysterious circumstances. Without his commanding presence, the LMI disbanded, *The Crescent* and *The Islamic World* abruptly halted, and the mosque fell into disuse. Soon after it became Liverpool's Registry of Births and Deaths – fitting for a building which had been host to the birth and death of Britain's first native-born Muslim community. In 1891, Rev. Pool had predicted that

[4] Ron Geaves, *Islam in Victorian Britain: The Life and Times of Abdullah Quilliam*, (Markfield: Kube Publishing, 2010), 6.

Quilliam's dream of a strong Muslim presence in Britain – perhaps even an Islamic Britain! – was a "forlorn hope." "Apart from the President," Pool remarked following his four-day visit, "I do not think the Institute contains any mental strength or signs of vigorous life."[5] Although Pool's comment was certainly said out of prejudice, he at least correctly identified Quilliam as the indispensable leader of the community: Roughly two decades later, when he departed in 1908, the community's head was removed and its body immediately withered away. Following its dissolution, a few members of the Institute became involved in the Islamic community in Woking, roughly thirty miles south-west of London, home to Britain's first purpose-built mosque (1889), the Shah Jahan Mosque, funded by adherents of the Ahmadiyya millenarian movement in India. Those converts who may have remained in Liverpool were without a mosque or any community organization to speak of. By 1909, the year following Quilliam's mysterious departure, Woking, London, and Cardiff had eclipsed Liverpool as the primary sites of British Islam.

Quilliam returned to Britain – to Woking, in fact – a few years after his disappearance. From there, he continued his efforts to spread Islam within Britain, working closely with converts and Indian Muslims. But whatever had scared him away in 1908 kept him cautious throughout the interwar period. Quilliam and two of his sons, Robert Ahmed and Billal Quilliam, claimed in 1908 that he had been summoned by Sultan Abdulhamid, as he had been in the past, and would return within six weeks. However, publication of *The Crescent* and *The Islamic World* ceased immediately, even though Billal had been left in charge of the LMI, a clear sign that his father had no intention of returning to Liverpool. His self-imposed exile to Constantinople came off the back of brewing troubles with the law. Between 1905 and 1907,

[5] Pool, *Studies in Mohammedanism*, 404.

Quilliam was subject to an investigation by the Foreign Office because of some allegedly illegal marriages that he had performed at the mosque between English girls and foreign Muslims. In one particular case, a Liverpudlian girl who married a Moroccan man wrote her father, from Morocco, begging him to come and bring her home. This is the case which initially made the Foreign Office suspect of Quilliam's behaviour. Jamie Gilham, however, suggests that, ultimately, it was a "bungled court case" which precipitated Quilliam's flight abroad. He was accused of having fabricated evidence in a divorce case, was subsequently reprimanded and ordered to pay costs, which he never paid as he fled following the ruling.[6] It is uncertain that this is the definitive reason for Quilliam's departure, as neither the 'bungled case' nor the Foreign Office's suspicion of him constituted an immediate threat, and throughout Quilliam's career as a lawyer and activism as a Muslim he had created many waves and was certainly no novice at riding them. Whatever the reason for his absence, once he did return to England, first briefly in 1909 and then permanently in 1913, he was clearly still worried about something, as he returned under a pseudonym, borrowing the identity of his deceased friend and fellow Muslim, Prof. Henri de Léon.

To the Muslim community of Woking, Quilliam's true identity was something of an open secret. However, as Quilliam's generation was replaced by a younger generation of British converts and émigrés from India, the relevance of Henri de Léon's true identity went increasingly unrecognized. By his death in 1932, the legacy of William Henry 'Abdullah' Quilliam and the Liverpool Muslims had already been forgotten by all but a few. Their stories would not be remembered until Daoud Rosser-Owen, also a British convert to Islam, who founded the Association of British Muslims (ABM) in 1976, rediscovered Quilliam in the 1960s.

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[6] Gilham, *Loyal Enemies*, 72-5.

In 1975, in a controversial move which was overturned three years later by the ABM membership, Rosser-Owen found a living nephew of Abdulhamid II in London and recruited him to sanction and perform a devolution of Quilliam's authority as Sheikh al-Islam to Rosser-Owen himself. Independently, but around the same time, in the early 1970s, a Liverpudlian Muslim, Akram Khan-Cheema, discovered some copies of *The Islamic World* in the Liverpool Central Library. A decade later, a Liverpudlian couple who owned an Islamic bookshop learned of him and began to research his life. In 1997, they founded the Abdullah Quilliam Society and in 2014, more than a century after he fled to Constantinople, condemning Britain's first ever community of converts to Islam to a temporary sentence of historical obscurity, the Liverpool mosque was purchased from the city for a sum of £1 and reopened.[7]

During the 1990s and early 2000s, Quilliam garnered a few fleeting mentions in academic work. One of the earliest was Ali Köse's monograph (1996) on native British converts to Islam, which contains a small section on Quilliam.[8] Köse knew of the existence of *The Crescent* and *The Islamic World*, but did not draw from them – or, at least, did not cite or quote from them. He likely learned of Quilliam from Rosser-Owen, whom he thanks in his acknowledgements for having provided him with "a substantial amount of information of native British converts to Islam."[9] Köse was thus aware of Quilliam's ties to the Ottoman Sultan-Caliph, of his title of Sheikh al-Islam of the British Isles, and that he fled Liverpool in 1908. But while describing the founding of the British Muslim Society in 1914, he fails to recognize that 'Prof. Henri Marcel (Mustafa) de Léon', a founding member and close associate of Lord

[7] For more on how Quilliam's history was rediscovered, see: Yahya Birt, "Preachers, Patriots and Islamists: Contemporary British Muslims and the Afterlives of Abdullah Quilliam," in *Victorian Muslim: Abdullah Quilliam and Islam in the West*, eds. Jamie Gilham and Ron Geaves, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 131-150.
[8] Ali Köse, *Conversion to Islam: A Study of Native British Converts,* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1996), 12-19.
[9] Ibid., acknowledgements.

Headley's (the Society's first president), was in fact Quilliam, whose departure was a sojourn and not a surrender.

In the years following, Quilliam was briefly mentioned in academic works by Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Hamayun Ansari.[10] Both scholars offer a cursory history of the Liverpool Mosque and Muslim Institute. But they primarily use the scant space they reserve for Quilliam to argue, in the words of Gilliat-Ray, that his story strengthens the argument that "the kind of religious liberty assumed to be implicit within Victorian Anglican Protestantism had definite boundaries" – boundaries which saw "Muslims placed on the margins of society."[11] Ansari offers a more explicit example of this marginalization by describing an event in which the Liverpool Muslims were targeted with rocks and mud upon exiting the mosque.[12] While events such as Ansari describes did sometimes occur, the point to which the Liverpool Muslims were marginalized is perhaps overstated in their accounts. For instance, in January 1895, the Liverpool Muslims were pelted with snowballs. An arrest was made, a man was charged and harshly chastised by the judge for his belief that the Muslims, given that they were, in his view, 'heretics', should not be allowed to practice their faith in peace. In *The Crescent*, Quilliam republished statements from several local publications which condemned the snowball-throwers.[13] This example demonstrates that while the Liverpool Muslims were subject to attacks which, say, Anglican worshipers were typically free from, they were hardly marginalized by society at large. Quilliam, for instance, remained a well-respected solicitor after his conversion, even dining with the mayor on occasion. He also seems to have published every instance of a

[10] Sophie Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain: An Introduction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 39-41; Humayun Ansari, *'The Infidel Within': Muslims in Britain since 1800*, (London: Hurst, 2004), 82-4.
[11] Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain*, 41.
[12] Ansari, *'The Infidel Within'*, 83.
[13] *The Crescent* 5, No. 106, 23 January 1895.

Christian assaulting a Liverpudlian Muslim or disturbing a service, and these events seem to have occurred infrequently.

In 2014, Jamie Gilham published *Loyal Enemies*, which, as its title suggests, offers a more nuanced view of Quilliam's history, portraying him as a man of torn allegiances, with Queen and country and Caliph and faith pulling him in opposite directions. In step with the discussion on his divided loyalties, Gilham describes the local and national responses to Quilliam's community as a mix of positive and negative.[14] However, Gilham's monograph covers an entire century and a slew of Muslims and converts to Islam and, as such, his treatment of Quilliam is not much longer than that of Köse, Gilliat-Ray, or Ansari. The first book to be dedicated to Quilliam's history is Ron Geaves' 2010 biography.[15] Geaves describes in detail Quilliam's childhood in the Isle of Man, early Temperance activism, career as a solicitor, conversion to Islam as a young man of thirty-one, and his actions as president of the LMI and Sheikh al-Islam. Quilliam's journal, *The Crescent*, described itself as "A Weekly Record of Islam in England," but for anyone looking for a year-by-year account of Quilliam's life, Geaves is the authoritative source. In the years since Geaves' biography, Quilliam has been the subject of two BBC radio documentaries, a 2012 BBC One television documentary, and a 2013 episode of *Britain's Secret Homes* which focused on the Brougham Terrace mosque.[16] In terms of scholarship, in recent years Quilliam has been the subject of a series of essays co-edited by Geaves and Gilham, a short article by Geoffrey Nash, and a small section of Cemil Aydin's recent book, *The Idea of the Muslim World*.[17] All three of these works attempt to situate

[14] Gilham, *Loyal Enemies*, 64-5.
[15] Geaves, *Islam in Victorian Britain*.
[16] Birt, "Preachers, Patriots and Islamists," in *Victorian Muslim*, eds. Gilham and Geaves, 142.
[17] Gilham and Geaves (eds.), *Victorian Muslim*; Geoffrey Nash, "W.H. Quilliam, Marmaduke Pickthall and the window of British modernist Islam," in *Postcolonialism and Islam: Theory, literature, culture, society and film*, eds.

Quilliam within some larger context, be it the history of English masonic lodges (Quilliam was involved in several); the creation of transnational Muslim networks which connected Liverpool to West Africa and America; the intellectual currents of Muslim modernism which enjoyed global circulation at the time; or pan-Islamism – the 'idea of the Muslim world' – with which Quilliam was a great sympathizer. And with the question of Islam's place within the West at the forefront of contemporary politics, time spent on Quilliam in the media and academia is likely to increase.

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Rev. Pool's visit from India to Liverpool in 1891, while Quilliam's Muslim community was still in its infancy, speaks to the globalized nature of the fin-de-siècle world. Ron Geaves opens his book, *Islam in Victorian Britain*, with another story which also testifies to the global interconnectedness of Quilliam's moment in history. On July 28, 1902, one-thousand Indian troops arrived in Liverpool from Bombay to take part in Edward VII's Coronation celebrations. The Indian troops took their seats at St. George's Hall amongst civic dignitaries and members of the press, a display of the British Empire's power and reach. As Quilliam walked into the hall, dressed in the robes and turban of an Ottoman *'alim*, five-hundred soldiers stood and shouted, *'Allah-u-Akbar!'*. This brief moment highlights some unexpected connections between seemingly disparate parts of the globe. St. George's Hall had been recently built in order to mark Liverpool's status as arguably the second greatest city of the British Empire. Within this imperial showpiece, during a celebration of the British Empire, a Muslim Britton, wearing traditional Ottoman clothing, was not only recognized but honoured by a troop of Indian

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Geoffrey Nash, Kathleen Kerr-Koch and Sarah E. Hackett, (London: Routledge, 2013); Cemil Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

Muslims from half-way around the world. "One of the many remarkable things about this incident," Geaves notes, "is that the Indian Muslim sepoys knew exactly who had entered the hall, and were prepared to break ranks to show their respect."[18] To Pool, in 1891 Quilliam had been only a rumour until he saw him calling passersby to prayer from the balcony of the mosque. A little over a decade later, Muslim Indians knew him as the Sheikh al-Islam of the British Isles.

Almost as soon as Quilliam began publishing *The Crescent* and *The Islamic World* – and certainly after he was named Sheikh al-Islam by Adbulhamid, a title which the Amir of Afghanistan officially recognized soon after – he became known throughout the world. For instance, Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb, an American convert to Islam and one-time United States Consul to the Philippines, who was somewhat of a rival of Quilliam's, purposely modeled his organization – the American Islamic Propaganda (AIP) movement – after the LMI.[19] The AIP's Indian benefactors believed that Islam's future within America would be virtually guaranteed if Islam had already firmly established itself in perhaps an even more unlikely location: the heart of the British Empire. In an article published in *The Times of India,* for instance, Budruddin Abdullah Kur, a member of the Bombay Municipal Council and a contact of Webb's, outlined to the newspaper's readers the successes of Quilliam's LMI in order to emphasize his "reason in support" and justify his "enthusiasm for the promotion of this American scheme," the AIP.[20] Webb's AIP eventually splintered into several quasi-antagonistic groups, in part because of the arrival in New York of Emin Nabakoff, a Russian Muslim and member of Quilliam's LMI, who criticized the AIP for its lack of basic Islamic practices in

[18] Geaves, *Islam in Victorian Britain*, 1.
[19] Brent D. Singleton, "Abdullah Quilliam's International Influence: America, West Africa and Beyond," in *Victorian Muslim: Abdullah Quilliam and Islam in the West*, eds. Jamie Gilham and Ron Geaves, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 114.
[20] Ibid., 114-5.

comparison to what he had seen from Quilliam's Liverpool community. Henceforth, after the AIP split, "every time a dispute arose among the American Muslims, one part or another used Quilliam as an example to bolster their cause, called upon him to settle the issue, or asked for his support."[21]

In West Africa, Quilliam was also looked to as a Muslim leader. In June 1894, he travelled along the West Africa coast, stopping in Senegal, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Gold Coast, and Lagos. He had been sent by Abdulhamid II to bestow the title of bey and the Order of Medjidie third class to Mohammed Shitta for having funded the construction of a mosque in Lagos. This trip, during which he could portray himself as a representative of the Sultan-Caliph and the leader of a community of British Muslims, solidified Quilliam's role as a Muslim leader of global importance. Thereafter, Quilliam played the part of middleman between Constantinople and West Africa. He received reports of African conversions to Islam, which he then passed on to Constantinople; in turn, Abdulhamid used Quilliam to deliver messages to his African contacts along the western coast. Quilliam's influence within West African Muslim communities was so great that, in 1903, Dr. Edward Wilmot Blyden, a pan-Africanist and Liberian politician, suggested that 'Abdullah Quilliam' was one of the two best-known English names in all of West and Central Africa. The other was Sir Alfred Jones, once the manager of the African Steamship Company in Liverpool, who later went into business for himself and managed to dominate the bulk of the trade along the West African coast.[22]

Before Quilliam adopted the name Abdullah – during his life as William Quilliam, the Liverpudlian Christian – he was a respected solicitor, well-known temperance advocator, and an

[21] Ibid., 117.
[22] Ibid.

all-around Victorian gentleman. As Abdullah Quilliam, the convert to Islam, he became the leader of a local religious community which enjoyed global fame, and a representative of the Ottoman Sultan and exemplar of missionary success to Muslims around the world. Quilliam was a global figure. But as we shall see, he grew up in a globalizing city. Liverpool was a local site of globalization, wherein global developments met local and national particularities, giving Islam, in this case, an English, Liverpudlian twist. In *Terrains of Exchange: Religious Economies of Global Islam*, Nile Green explains that by "examining world history from the ground up through tracing the exchanges between distant but interlinked locales, we are able to draw together two scales of analysis by recognizing that global history is at the same time microhistory."[23] Drawing from Green's work, fin-de-siècle Liverpool is a 'terrain of exchange' – a local site of globalization. Such "fields of terrain," Green writes, "are conceived as distinctive environments that lent shape – defining colour and flavour – to their religious produce. . . . [They] were also the soil into which foreign vines were planted to yield cross-fertilizations of culture."[24] The networks of trade and imperialism which connected Liverpool to other locals around the world exposed its 'soil', so to speak, to seeds which were planted and germinated into products neither completely British, nor entirely foreign. Quilliam's particular brand of Islam is one such example. Though globalization and modernization, which throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been inseparable, may be (and have been) characterized in generalized terms – and though both projects may have been driven by empire and imperialism – these forces played out differently and gave rise to distinct developments across their various terrains of exchange. The result of the interplay between the local and the

[23] Nile Green, *Terrains of Exchange: Religious Economies of Global Islam*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7.
[24] Ibid.

global, then, produces heterogeneity and not homogeneity – even though one goal of European imperialism was to increase homogeneity between cultures and disparate parts of the globe.

This goes some way to explaining how historical theories such as Max Weber's 'disenchantment', and the modernization and secularization theories which followed it, were proven incorrect when it became obvious by the late twentieth-century that modernity does not necessarily produce one singular, repeated (and repeatable) outcome. In fact, Peter Berger, one of the main proponents of the Secularization Thesis during the 1950s and '60s, admitted as much during an interview in 2014: "Basically, [the Secularization theory] had a very simple proposition. It could be stated in one sentence. Modernity inevitably produces a decline in religion. . . . The theory is wrong. . . . I came to the conclusion some years ago that to replace secularization theory – to explain religion in the modern world – we need the theory of pluralism. Modernity does not necessarily produce secularity. It necessarily produces pluralism."[25] This is not to say that pluralism is new to modernity, and I would hesitate in replacing the secularization theory with a new, equally neat and tidy, teleological theory of history. In reality, history is too messy and resists catchall theories and easy categorization, and thus it cannot be reduced to a struggle between the hegemonic forces of homogenization and the subversive forces of pluralism. But as Berger remarks, it is now clear that modernity does not necessarily produce the homogeneity that it claims to in its internal logic and desire. In addressing the messiness of history, it should be noted that pluralism of religious thought and practice – as well as secular thought and practice – changes through time, but is also produced across space – 'terrains of exchange' – through the interaction of various peoples, ideas,

[25] Peter Berger, "A Conversation with Peter Berger: 'How my views have changed,'" interview by Gregor Thuswaldner, *The Cresset*, 12 September 2013, http://thecresset.org/2014/Lent/Thuswaldner_L14.html

institutions, etc. This is a key difference between Weberian sociology, which maps religious change across time and history – through teleological processes of disenchantment and secularization, for example – and religious economy, which maps religious change across space instead. Green notes that when viewing religious change in this fashion, "'enchanted' and 'disenchanted' religious productions can . . . be seen as competitively co-existing or sequentially displacing one another without the Weberian expectation that one of them will ultimately triumph."[26]

Quilliam's particular brand of Islam can rightly be described as 'disenchanted'. Like John Calvin and other Reformation figures, whom Charles Taylor has identified as the progenitors of the centuries-long process of disenchantment in the West,[27] Quilliam held the Christianity of his British Isles to the standard of reason and found it lacking. He dismissed the Trinity as superstition and ignorance, even using mathematical principles to demonstrate that the Trinity – with each part being equal to the whole – defied basic logic.[28] He constantly affirmed Mohammed's superiority – and the suitability of his message for the modern age – on the basis that he did not perform miracles, but rather appealed to people's reason to convince them of his divine mission. He once wrote that "Those who cannot understand how 'Islam can be accepted by a European', have no proper comprehension of Western peoples. In the British Isles we are taught to be logical, and to think and reason for ourselves. Islam as a reasonable and logical faith appeals to men's reason, and therefore is likely to be adopted by those who reflect and think and have the courage of their convictions."[29]

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[26] Green, *Terrains of Exchange*, 9.
[27] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).
[28] *The Crescent* 8, No. 195, (7 October 1896): 1066.
[29] *The Crescent* 7, No. 177, (3 June 1986): 774.

Quilliam became a Muslim, I argue, primarily because of his rationalist, scientific worldview which made certain denominations of Christianity unpalatable to him – hence his flirtation with Unitarianism prior to becoming a Muslim. For this reason, Quilliam saw Unitarians, Deists, agnostics, and even atheists, as natural allies. That these latter groups were growing by the year did not signal to Quilliam – as it did to Weber, Peter Berger, and a line of thinkers before them, including Marx and Nietzsche – that irreligiosity was the inevitable, teleological outcome of modernity and the more scientifically literate, reason-based world which characterized it. To Quilliam, Christian theology's steady retreat in face of the unrelenting advance of science signaled that the religion of the modern era would have to be one in complete harmony with science and reason. Quilliam identified Islam as that religion. While Nietzsche was lamenting that God was dead, and creating a philosophy for a future wherein people would have to create their own values, Quilliam was looking for a new system of values – a new religion – which was in harmony with the very forces which had 'killed' Christianity. To Quilliam, God was still very much alive.

Nietzsche was correct, though, that with the ascendancy of a global modernity based on Enlightenment rationality and reason, the religious necessarily had to re-evaluate, or reinterpret, their beliefs and values. In Victorian England, these negotiations were had in public, often in the form of debates between scientists and theologians, but also in private, in the hearts and minds of scientists who were often religious themselves. Engagement in these negotiations between science and religion could be undertaken from a position of belief and, even for the most ardent supporters of reason and science, the conclusion of such a process did not necessarily lead one away from faith. They led Quilliam to Islam. In 1913, Holbrook Jackson wrote in his book, *The Eighteen Nineties*, that the spirit of that decade could be summed up as a climax within the "old

battle between heterodoxy and orthodoxy, materialist and mystic, Christian and Pagan, but fought from a great variety of positions."[30] Quilliam fought these battles, and others, from the position of a rationalist and modernist Muslim.

In this respect, Quilliam's Islam resembles that of other Muslim modernists such as Muhammad 'Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. Geaves states that Quilliam applied the ideals of Muslim modernists, particularly 'Abduh, to how he ran his community, though he offers no evidence that Quilliam was even aware of 'Abduh (or al-Afghani, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, or any other Muslim modernists) and I can find none in either *The Crescent* nor *The Islamic World*. However, given his frequent contacts with Egyptians, Indians, and others throughout the Middle East and Asian sub-continent, it is possible that he knew of them. But Quilliam would not have to have known any Middle Eastern or Indian Muslim modernists in order to come to the same conclusions as them. As Geoffrey Nash has pointed out, "because [Islam] was God's final revelation" in the eyes of Muslim modernists it necessarily "had the malleability to be re-formed so as to answer the needs of modern mankind." Islamic modernists thus "construed Islam as rational [and] common-sense based"; as a religion which held "the solution to the problems of the modern world."[31] But regardless of whether Quilliam knew of other Muslim modernists or came to the same conclusions independently, the men who had the most influence on Quilliam's worldview were not Mohammad 'Abduh or Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, but scientific naturalists such as Charles Darwin, Thomas Huxley, and John Tyndall. If Quilliam really was aware of the arguments for a modern, reformed Islam coming from 'Abduh, as they corresponded with his own opinions one would expect to find some discussion of them in either of his journals, perhaps

[30] Quoted in Vincent Lloyd, "Christianity," in *The Fin-de-Siècle World*, ed. Michael Saler, (London: Routledge, 2015), 568.
[31] Geoffrey Nash, "W.H. Quilliam, Marmaduke Pickthall" in *Postcolonialism and Islam*, eds. Nash et al., [Vitalsource] 5th paragraph, e-book.

between the plethora of articles on scientific naturalism and naturalists. Just as ‘Abduh and al-Afghani’s Islam cannot be separated from the context of British empire and imperialism, the way that Islam was interpreted and practiced in Liverpool from 1889 to 1908 cannot be separated from the local and national conditions in which it developed. And at the same time, given Liverpool’s place in the global fabric, and the British Empire’s unintentional role as a facilitator between local sites of globalization, the seeds of Quilliam’s particular Islam were planted in other soils, and Muslim modernists in those lands, throughout the British Empire and beyond, responded to Quilliam, thereby creating a transnational Muslim network – a particular Muslim world, perhaps – created by the unique blending of local and global conditions during the fin-de-siècle.

In the following chapters, we shall investigate Quilliam’s Islam further. Chapter one explores Victorian England, and Liverpool specifically, as a local site of globalization in order to build the context within which Quilliam converted to Islam. Chapter two situates Quilliam’s two journals, *The Crescent* and *The Islamic World*, as the main components of his missionary activity both within Britain and globally. These journals, whose global circulations were possible due to imperial networks and technologies, were the vessels of the cross-fertilization which occurred between Quilliam and the British Muslims in Liverpool, and other Muslims (and non-Muslims) in localities throughout the world. These journals, therefore, document the emergence of a particular religious economy and transnational network of modernist, pan-Islamic Muslims. The third and final chapter explores Quilliam’s Muslim modernism as it affected his view of the past and the present in relation to the possibilities of the future. Quilliam, like many of his contemporaries, looked negatively upon the European Middle Ages as a time of ignorance and backwardness and identified the height of civilization at that time as having been within the Arab

world. In so doing, he located analogues for a coming Islamic golden age of reason in the histories of Muslim Spain and the Ottoman Empire. However, although Quilliam's British Islam – more specifically his Liverpudlian Islam, coming to age as it did in the unique conditions of that imperial port-city – imagined itself to be a global religion, pan-Islamic in its aspirations, its call to unity was based on Enlightenment reason, not a shared history, culture, language, or so on. As such, Quilliam's Islam, deeply rooted in reason, found itself at ease with the arguments and worldviews of Unitarians, agnostics, and even scientific naturalists, who also looked teleologically toward a future based on Enlightenment reason and rationality. On all the important debates raging in Victorian Britain at the time, Quilliam took a side – what he often called 'the Muslim point of view'. In reality, the point of view being offered was often that of an upper-middle class, liberal, rational Victorian gentleman, who had converted to Islam for reasons similar to why Huxley had coined the term 'agnostic', or Darwin had become a Deist. In this sense, Quilliam's was truly an Islam of the Victorian fin-de-siècle.

CHAPTER ONE

World Building

Victorian England

In more recent decades scholars have questioned the periodization of the 'Victorian years' as a distinct historical era. For instance, in 2000, John Lucas contended that "There is a strong case for arguing that, except in the most rigorously controlled of contexts, 'Victorian' and 'Victorianism' are terms we could well do without. They are all too frequently employed in ways that are chronologically indefensible, historically dubious, intellectually confusing, and ideologically unacceptable."[32] While this may well be true, the same could be said of almost any periodization, even the delineation of centuries, with which historians and other scholars show extreme flexibility, in allowing for the 'long nineteenth-century' for instance. But even there, the same accusations could be made with equal force. Nevertheless, it is something of an uncontested fact that upon Queen Victoria's passing, British and non-British subjects of Victoria's empire generally felt that an age was at a close.[33] Whether this sentiment was the product of an objective analysis of the Victorian years and Victoria's impact upon them or an affair of sentimental imagination seems a moot point; insofar as Victorians themselves thought as such, it seems as fair a periodization as any, regardless of whether their understanding of their age and their place within it can be problematized by nitpicky historians. So, what is the 'Victorian era'?

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[32] Quoted in Martin Hewitt, "Introduction" in *The Victorian World*, ed. Martin Hewitt, (London: Routledge, 2012), 2.
[33] Ibid., 1-2.

The Victorian era has an odd familiarity about it for a period which ended well over a century ago, possibly because the historical narratives which connect its developments to the present contain such extraordinary explanatory power. Whatever one's idea of 'the West', perhaps no other period has contributed so much to its modern heritage – technologically, scientifically, culturally – as has the Victorian era. Neoliberal thought, for instance, from the 1970s onward, could reasonably locate its roots in the Victorian consensus that existed within Britain across parliamentary parties around the following principles: "cheap government, 'good government', 'Laissez-faire', 'free trade' and 'sound money', underpinned by a philosophy of individualism and rationalism."[34] Contemporary, global networks of trade and finance – the arteries of the neoliberal international system – have been laid on top of routes well-travelled by individual Victorians who both advanced their own rational interests and served those of the Empire.

Their mobility in this sense provides one of the greatest points of comparison; like us, Victorians lived in a truly global world. As J.R. Seely wrote in 1883, "Science [gave] the political organism [of Empire] a new circulation, which is steam, and a new nervous system, which is electricity."[35] Using the power of steam and electricity, Victorians travelled and communicated from one end of the Earth to the other. They were present almost everywhere, from India to the Caribbean, Egypt to Canada, South Africa to Australia. Some were colonists seeking a new life and a certain degree of self-rule, or officials working a job or forging what they hoped would be a respectable imperial career. Others were simply travellers. Many of these overseas Britons relayed their experiences back to the Isles through letters, travelogues,

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[34] Ibid., 10.
[35] Quoted in Patrick Brantlinger, "Imperialism at Home," in *The Victorian World*, ed. Martin Hewitt, (London: Routledge, 2012), 126.

and memoirs, and almost everyone knew someone or had a relative who lived, served, or travelled abroad.[36] Not only were the Victorians present abroad, but the evidences of their imperialism were to be found at home. Commodities such as tea, sugar, chocolate, and tobacco made even the most banal activities such as eating or smoking a reminder of imperial reach. Even the English language became "peppered with Indian terms, such as curry, nabob, verandah, pundit, mango, pajamas, moghul, cheroot, thug, and bungalow" and even some Australian Aboriginal terms – "kangaroo, boomerang, dingo, billabong."[37] As Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose have noted, "Empire was omnipresent in the everyday lives of 'ordinary people' – it was there as part of the mundane."[38]

Victorian Britain was also undergoing visible changes from within. It was during the Victorian era that manufacture fully industrialized, urbanization transformed landscapes to an unprecedented degree, government modernized, the middle-class grew and the electorate enlarged. Most recent estimates put the rate of industrial growth from the 1830s onward between 2 and 3.3 percent per year and the annual increases of real wages at somewhere between 1 and 1.5 percent.[39] An industrial workforce capable of clothing, feeding, and housing itself to a minimal degree is a product of the Victorian era.

All the historical processes mentioned above shaped the world in which we live today and created environments and institutions which are familiar to us. The Victorian era was also an age of reform. As Susie L. Steinbach discusses in *Understanding the Victorians*, "Liberalism

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[36] Ibid., 127.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, *At Home with Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 22.
[39] Emma Griffin, "Patterns of Industrialisation," in *The Victorian World*, ed. Martin Hewitt, (London: Routledge, 2012), 90-91.

dominated the political and philosophical temper and debates of the day, and encouraged an atmosphere of gradual and moderate but deliberate and unstoppable reforms. These led to restrictions on work hours, improvements in public health, the growth of civil service bureaucracies, and enlargements of the electorate towards a more representative system."[40] It is easy to see how a historical connection could be made between Victorian reformist attitudes and movements for reform and rights in the twentieth-century. Gary Bass has even argued that humanitarian intervention has its origins in the Victorian period: "There was a genuine humanitarianism at work in the making of some foreign policy in the nineteenth century, which was not the same thing as that era's imperialism. . . . Even in the heyday of imperialism and realpolitik, the politics of human rights made a big impact on foreign policy."[41] Bass here refers to British inventions on behalf of Greeks and Druze (primarily, though not exclusively) in Ottoman lands.

One may question the appropriateness of labelling such interventions as 'humanitarian', but even if we accept Bass's argument, by the last quarter of the nineteenth century a New Imperialism, characterised by racial ideologies and intense violence, tore apart lives across the colonized and soon-to-be colonized world. Indeed, "While urbane Londoners, Parisians, and Viennese were basking in the wealth and cultural flowering of 'La Belle Époque,' the peoples of Africa and Asia were enduring undreamt-of misery and bloodshed. . . . [T]he explicit linkage of laws that dispossessed, disfranchised, or excluded non-whites to race-based ideologies grounded in alleged biological and evolutionary necessity signalled how far removed the period of New Imperialism was, culturally and intellectually, from the humanitarian impulse that had brought an

[40] Susie L. Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Culture and Society in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, (New York: Routledge, 2012), 6.
[41] Gary J. Bass, *Freedom's Battle: The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), 5-6.

end to slavery in the British Empire at the beginning of the century."[42] Thus, while modern humanitarian intervention may find its origins in the period, so do the most terrible aspects – and our indifference to them – of Western intervention throughout the world today.

Quilliam was, as Geaves has referred to him in the title of his first chapter, a 'Victorian gentleman'. He was a man of his time. As we shall see, Quilliam was liberal and reform-minded, as were most other Nonconformists at the time. Although Quilliam seemed to have been a supporter of the British Empire, he was also extremely critical of the New Imperialism, under which, for example, Britain invaded Sudan. His own home, in which he maintained a private zoo and small museum full of geological specimens and oriental artifacts, was evidence of the global reach which middle- and upper-class Victorians enjoyed during the period. After he became Sheikh al-Islam, Muslims from around the world sent him specimens to add to both collections.[43] Quilliam was also heavily influenced by the national debate around evolution and other scientific claims, which were often framed at the time as a struggle between science and theology. Quilliam himself, despite being a religious man, came down forcefully on the side of scientific naturalists such as Darwin, Huxley, and Tyndall. In all these ways and more Quilliam was a Victorian, enmeshed in the debates and uncertainties of his time. More specifically, though, Quilliam was a Liverpudlian. He would have viewed these national debates and uncertainties, as well as global developments, through the unique lens of Liverpool's political, social, and religious life.

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[42] Sascha Auerbach, "The New Imperialism,", *The Fin-de-Siècle*, ed. Michael Saler, (London: Routledge, 2015), 336, 339.
[43] Geaves, *Islam in Victorian Britain*, 4.

Liverpool

For all of Liverpool's modern history, since at least the eighteenth-century, it had been tied up with global developments. In 1709, advances in engineering made it possible to build the country's first artificial wet dock in Liverpool to cater to the growing Atlantic trade, a large part of which was the slave trade. Until that point, Liverpool was an insignificant place of little consequence even locally, to say nothing of its place in the emerging global fabric. Until the building of the docks, for instance, Liverpool had no parish church; those who resided there had to travel to the neighbouring township of Walton.[44] But Liverpool, as a town constructed around global trade, grew rapidly. In 1700 it had a population of 4,240 inhabitants. In 1841, a little over a decade before Quilliam's birth, its population had increased to 222,954.[45] By roughly the half-way point of its rise to global importance, in 1791, Lord Erskine described the "quondam village" of Liverpool as having become a city which was "fit to be a proud capital for any empire in the world."[46] Although it was not the capital, Liverpool's rapid growth, from a forgotten corner of England to arguably the second-most important city in the United Kingdom, mirrored the growth of the empire itself. In 1800, for instance, thirty-five percent of the world's land was controlled or occupied by Europeans; in 1878, a few years before Quilliam first travelled to Morocco and was exposed to Islam, the percentage of European-controlled territory had risen to sixty-seven percent, or roughly two-thirds of the globe.[47]

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[44] Margaret B. Simey, *Charitable Effort in Liverpool in the Nineteenth Century*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1951), 7.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Quoted in Ibid., 8.
[47] Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 3.

Paul Mantoux, a French economic historian, has made this same connection: The growth of Liverpool "seems to be bound up with the general trade of the country and to run parallel with it," he writes. "[T]he history of Liverpool illustrates during nearly all the years of the eighteenth century the history of English trade."[48] The history of English trade, then, is the history of a certain period of globalization as spread by English imperialism and colonialism, much of which was either directly or indirectly connected to Liverpool. It was at once the principal port of the slave trade, the end-point of the often-violent extraction of resources from periphery to center, and a launching-pad for missionary action abroad. Liverpool developed in tandem with, and because of, these global forces. Wherever the British Empire spread, Liverpudlian traders and capital followed in its wake; whenever the British Empire grew, so too did Liverpool; the more diverse territories and peoples the Empire laid claim to, the more diverse the inhabitants of Liverpool became.

The salt trade in the early eighteenth-century, "generally acknowledged to have been the Nursing Mother" of Liverpudlian commerce, was Liverpool's first large-scale trading operation.[49] This operation brought Liverpool's merchants to Newfoundland where they traded salt for fish and then sold those fish in the West Indies or the Mediterranean before returning to Liverpool with sugar, coffee, wine, or fruit. Between the 1740s and 1760s, Liverpool became principally known as a slave-trading port, a terrible shift from the comparatively benign salt trade. During these three decades, it eclipsed the slave-trading cities of Bristol and London and became the major English port of the slave trade. The subsequent large-scale adoption of the steamship in the 1840s and 1850s facilitated the opening of the Pacific to capital and traders

[48] Quoted in Francis E. Hyde, *Liverpool and the Mersey: An Economic History of a Port 1700-1970*, (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1971), 23.
[49] Ibid., 27.

from Liverpool. From around 1870 until the beginning of the Great War in 1914 – a span of four-decades which encompasses Quilliam's entire time as the President of the Liverpool Muslim Institute (1889 – 1908) – Liverpool held a dominant position in the British economy, a direct consequence of the spread of British imperialism. Indeed, by the fin-de-siècle, the period of Quilliam's greatest missionary activity at home and engagement with Muslims abroad, Liverpool had for over a century been the heart of the Transatlantic trade, the link between Britain and Ireland, and had recently become the fulcrum between Britain and its colonies in Africa and South Asia.[50]

Given Liverpool's place within an expanding British Empire, Quilliam's conversion occurred against both the backdrop of local developments which were influenced by global trends, and global realities which manifested themselves locally within Liverpool. For instance, Liverpool's rapid industrialization and growth as a global hub of exports and imports, in goods and people, created opportunities for employers but also conditions of abject poverty for labourers. Quilliam grew up and became a young man acutely aware of the dismal lives which Liverpool's working-class struggled to live. Displaced peoples from Wales, Ireland, the north of England, as well as refugees from Europe, flocked to Liverpool in search of employment. These employment-seekers, according to Margaret Simey, came to Liverpool out of sheer desperation rather than ambition.[51] The demand for labour in Liverpool was great, but for almost two-centuries, as the city continuously grew, the labour requirements fluctuated depending on the inconsistent levels of activity at the waterfront. The constant arrival of displaced peoples seeking economic relief was at odds with the shifting nature of the Liverpool job market; there

[50] M.J. Power, "The Growth of Liverpool," in *Popular Politics, Riot and Labour: Essays in Liverpool History 1790-1940*, ed. John Belcham, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992), 21.
[51] Simey, *Charitable Effort in Liverpool*, 9.

was a permanent desire for full employment in a city which offered employment in booms and busts. One month, a labourer might be engaged in back-breaking work for long hours under terrible working conditions. The next month, he might have little or no work, become idle, and descend into terrible living conditions. The results of the waterfront's unpredictable job-market fluctuations were movement and unrest. In 1859, the Domestic Mission estimated that not more than a quarter of Liverpudlians remained in the same home, or even on the same street, for more than two consecutive years.[52] It was not only in its growth, then, but also in its turbulence and constant movement, that Liverpool mirrored the global activity of empire.

The poverty engendered by such constant movement, and work offered in fits and starts, was devastating in both its scale and effect. As the city grew commercially, "there was a great deal of misery and degradation" amongst the working class.[53] As ever-greater numbers of people migrated to the city, rents increased to such a point that thousands of Liverpudlians began to take up residency in cellars – a phenomenon virtually unheard of in the rest of Britain. In 1845, it was estimated that the average size of a labourer's dwelling in Liverpool was twelve times smaller than that of a labourer in Birmingham.[54] And while its manual labourers lived in squalor, there was a disproportionate number of office workers and administrators in Liverpool, in comparison with other British cities, who ran the docks, banks, customs, trade companies, and so on, and enjoyed much better status, pay, and living conditions. The gulf between labourers and the rest of the community became a dominating feature of life within Liverpool, more so than anywhere else within Britain. William S. Trench and Charles Beard noted in 1871 that "In Liverpool, almost alone amongst the provincial cities of the kingdom, the intercourse between

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[52] Ibid., 10.
[53] J. R. Harris (ed.), *Liverpool and Merseyside: Essays in the economic and social history of the port and its hinterland*, (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1969), xii.
[54] Simey, *Charitable Effort in Liverpool*, 11.

masters and men, between employers and employed, ceases on the payment of wages."[55] Indeed, in Liverpool "New wealth was in the pockets of new men. A new poor lived in new hovels."[56] And the two groups, as noted by Rev. A. Hulme in 1858, were "in many respects . . . as wide apart as if they resided in two separate quarters of the globe."[57] Quilliam, though, despite belonging solidly to the upper-middle-class, had an acute awareness of the problems of Liverpool's underclass.

Quilliam was a lawyer, well-known in Liverpool for his charitable attitude toward the poor, which continued after he converted to Islam publicly in 1888 and took the name Abdullah. He would often use the resources of his profession, for example, to track down husbands who had abandoned their families. He attempted to ensure that their wages went to satisfying the basic needs of their hungry children.[58] He was also well-known for his work in various Temperance organizations – a movement which he believed directly improved the lives of the poor, as most of Liverpool's over 50,000 beerhouses in the 1870s were located in impoverished, working-class neighbourhoods. He signed the total abstinence pledge at the young age of seven. By the age of sixteen, he was preaching the merits of Temperance alongside Sir Wilfred Lawson and George Trevelyan, both Members of Parliament, at Liverpool's Philharmonic Hall. As a young man Quilliam devoted an impressive amount of time to this cause considering that he was also studying law and working as a reporter.[59] Following his conversion, Quilliam also used his

[55] Quoted in Ibid., 12.
[56] Anne Holt, *A Ministry to the Poor,* (Liverpool: Henry Young and Sons, Ltd., 1936), 2. Quoted in Simey, *Charitable Effort in Liverpool*, 17.
[57] Quoted in Simey, *Charitable Effort in Liverpool,* 17.
[58] Geaves, *Islam in Victorian Britain,* 4.
[59] Ibid., 26-29.

teetotaling as a means of proselytizing after a year of failures taught him that his fellow Britons would not accept Islam on its own merits: it had to be made relatable to their English experience.

Quilliam also represented and was involved in various trade unions throughout his time as a lawyer. In 1897, for instance, he was appointed President of the Mersey Railway Quay and Carters Union, a position he held until 1908.[60] As a lawyer, Quilliam took on upwards of thirty or forty cases a week and was known in Liverpool as an advocate for the marginalized. Those that he chose to represent were often considered to be questionable characters. For instance, in 1895 he defended two Irish dynamitards who had threatened to cause terror throughout England and Scotland. Quilliam received around-the-clock protection from the Fenian Brotherhood during the trial. He also defended Bhagwan Jassawari, a Hindu sailor who murdered a ship's captain and his wife while out at sea. Quilliam's choice of preferred client did not go unnoticed. In 1901, the *Liverpool Weekly Courier* noted that it was Quilliam's "curious distinction to have defended probably more murderers than any other solicitor" and went on to describe him as the "unofficial Attorney-General of Liverpool."[61] As Ron Geaves notes, Quilliam's preference for working with marginalized defendants, either by way of their race, religion, socio-economic status, or political affiliation, speaks in part to his "flamboyance and adventurism" but also to his immovable belief in equality. In what was perhaps the most divided city in all of Britain in terms of religion and socio-economic status, Quilliam was famous for his inclusivity and willingness to reach out to those who were shunned by most other people from within his class. Indeed, as Geaves notes, the "enlightened activities" which Quilliam engaged in such as sitting on the board of trade unions, representing racialized defendants or political radicals, or even

[60] Ibid., 29.
[61] Quoted in Ibid., 32-33.

preaching Temperance, "were not necessarily part of the worldview of Liverpool's gentry. Equality," Geaves writes, "was not a major feature of the town."[62]

Liverpool, in many ways, was a microcosm of global developments fitting for a port-city which developed in tandem with empire and imperialism. The creation of an economic underclass, exploited by greedy corporations and heartless capitalists, mirrored that of peoples elsewhere whose labour was extracted for the benefit of a few wealthy British elites (although labourers' treatment in Liverpool was certainly less harsh than that of many non-Europeans). As a hub of global trade, Liverpool was also home to peoples of various nationalities and faiths. In the eighteenth-century the religious differences were mainly between Catholics and Protestants: Irish, Welsh, English, and some continental Europeans. But during the latter-half of the 1800s, Muslims and Hindus were to be regularly found working in Liverpool's ports or temporarily residing nearby. The battles Quilliam fought within Liverpool, then, were local issues taking place against a global backdrop. His support for Liverpool's trade unions and advocacy for its disenfranchised was connected to his later denouncement of Britain's treatment of native populations in Africa, for example. And he often used such global framing to draw attention to the hypocrisy of going out into the world to 'convert the heathen' and 'civilize the uncivilized' while there were so many social ills which went ignored at home. The problems Quilliam identified within Liverpool all had easily identifiable analogues elsewhere.

[62] Ibid., 33.

Religion

As well as the enormous socio-economic inequality, Liverpool was also deeply divided along religious lines, even more so than the rest of Britain, which was hardly religiously homogenous. In 1851, government officials attempted to count and categorize every single Sunday churchgoer in England and Wales. The census determined that anywhere between 41 percent and 58 percent of the 'eligible' population attended some sort of Sunday service within a church. The range is broad and the assumptions within it numerous. For instance, the census-takers took wild guesses to determine the number of sick, of disabled persons, of children, elderly, those who had to work, etc., and subtracted them from the overall population to ascertain exactly what portion of the population was 'eligible' to attend church. Nevertheless, their estimates suggested that roughly half the eligible population did – or did not, depending on one's levels of optimism – attend church. Upper-class Victorian observers tended to choose to approach the figures with pessimism. They read the conclusions of the census-takers with concern and concluded that Britain was slowly but surely becoming an irreligious nation. A second, more obvious conclusion (for it required less interpretation) was that only half of the churchgoing population – roughly a quarter of the country – attended the established Church of England.[63]

Quilliam belonged to one such denomination which stood in proud defiance to Anglicanism. He was born a Wesleyan Methodist, one of the largest Nonconformist denominations which throughout the nineteenth century grew considerably. In 1800 it was estimated that Wesleyans and other Methodists made up approximately 200,000 churchgoers. The 1851 census indicated that that number had grown to nearly 2,000,000 in a mere fifty

[63] Jeffrey Cox, "Victorian Religion," in *The Victorian World*, ed. Martin Hewitt, (London: Routledge, 2012), 433-4.

years.[64] Nonconformists were, generally speaking, known to be more Liberal and more reform-minded than their Anglican counterparts. Throughout the latter half of the century, Nonconformity continued to grow. As each denomination grew, greater numbers of chapels were built, a permanent testament to their presence erected onto the landscape of cities, towns, and even the smallest village. From the 1840s through the 1870s, these chapels began to show dissent even in their very construction. Whereas most had previously mirrored the Anglican's Grecian style, chapels began to be built in Gothic, Romanesque, or other, more experimental styles. The Unitarians, a religion which Quilliam briefly showed interest in before converting to Islam, were the first to begin experimenting with the architecture of their places of worship. This architectural creativity created what has been referred to as a 'Nonconformity of soaring spires' which "proclaimed to the world that the era of Anglican monopoly had effectively come to an end."[65] By the time Quilliam was coming of age, religious difference was built into the rural and urban landscapes of England.

During Quilliam's lifetime, then, there existed a sort of 'religious marketplace' wherein each denomination was openly competing for souls. As Tomoko Masuzawa points out, religious traditions were forced throughout the fin-de-siècle to demonstrate their "resiliency, adaptability, and sheer vitality for survival and growth in the face of the rising tide of modernization and increasing global competition."[66] However, as Quilliam's conversion to Islam testifies to, England's Christian denominations could no longer compete solely amongst themselves, but with other religions from around the world – notably Islam and Buddhism – which they were only then learning about in any complex, holistic sort of way. Many Victorians – including the

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[64] Ian Sellers, *Nineteenth-Century Nonconformity*, (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1977), 9.
[65] Ibid., 13-4.
[66] Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 41-42.

*a*religious as well as the deeply religious – came to see these other religions as true competitors within a global religious economy. When it came to religion and spirituality in fin-de-siècle England, plurality was the norm.

For instance, John Tyndall, the famous physicist and popularizer of science, rejected Christianity because of its theological dogmas such as redemptive salvation, the Incarnation, miracles, and so on, and he claimed for science the absolute authority over investigation of the natural world. But he could not accept that a purely scientific, mechanical view of the world could ever satisfy 'the *creative* faculties of man':

> [T]here are such things woven into the texture of man as the feeling of Awe, Reverence, Wonder . . . the love of beautiful, physical, and moral, in Nature, Poetry, and Art. There is also that deep-set feeling which, since the earliest dawn of history, and probably for ages prior to all history, incorporated itself in the Religions of the world. You who have escaped from these religions into the high-and-dry light of the intellect may deride them; but in so doing you deride accidents of form merely, and fail to touch the immovable basis of the religious sentiment in the nature of man.[67]

In Tyndall's view, Christianity was a manifestation, weighed down by the dogmatic baggage which it had accrued over centuries, of the religious sentiment which was an inextricable part of human nature. The doctrines of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and so forth, were mere 'accidents of form'. Tyndall rejected such doctrines and expressed his creative faculties – his religious nature – by meditating atop mountains. On the snowy peaks of the Alps, he had sublime experiences which he believed tapped into fundamental truths without the theological, superstitious baggage which came along with religious hierarchies and established dogmas. He described the mountains as a place which appealed "at once to thought and feeling, offering their

[67] John Tyndall, "Address Delivered Before the British Association at Belfast" (London, 1874), http://victorianweb.org/science/science_texts/belfast.html

problems to the one and their grandeurs to the other."[68] Even a sort of deistic mountaineering, it seems, was a competitor within the Victorian religious economy.

Tyndall's rejection of organized religion and turn toward personal experience reflects a trend within Victorian England at the time. H.V. Routh has noted that many educated Victorian men and women "resigned [their] traditional religion under the influence of science, and then having discarded the materialism of science under the influence of experience (especially inward experience) . . . look[ed] for a new spirituality which must be authorised by science and yet contain a religious value."[69] Tyndall's mountain climbing was just that: a religious expression, free of superstition and dogma, which transcended pure materialism and yet avoided conflict, or even existed harmoniously, with science. Quilliam imagined his practice of Islam in much the same way. He was an extremely religious, God-fearing man – *homo religiosis,* Geaves calls him.[70] But he was also a scientist, *homo physicus*. As such, he spent most of his young-adult life searching for a religion that was in harmony with science.

Science

In Quilliam's Victorian society, science and reason proved a great challenge to institutions of religious authority, perhaps more so than at any other time in history. True, religious authorities had in the past had to contend with Martin Luther's reason-based ninety-nine theses and Calvin's attack on the empirical verifiability (or lack thereof) of the claims made about icons and relics.

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[68] Quoted in Ursula DeYoung. *A Vision of Modern Science: John Tyndall and the Role of the Scientist in Victorian Culture*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 73.
[69] H.V. Routh. *Towards the Twentieth Century: Essays in the Spiritual History of the Nineteenth.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 369.
[70] Geaves, *Islam in Victorian Britain,* 35.

These critiques proved such a challenge that the Church split in two, a schism which then went on to repeat itself within Protestantism many times over. The challenges which reason and empiricism – which science – presented to religious authorities and religious worldviews in the nineteenth-century are not only unique in that their main proponents – Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Tyndall, Clifford, Lewes, Lubbock, to name only a few – were greater in number. What makes the challenge unprecedented in its potency was that, rather than critiquing specific church doctrines, these scientists were attacking the foundations of religion itself, either explicitly or through the implications of their work, as Frederic Myers (1843 – 1901), poet and founder of the Society for Physical Research, describes here:

> The essential spirituality of the universe, in short, is the basis of religion, and it is precisely this basis which is now assailed . . . The most effective assailants of Christianity no longer take the trouble to attack, as Voltaire did, the Biblical miracles in detail. They strike at the root, and begin by denying – outright or virtually – that a spiritual world, a world beyond the conceivable reach of mathematical formulae, exists for us at all. They say with Clifford that 'no intelligences except for those of men and animals have been at work in the solar system'; or, implying that the physical Cosmos is all, and massing together all possible spiritual entities under the name which most suggests superstition, they affirm that the world 'is made of ether and atoms, and there is no room for ghosts.'[71]

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the 'attacks' on theology coming from the scientific community were much more 'Voltarian' in nature and were targeted at specific theological claims regarding the nature of the physical world. At the time, questions that today would be considered to rest firmly within the jurisdiction of science were also the business of churchmen and theologians. Grandiose questions such as the purpose of existence and the nature of life after death obviously fell within their purview, but so too did more narrow questions such as the age

[71] F.W.H. Meyers, *Science and a Future Life with Other Essays* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1893), 131-32.

of the Earth. This one example will have to stand in for the dozens of others which could have been chosen to demonstrate the challenge posed to theology throughout the period.

The idea that the Earth was young, with even the most generous estimates placing it at 6000 years old, was for awhile common to both Victorian religious thought and Victorian science. As A. Bowdoin Van Riper has argued, the young Earth theory and belief in a recent origin of the human race "provided one of the last points where science's emerging picture of Earth's history reinforced traditional interpretations of Genesis" as well as "what many Christians saw as a central message of Genesis: the idea that humans were the greatest of God's creations and lords of the planet that He had created for them."[72] Pre-human history was generally interpreted as a period of preparation during which the geological processes which Victorian scientists were discovering and studying readied the Earth for the arrival of humans. This understanding was common to "clergymen and lay people, as well as scientists, [and allowed them] to discuss ideas about the past."[73]

In the 1860s, scientific discoveries threw this common understanding into disarray. Decades earlier, in 1797, John Frere had discovered primitive tools buried with mammoth bones about ten feet below ground. He suggested that the mix of tools, bones, and shells, at such a depth, indicated that they belonged to a time beyond the commonly agreed upon beginning of the world. Frere's discovery garnered little attention and changed few minds. In 1859, however, John Evans made a similar discovery in France and cited Frere's by then long-forgotten observations. In 1863, Britain's leading geologist, Charles Lyell, threw his weight behind the interpretations of the evidence offered by Frere and Evans, thereby giving the theory of a much

[72] A. Bowdoin Van Riper, *Men among the Mammoths: Victorian Science and the Discovery of Human Prehistory,* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 4-5.
[73] Ibid., 6.

older Earth "the stamp of scientific orthodoxy."[74] As the 6000-year-old Earth was common to both Victorian religious thought and Victorian science, there was a common context wherein new, contrary evidence was presented and the ensuing debates took place. In the 1860s, at least, what are now understood as 'scientific debates' did not occur solely within universities, or scientific institutions, between scientists recognized as such because of widely accepted methods of accreditation. During this time, scientists debated on somewhat equal footing with theologians and clergymen – Huxley's debate with Wilberforce about the veracity of Darwin's theory being the prime example here – and educated Victorians kept up with it all thanks to the nation's booming periodical industry.

These debates happened mainly within educated circles, and thus the perception of a population decreasing in its religiosity, jaded by a science which brought to light theology's falsehoods, was mainly limited to these circles. The working class, and perhaps even middle class, whose ranks were much more likely to include Nonconformists and proudly attacked the stiffness and elite nature of the Church of England, may have been worried about perceived decadence within British culture at large, but they would not have seen themselves as part of a society in which religiosity was waning. Thanks to popularizers of science such as Thomas Henry Huxley, however, by the 1870s even the working class would have been aware that some prominent Victorians were positing a purely materialistic worldview which made no reference to religion or a creator whatsoever.

In 1868, for example, Huxley gave a lecture titled "On a Piece of Chalk" to Norwich's working men during a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. The lecture was published as an essay in *Macmillan's Magazine* later that year. A small piece of

[74] Ibid., 6-9.

chalk – mined from a massive chalk formation which stretches from Ireland, underneath Norwich, through to Paris and as far east as the mountain ranges of Lebanon – enabled Huxley to speak of Britain's history on an enormous, geological timescale. "[T]he man who should know the true history of the bit of chalk which every carpenter carries about in his breeches-pocket," Huxley told Norwich's workers, "though ignorant of all other history, is likely, if he will think his knowledge out to its ultimate results, to have a truer, and therefore a better, conception of this wonderful universe, and of man's relation to it, than the most learned student who is deep-read in the records of humanity and ignorant of those of Nature."[75]

Here Huxley is asserting the supremacy of a scientific education over a classical education, so often connected with religious history and thought. Huxley's small piece of chalk could reveal truths about the universe and humankind not found in classical or Biblical sources. The truth of the history of chalk, Huxley explained, was that it was in fact "the dried mud of an ancient deep sea," largely composed of the skeletal remains of tiny creatures called *Globigerinae*, which live exclusively in the world's seas and oceans. From this fact, one can ascertain that for one or multiple periods of almost unfathomable duration, Britain, and in fact most of Europe, must have been submerged by water, as *Globigerinae* take millennia to naturally produce chalk.[76]

What are the implications of this history of chalk? Well, as Huxley explains, it must necessarily be the case that the chalk which came to form the foundation of the dry land of Norwich must be older than the trees which grow on it. It must also be older than the remains of walruses and reindeer which are found within it; animals which permanently migrated north due

[75] Thomas Huxley, "On a Piece of Chalk," *Macmillan's Magazine*, collected essays VIII, (1868), https://mathcs.clarku.edu/huxley/CE8/Chalk.html
[76] Ibid.

to climactic change long before what is generally understood to be the history of England began. The British chalk, then, must be older than the first traces of humankind on the Isles. "But we may go further" in investigating the history of chalk Huxley told the workers, some of whom were certainly unwilling to continue to follow his implications, "and demonstrate . . . that the chalk is vastly older than Adam himself." Skeletal remains in the geological record prove, for instance, that the snake's-head lampshell, *Terebratulina caput serpentis*, a small creature, must have existed in the vicinity of Norwich while it was still underwater. Huxley pointed out that while Englishmen might be proud to have an ancestor who was present at the Battle of Hastings, "The ancestors of *Terebratulina caput serpentis* may have been present at the battle of *Ichthyosauria* in that part of the sea which, when the chalk was forming, flowed over the site of Hastings." Huxley concluded his lecture by asking Norwich's workers to consider the following: With a single piece of chalk, it is possible to penetrate "the abyss of the remote past," determine "some stages of the evolution of the earth," all while having "observed nothing but the natural product of the forces originally possessed by the substance of the universe." All this without reference to God, Creation, or the Bible – just a single piece of chalk.[77]

Scientific naturalists such as Huxley and Tyndall were positing theories of human life which relied on nothing but that which was empirically verifiable. The Victorian world (at least that of its elite) was, to borrow a term from Max Weber, undergoing a rapid process of 'disenchantment'. This process did not begin in the nineteenth century: it arguably began with the Protestant Reformation, or at least accelerated during this turbulent period. In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor argues that it was the Protestant Reformation's disenchanting of the world, by positing a far-off God whose only miracle was that of his grace toward the individual believer,

[77] Ibid.

which made non-belief possible at all – and perhaps, eventually, even the default. Proponents of the secularization thesis during the 1950s and '60s argued that as European modernity spread so too would disenchantment until the day when the ultimate disenchantment – secular atheism – became the global norm. Although few Victorian scientists consciously worked toward this goal, many nineteenth- and twentieth-century thinkers believed it to be the inevitable outcome of a self-conscious modernity which eschewed superstition in favour of reason and empiricism.

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The Victorian period saw the rise of a global modernity which, however problematically, rendered the world knowable by reducing it to a system of binaries. This low-resolution picture of the world had science pitted against religion, reason striving to overcome superstition, East in a struggle against West, the forces of civilization engaged in a global project to root out barbarism. In many ways, though, the picture of themselves that Victorians projected into the twentieth-century made blurred lines seem more rigid than they were. In truth, in Victorian Britain, and especially in Liverpool, workers were not all British, worshippers not all Protestant, or even Christian, scientific minds not all atheists, and self-described modernists not all 'European supremacists'. Quilliam, through his conversion to Islam, problematizes the Victorian, low-resolution image of global modernity even further. Now that we have partially recreated his world, we can place him, and his two periodicals, firmly within it.

CHAPTER TWO

Quilliam's Soapboxes, *The Crescent* and *The Islamic World*

In 1893, under the auspices of the Liverpool Moslem Institute (LMI), Quilliam began to publish two periodicals: *The Crescent*, which was published weekly, and *The Islamic World* which was published monthly. Following 1897's September issue, however, *The Islamic World*, without pronouncement, became a bi-monthly publication. Towards the closing months of 1898, Quilliam quietly ceased printing the date on its cover, likely to not draw attention to the contradiction of a 'monthly' periodical which was issued only once every sixty days. Until its final issue, *The Islamic World* described itself as "A Monthly Journal Devoted to the Interests of Islam." *The Crescent* was described on the front page of each issue as "A Weekly Record of Islam in England." Both journals were abruptly discontinued in 1908, the year of the "Young Turk" Revolution and Quilliam's unexpected and mysterious departure to Constantinople. Unfortunately, the issues of *The Islamic World* from 1893 – its first twelve issues – are absent from the British Library's collection, as are the issues of *The Crescent* from 1894. With a few minor exceptions – a missing issue here and there; a faded page which is impossible to decipher – the rest of both journals are intact and were consulted for the purposes of this thesis.

As might be inferred from their differing descriptions, *The Crescent* and *The Islamic World* had styles and contents which were each their own.

The Crescent began as an 8-page journal. On June 19, 1895, the journal was enlarged to sixteen pages per issue. Each issue began with a section of editorial notes which mentioned any recent conversions or deaths within the Liverpool community, the topics and sometimes brief summaries of recent lectures held at the mosque, Quilliam's engagements and activities, and other day-to-day events or occurrences of note from throughout the previous week. The editorial

notes section often contained excerpts of reprinted material from other publications, sometimes as close to home as Liverpool but often from as far away as South Africa, India, or Australia. Generally, such reprinted material fell into one of three categories: it either mentioned Liverpool's Muslim community in some manner, whether positively or negatively; had something complimentary to say about Islam; or, made disparaging comments about Christianity. Sometimes these excerpts were exceedingly small and served as a softball to set up Quilliam's homerun. For instance, on July 3, 1895, Quilliam quoted the following short passage from the *Echo*: "Within the last two weeks fourteen bodies of murdered infants have been found in London." Quilliam responded to this bit of local news with a broad condemnation of Christian global practice: "Let Christians then haste to convert the far-off heathen."[78]

The Crescent is laden with such sarcasm, and sometimes humour. Under the title, "A Chance for the Missionaries," one column recounts a story in which a South African man discovered that baboons can express gratitude. Quilliam remarks that this provides a "glorious opportunity" for Christian missionaries: "Fancy a fully organised native Baboon Christian Church in South Africa! What a triumph that would be for Christianity!"[79] On another occasion, Quilliam tells the amusing story of an old man in a Wesleyan chapel who accuses the minister of attempting to defraud the congregation after he misunderstands the Biblical passage of the day: 'In my Father's house there are many mansions'. As it turns out, the old man was a friend of the minister's father and happened to know that his modest cottage, "where you couldn't swing a cat," contained no mansions at all.[80]

[78] *The Crescent* 6, No. 129, (July 3, 1895), 11.
[79] *The Crescent* 8, No. 195, (October 14, 1895), 1079.
[80] *The Crescent* 9, No. 225, (May 5, 1897), 302.

In some ways the tone of *The Crescent* makes it much lighter than *The Islamic World*, which contains little to no sarcasm or cheeky humour. From the beginning of its existence, *The Islamic World* was a 32-page publication, possibly because it was infrequently issued compared to *The Crescent*. Most issues contained four or so articles, but a rare few featured but a single article or many more than four. This is also a complete reversal of *The Crescent*, wherein each issue could contain a few larger pieces combined with a dozen or more small columns, reprints, and singular lines of important information. *The Islamic World* was a much more cerebral, sophisticated publication compared to the relatively hodgepodge nature of the easily-readable *Crescent*, which resembles a newspaper more than *The Islamic World* which, comparatively-speaking, resembles a magazine (albeit, usually without pictures or photographs – *The Crescent* contained more, but still rather few). Articles in *The Islamic World* were sometimes short essays, but oftentimes longer essays which would spill over across multiple issues. They were often written by Quilliam or another prominent member of the LMI, but sometimes a Muslim from abroad would write a piece for the journal. It was not uncommon that the weekly lectures which were held in the mosque (and open to the public), which often only received passing mention in *The Crescent* due to space restrictions, were reprinted in full in *The Islamic World*, either in the form of a summary or a verbatim transcription of the lecture in question. The topics of such lectures and essays were usually historical, theological, or scientific in nature, and were usually rather expertly written, no matter the author. Such essays were always targeted toward the layman rather than the specialist, but only a rather educated person would have read, for example, essays on the history of Andalusia, a Muslim refutation of the Christian trinity, or a breakdown of the chemical composition of soap.

In other ways, though, *The Crescent* was an even more serious publication than its sister publication, *The Islamic World*. After Quilliam was appointed Sheikh al-Islam of the British Isles by Sultan Abdulhamid II in 1894, *The Crescent* adopted a much more pro-Ottoman stance than it had displayed in its inaugural year of 1893, and Quilliam began to take advantage of his newfound authority. Shortly after receiving his title, a new and permanent fixture appeared in *The Crescent* – "The Sheikh's Passing Thoughts" – in which he gave the reader small pearls of wisdom such as "Too much pleasure becomes pain" or "A good fruit planted in good soil will grow and bear fruit."[81] On the issues that he thought deeply about, his authority gave him the confidence to offer opinions and make pronouncements, almost as if he were a mouthpiece of Abdulhamid.

From 1895 onward, for instance, there are articles discussing the 'Armenian Question' in almost every issue. Ron Geaves estimates that around seventy percent of the articles in *The Crescent* deal with foreign affairs.[82] Quilliam believed that European portrayals of Ottoman actions and Armenian concerns were full of rank hypocrisy. The British government and media at the time were regularly outraged by the violence with which the Ottoman government quelled Armenian rebellions. In one short column, Quilliam succinctly compared so-called 'Muslim Barbarism' to 'Christian Civilization'. The latter, he argued, consisted of "The British killing a few hundred half-naked black men, fighting for their native land, with Maxim guns in Matabeleland." The former, "A Kurdish soldier cutting off, with a scimitar, the head of a full-armed insurgent Armenian in rebellion against a Government established in his country for over

[81] *The Crescent* 9, No. 233, (June 30, 1897).
[82] Geaves, *Islam in Victorian Britain*, 15.

600 years."[83] Whereas both responses are violent, he only considered one to be justifiable; he was disgusted by Europe's double-standards.

Demonstrating another example of European hypocrisy, during a celebration of the Sultan's accession to the throne Quilliam told those present that the "English people are afflicted with two infirmities – insular prejudice and the arrogant pride of a ruling nation." He explained the ramifications of these 'infirmities' by way of his usual witty sarcasm: The British "are saturated with the belief that . . . if any foreign land were only to be placed under the government of an English police magistrate and a score of police officers, and was blessed with a Christian Church or a Salvation Army Barracks, that it was on the high road to become an Utopia." This caused much laughter among the British Muslims in the room. Quilliam went on, more seriously, to point out the British hypocrisy in criticizing the Turks for "put[ing] to death men caught red-handed throwing bombs and explosives in the public streets" when "England did not scruple to put down revolution in India by blowing men to atoms from the mouths of cannon."[84]

Pointing out hypocrisy is the job of any editor, journalist, or lawyer worth his salt – and Quilliam was all three. Most of the hypocrisy that Quilliam noted in his British contemporaries was on the point of the 'Armenian Question'. In September 1896, on the eve of Prime Minister Gladstone's visit to Liverpool during which he was to speak on the precarious situation in the Ottoman Empire, Quilliam held a meeting and made a point of inviting the press. He accused the media of being mischievous agitators and threatened that if Islam were attacked (and by Islam, he surely meant the Ottoman Empire and the Sultan-Caliph to whom he was fiercely loyal) it might be necessary to proclaim a *jihad* which he claimed would rally every Muslim in

[83] *The Crescent* 7, No. 178, (June 3, 1896), 782.
[84] "Celebrating the Anniversary of the Sultan's Accession," *The Crescent* 8, No. 191, (September 9, 1896), 1002-3.

the world against the Christian powers. He asserted that the English people mistook the situation in Anatolia for a religious one when really "this was not a religious question so far as the Turks and Armenians were concerned, but a political one."[85] Quilliam's plan worked: The same issue of *The Crescent* which printed Quilliam's speech reprinted an article from *The Evening News* of September 25 which reported that "There can be little doubt but that this speech of Sheikh Quilliam's caused Mr. Gladstone and the other speakers to be more than usually moderate in their orations at the Towns Meeting the following day."[86]

As Quilliam alluded, it was generally believed during the late-nineteenth-century that the uptick of violence in the Ottoman Empire could be explained by reference to religious grievances and religious radicalism. As historian Ussama Makdisi has described, the problem was generally diagnosed at the time (and by historians afterward) as "an upswelling of primordial religious solidarities" whereas in actual fact, the sectarian violence of the late-nineteenth-century was a completely new phenomenon, made possible by emerging political spaces, divided along religious lines, which were created by *Tanzimat* reforms and European challenges to Ottoman sovereignty.[87] Quilliam was correct in diagnosing the conflict as being primarily political in nature.

Whether his threat of violent *jihad* was a load of hot air – a political stunt rather than a religious threat – has little bearing on the significance of Quilliam's position on the 'Armenian Question', which is that, as a British Muslim, he understood tensions in the Ottoman Empire to be political, whereas the 'mainstream' view in Britain was that they were due to primordial

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[85] "British Muslims and the Armenian Agitation," *The Crescent* 8, No. 194, (September 30, 1896), 1045-6.
[86] "The Muslim Scores One," *The Crescent* 8, No. 194, (September 30, 1896), 1046-7.
[87] Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon,* (Berkeley: University of California, 2000), 52.

religious tensions which had reached a boiling point. The implication of this mainstream view, of course, is that the Ottomans were 'less developed', more 'backward', not quite yet modern. Quilliam was at times victim of these tropes; he was certainly considered by some of his contemporaries as a fanatical zealot – is was not uncommon for Muslims in general to be considered much more prone to fanaticism than Christians – and yet it was Quilliam, the Muslim, who cut through the dominant discourse on the matter and reframed a 'religious question' as a political one. Ironically, of course, this framing is the exact opposite that one would expect a religious fanatic to have. This both complicates the notion of the 'religious fanatic' as applied by Victorians, and demonstrates that in Britain at the time, not only did religions exist within a marketplace – a religious economy – but so too did political opinions, even those that were viewed as extreme in relation to the centre.

Quilliam did not shy away from publicly taking such far-from-centre political stances. For instance, when the Ottoman Empire officially declared war on Greece on April 18, 1897, Quilliam immediately began to receive telegrams from Constantinople informing the Liverpool community as to the success of the war effort. One such telegram read: "*Allah Akhbar!* One division of our army has defeated the *Giaours* in Milouna Pass, on the frontier. Our brave Muslims fight like lions: the braggart Greeks flee before them. Our troops are now advancing on Larissa."[88] Quilliam continued to receive such telegrams until the end of the short, month-long war. He reprinted them on the front page of *The Crescent* each week and posted them on the notice board outside of the mosque for all to see. Congratulatory telegrams were sent to

[88] *The Crescent* 9, No. 223, (April 21, 1897), 249.

Ottoman authorities on behalf of the British Muslims, who decorated the mosque with Turkish flags and prayed for further wartime successes.[89]

When Abdulhamid won the war and the European powers prevented him from annexing what they considered to be too large a part of Greece, Quilliam issued a proclamation denouncing what he perceived to be a grave injustice. Normally, he argued, according to "the laws of Allah, the precepts of his prophet, and even the customs of man," land belongs to the conqueror. Quilliam attributed Europe's interference in the matter to the fact that the victor – the Sultan-Caliph – was a Muslim. Speaking to the Muslim world, he proclaimed that "The triumph of the Ottoman Muslim is your, is my, triumph, an undeserved insult to one Muslim is an insult to every Muslim in the world. Interference with our Khalif in the exercise by him of his undoubted rights under the laws of God and the customs of nations by any combination of Christian Powers is an insult to the whole Mussulman community." He advised Muslims to remain calm and bear these insults with patience, but to "be heard loud and clear in protest" – especially those who were subjects of the British Queen-Empress.[90]

On March 24, 1896, a year earlier, Quilliam issued a similar proclamation: a *fatwa* which warned that any Muslim who aided the British in their campaign against Sudan, "even to the extent of carrying a parcel, or giving a bite of bread or a drink of water to any person taking part in the expedition against these Muslims," would "be unworthy to be continued upon the roll of the faithful."[91] This was perhaps the first time that he used his authority as Sheikh al-Islam of the British Isles beyond the confines of the Liverpool mosque. Although *The Crescent* was never translated into any language other than English, the *fatwa* which was printed on its front

[89] "British Muslims and the War," *The Crescent* 9, No. 223, (April 21, 1897), 249.
[90] "Proclamation by the Sheikh-ul-Islam," *The Crescent* 10, No. 235, (July 14, 1897), 441-2.
[91] *The Crescent* 7, No. 167, (March 25, 1896), 617.

page was translated into Arabic, Persian, and Hindi, and according to the French press (reprinted in *The Crescent*, of course) "many thousand copies . . . are now on their way to India for distribution among the native troops likely to be required for service in the Soudan, while equally numerous copies have been sent to Egypt, to be distributed among the native troops, and others to Turkey, Syria, Tripoli, Algiers, and the rest of the Muslim world."[92] Quilliam had no qualms about being controversial and placing religion before patriotism. In fact, he reveled in it. When he was accused, as a direct result of his *fatwa,* of having allowed his religious zeal to outrun his patriotism, his proud response was to admit to the truth of the accusation: "I am verily guilty. Nay, more, *I glory in such guilt!*"[93]

At that year's annual meeting of the LMI, as transcribed in both *The Crescent* and *The Islamic World*,[94] Quilliam divulged that after the publication of the *fatwa* he received letters from Muslims in Bulgaria, France, Greece, and Crete congratulating him for his bold stance against Sudan's invaders. He claimed that the only bad press his proclamation had received abroad was from Indian newspapers under the control of Europeans. According to those papers, Quilliam told the members of the LMI, "Only my very insignificance saved me from being prosecuted for high treason." One newspaper in particular, the *Muslim Chronicle,* claimed that there were not even five people in India who supported the *fatwa*. According to Quilliam – and this got a laugh out of the room – in the same mail in which he received that copy of the *Muslim Chronicle* he also received twenty-nine letters from "educated Muslims," all expressing their approval. The only letter he received from an Indian that was not entirely congratulatory suggested he leave

[92] *The Crescent* 7, No. 168, (April 1, 1896), 668.
[93] *The Crescent* 7, No. 178, (June 10, 1896), 793.
[94] *The Islamic World* 4, No. 39, (July 1896), 84-90. In the *Crescent* the minutes of the meeting were published in parts, across multiple issues, whereas in the *Islamic World* the same was published within a single issue.

politics alone and continue his work preaching Islam. But to Quilliam, as he made clear at that year's meeting, this was not a political matter but a religious matter:

> This is not and has never been a question of politics with me. It is purely and solely a question of religion. . . . I believe in the complete union of Islam, and of all Muslim peoples; for this I pray, for this I work, and this I believe will yet be accomplished. . . . From Liverpool our streamers and trading vessels journey to each part of the world, and here within the walls of this Institution who knows but that the scattered cords may not be able to be gathered together and woven into a strong rope, *Al-Habbulmateen*, of fraternal union. . . . Always pressing forwards, undaunted by obstacles, not discouraged by no immediate success, working and praying, working and waiting, but always working and striving, having your eyes fixed upon the ultimate goal of your endeavours, THE WORLD FOR ISLAM.[95]

To Quilliam, then, *The Crescent* and *The Islamic World* were part of the LMI's missionary activities. Nineteenth-century print media increasingly became the medium through which communities were imagined (sometimes into existence) and messages were disseminated to large numbers of people. Abdulhamid II, for instance, who promoted Ottoman-Islamic nationalism, used state sponsored missionary activity and publications to convert heterodox Muslims to the officially sanctioned Hanafi school of Sunni Islam, turned the printing of the Qur'an into a state monopoly (in at least one instance Qur'ans were distributed freely), and used state funds to support the publications of four-thousand books in just the first fifteen years of his reign.[96] But the spread, during the latter-half of the nineteenth-century, of mass-produced iron Stanhope presses and lithographic printing revolutionized the ease in which printed works could be created, and the invention of rail and steam-powered ships, which in many instances more than halved travel times, forever improved the individual group or person's ability to disseminate

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[95] Ibid.

[96] James L. Gelvin and Nile Green, *Global Muslims: In the Age of Steam and Print*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 2014), 12-13.

their own message. Cemil Aydin argues that pan-Islamists (such as Quilliam) often understood themselves to be in a position of weakness, in need of a Great Power sponsor.[97] Quilliam found this in Abdulhamid, but thanks to these nineteenth-century technological advancements he did not need his Caliph in order to print or propagate his journals. As English novelist, James Payn, once said, 'penny weeklies' (such as *The Crescent*) were "put forth from Heaven knows what printing-houses in courts and alleys" – in this case, it was from the basement of a makeshift mosque.[98] Such publications stood outside the 'regular' publishing world, independent of rulers and states.

And yet they were quite influential. Quilliam considered the reach of *The Crescent* and *The Islamic World* to be one of the most important aspect of the LMI's vision of spreading Islam throughout Britain, around the world, and realizing a future pan-Islamic, global unity:

> [S]carcely a week passes without an extract from one or another of our journals being quoted in some other publication. I regard this as one of the most important features of our work. Standing upon this platform once a week, my voice only reaches the ears of a certain necessarily limited number of persons, some of whom come merely out of idle curiosity and are never seen by us again. Although the importance of the lecture work is very great and must not be minimised or discountenanced and has been the undoubted means of bringing many coverts into the faith, yet the printed matter we issue is read by hundreds and thousands every week. What is heard at a lecture is only retained in the memory for a time, but what is published and circulated remains ever in print, to be read and re-read over and over again. While we are asleep even, the silent witness still may be pursued by numbers of persons in distant lands. Therefore I trust you will all properly recognise and appreciate this feature of our work. Financially it is a loss, and I am afraid will remain as such for a considerable period yet, but this is a contingency that we must boldly face and be prepared to meet.[99]

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[97] Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World*, 236.
[98] Quoted in Christopher Hilliard, "Publishing" in *The Fin-de-Siècle World*, ed. Michael Saler (New York: Routledge, 2015), 378.
[99] *The Crescent* 8, No. 183, (July 15, 1896), 874.

Indeed, Quilliam paid £200 per year out of his own pocket to keep the journals running, an enormous sum equal to roughly £25,000 today.[100]

Quilliam continued to work hours each day out of his busy schedule until 1908, writing for and editing both journals, paying monumental sums out of his own pocket, because the journals, as he said, gave him a voice. And with his voice he spoke for the advancement of Islam throughout the world. Thus, everything in *The Crescent* and *The Islamic World* must be considered a part of Quilliam's missionary efforts. The original articles and republications in both journals were carefully selected by Quilliam in order to foster Islamic brotherhood globally and spread Islam within Britain and the Christian world more generally. The vast amount of space which he devoted to foreign affairs, pro-Ottoman and Caliphate propaganda, and demonstrations of European geopolitical hypocrisy, makes sense in this context.

The considerable space dedicated to scientific matters, though, is less obviously a part of his missionary efforts and ultimate aim, a world for Islam. However, we must consider these journals as missionary material, and view the subjects addressed therein as windows which give us a direct view into how Quilliam understood Islam and its allure. In seeing how he attempted to make Islam appealing to others, we can see what it was in Islam that appealed to him. By understanding Quilliam's worldview beyond the political, which largely seems to have been a result of his conversion and not a contributing factor to it, it becomes apparent that Quilliam viewed a scientific, rational worldview to not only be compatible with Islam, but to lead the way to Islam – as it did for him. This gives us insight not only into his own personal conversion, but the religious and intellectual climate at the time. Science and rationality, on the one hand, and religion on the other, are often portrayed as antagonistic opposites: one leaves religion *to*

[100] *The Crescent* 8, No. 189, (August 26, 1896), 971.

become, or *because* they became, 'rational'. However, in Quilliam's case, he came to Islam because he felt that it offered the best home for his self-consciously rational, scientific worldview.

CHAPTER THREE

Quilliam's Islam

History and Progress

When Quilliam converted from Christianity to Islam, he wasn't imagining himself to be moving laterally, but forward. After all, Muslims consider Islam to be God's most recent and final revelation to mankind. In 1899, Quilliam gave a lecture at the mosque entitled "Islam the Absolute Religion," which was reprinted verbatim across multiple issues of *The Islamic World*. This lecture offers a unique insight into Quilliam's understanding of Islam as it relates to history and science.

Quilliam began by explaining his conception of the 'absolute religion' – one which would satisfy all the "cravings of the human soul and mind at all stages of its development" – thusly: "Children and childlike races have of necessity different conceptions of self and the world, and of God – the final elements of religion – from those which belong to a mature age or to a later period of national growth. The religion which is able to bring peace at one stage of a human development may be wholly ineffective at another. . . . It must be such as to be able to be comprehended by the child or the poor mendicant, and yet sufficient to satisfy the researches of the scientist and the philosopher." Here Quilliam is describing a religion with global appeal, one which at once uplifts the ignorant and challenges the cerebral; a religion which would suit the needs of modern man while providing the tools for primitive man to uplift himself and reach a 'mature age' of greater 'national growth'. To demonstrate that Islam is a religion capable of just that, Quilliam turns to the "Negro [who] has ever been depicted as being perpetually in a mental condition of either gross darkness or happy ignorance, and by most European nations was, and

by some still is, considered to be so hopelessly ossified in his degraded state as to be next to unimprovable, by moral suasion at least."[101]

To demonstrate his point, Quilliam goes on to read extensively from Joseph Thomson's essay "Mahommedanism in Central Africa." Thomson was a geologist and explorer who played a part in the Scramble for Africa, having in 1878-9 led an expedition which established a route between Dar es Salaam and Lakes Nyasa and Tanganyika. In the essay from which Quilliam was quoting, Thomson wrote that at the beginning of his travels throughout Africa he saw no way to 'improve the Negro'. Even those who had nominally adopted Christianity – "a sort of veneer . . . which made a good show, and looked satisfactory only when described in a missionary magazine" – showed, in his estimation, no capacity to progress along the lines of European civilization. He even had no hope for the 'civilising influence' of European trade, which he believed caused untold degradation by "raising taste for gin, rum, gunpowder, and guns." Taking a somewhat contrarian stance, Thomson comes to the painful realization "that in West Africa our influence for evil enormously counterbalances any little good we have produced by our contact with the African."[102]

In his last year in Africa, however, he was "converted from this scepticism about the negro" and began "to see infinite possibilities lying latent, encased in his low, thick cranium." In Sudan he found communities of 10,000 to 30,000 inhabitants, people "picturesquely and voluminously dressed" who were "industrious" and "far advanced . . . on the road to civilisation." Thomson could find no beer nor spirits, neither native nor European. "[T]here were no buyers, and therefore no sellers." Thomson noticed that the difference between these

[101] *The Islamic World* 6, No. 66, (1899).
[102] Quoted in Ibid.

Africans and those he had encountered further south could not be explained in terms of European contact, as Europeans were familiar to both, nor were Moors or Arabs in charge of government and industry in Sudan. He concluded that the people of Sudan advanced themselves, from "numerous tribes of savages into semi-civilized nations," because of the transformative power of Islam. "Mohammedanism it was, without a doubt, which had breathed this fresh vigorous life into the Negroes." In his estimation, it had united warring tribes, "swept away fetishism," and replaced nakedness and the laying of "offerings before serpents and lizards" with the well-clothed worship of a single deity. Islamic schools had also been established which taught religion and the Arabic language. Thomson's conclusion, that "Islam is a powerful agency for good in Central Africa," enabled Quilliam to suggest to his audience that, if Islam has the transformative power to uplift even the "childlike Negro race," it is then justifiable to claim that Islam is "able to satisfy the cravings of the human soul and mind at all stages of its development."[103]

This teleological way of understanding history, wherein Africans exist in a childlike state with need of an outside force to guide them to adulthood, at which time they can become part of the modern world, was of course common, if not universally held (within Western Europe, at least) during the nineteenth century. It should be no surprise, then, that Quilliam also viewed history as such. What is interesting is that Quilliam viewed Islam as the civilizing force which 'childlike races' required. And why? Precisely *because* he believed Islam, more so than Christianity, to be the carrier of what, then and now, have often been described as the values of modern, Western civilization.

[103] Ibid.

In the same lecture, Quilliam argued that the absolute religion is one which "secured for its votaries the triumphs of the civilised life – art and poetry, science and philosophy" and "blended [into] one by a spiritual force . . . at once personal and absolute."[104] To Quilliam, there was no question that Europe had reached the pinnacle of civilization and had left everyone else behind. Like the Christian missionaries whom he attacked venomously in his journals, he too believed in civilizing missions. And crucially, he too believed that religion was the carrier of civilization. He simply disagreed about which religion transmitted modern civilization the best. In his estimation, spreading Christianity was counterproductive. And among Muslims it had proven to be a near impossible task. But Islam, he believed, brought the highest forms of art, poetry, philosophy, and scientific rationalism wherever it went. How, then, did Quilliam contend with the fact that Europe was, undeniably, more materially advanced than much of the Arab and Muslim worlds, and that it was European civilization, or Western civilization, which occupied the pinnacle of 'progress' rather than Arab or Muslim civilizations? To answer this question, Quilliam turned to history.

A Return to an Islamic Golden Age

After having read extensively from Thomson's travel narrative, and having demonstrated that Islam can fulfill the needs of even those to the bottom of the totem pole of historical progress (perhaps especially those at the bottom), Quilliam went on to attempt to prove that the forces of civilization can best be focused within Islam. He did this by offering a short history of Muslim Spain. He quotes T.W. Arnold, Washington Irving, and John Charles Leonard Simonde de

[104] Ibid.

Simondi, eighteenth-century historians, all of whom praised the artists, philosophers, and scientists which Andalusia had produced. Quilliam went on to note that in the fourteenth-century, a single city in Muslim Spain was likely more populous than the five largest cities in England combined. "We must compare," he urged his audience, "this brilliant age of Spanish history with the profound darkness which reined over the rest of Europe."[105] This, of course, is a long-held position within European historiography, that of a Europe shrouded in darkness, eclipsed by an ascendant Muslim civilization from which they re-learned the philosophy of the ancient Greeks and others and were saved from their state of relative ignorance. Some historians have found this to be an overstatement, and the periodization the 'Dark Ages' – a creation of the Enlightenment – has generally been dropped in favour of the less loaded 'Middle Ages'. But there is no doubt that Andalusian civilization was extremely advanced both materially and in terms of the knowledge it produced. When the Christians defeated the Moors and exiled them, "they had killed their golden goose," said Quilliam. Ferdinand and Isabella, nor that juggernaut of European aristocratic rule, Charles V, could, according to Quilliam, match anything that had been accomplished by the Muslims in Spain. "Christian Spain shone, like the moon, with a borrowed light; then came the eclipse, and in that darkness Spain has grovelled ever since."[106]

This focus on a lost golden age of Muslim civilization is also found in the poetry of Yehya-en-Nasr Parkinson, a British convert to Islam and prominent member of the LMI. Poetry was one of the ways in which Victorians expressed their religious selves and interpreted events. The philosopher Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), for instance, believed that literature, and specifically poetry, could one day replace traditional religious formulations.[107] In this sense,

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[105] *The Islamic World* 6, No. 66, (1899).
[106] Ibid.
[107] Lawrence J. Starzyk. "'That Promised Land': Poetry and Religion in the Early Victorian Period," *Victorian Studies* 16, No. 3 (1973): 269-270.

Victorians used poems in much the same way that Robert Darnton claims peasants of the Early Modern period used folk tales: as tools to make sense of the world, because "they found them good to think with."[108] Newspapers in Victorian Britain published many poems that required no literary knowledge in order to be appreciated. These poems were often of a satirical or commemorative nature, or concerning current events. English professor, Nathalie Houston, explains that "poetry functioned as one of several interpretive frameworks for public events during the nineteenth century." She suggests that poetry "was one way that individuals participating in the communal, nation-defining experience of reading the newspaper described by Benedict Anderson were guided toward emotional and aesthetic interpretations of different national events."[109] Just as reading national newspapers provided a platform on which to interpret various national events and thereby contributed to the formation of an imagined British community, the poems that were published in *The Crescent* and *The Islamic World* provided the British Muslims with their own platform to interpret events through which they imagined their own community – locally and globally – across its past, present, and future.

Parkinson's poetry was particularly prolific. He wrote more poetry for *The Crescent* and *The Islamic World* than anyone other than Quilliam himself. Parkinson was born in Scotland in 1874 and converted to Islam some time before 1901. Throughout his activities as part of Quilliam's community he lived in Scotland and Ireland, only coming to Liverpool for special occasions. His contributions to *The Crescent* and *The Islamic World* began in 1901 and lasted until the last issues in 1908. In the second-last issue of *The Islamic World*, Parkinson wrote an essay which attempted to establish a future column devoted to "friendly and brotherly

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[108] Robert Darnton. *The Great Cat Massacre and other Episodes in French Cultural History.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 64.
[109] Nathalie M. Houston. "Newspaper Poems: Material Texts in the Public Sphere," *Victorian Studies* 50, No. 2 (2008): 241.

communication" between Muslims. He felt isolated in the hills and swamps of Scotland, far from any other Muslims: "How are the brethren getting on in Turkey, Persia, Arabia, and Egypt? I don't know; how can I? I do not know any of them; I have no means of communication."[110] Unfortunately for him, the next issue would be the last and no such column was ever created. It would seem, then, that for Parkinson at least, the global Muslim community within which he felt he belonged was more imaginary than real.

His poems, many of which were historical in nature and dealt with various Muslim generals or warriors, heroizing their struggle against Christian forces, facilitated this process of imagining communities and connections across time and space. One of his earliest poems tells the story of Imad al-Din Zangi, the Turkish founder of the Zangid dynasty of modern-day northern Iraq and Syria. Parkinson commends Zangi for being the first Muslim commander to successfully lead counter-Crusade campaigns against Christendom:

> Crusaders from the ferine west,
> Imbued with mad religious hate;
> Were rushing in fanatic zest,
> The Muslim to annihilate.
> . . .
> He was the first the torch to light,
> And bid the European pause;
> The first to meet the Christian might
> As champion of the Muslim cause.[111]

In other poems, Parkinson pays tribute to the Zegri clan of Moorish Spain whose defeat in 1492 signaled the end of Muslim rule; celebrates Al-Mansur Bi'llah, who ruled Andalusia from 978 to

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[110] *The Islamic World* 8, No. 87, (1908), 83.

[111] Originally published in *The Islamic World*, 1901. Quoted in Brent D. Singleton (ed.), *The Convert's Passion: An Anthology of Islamic Poetry from Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain*, (Rockville: The Borgo Press, 2009), 57-62.

1002 and led dozens of expeditions against the Spanish Christians; retells the story of Musa ibn Abu l'Gazan, the lone Muslim who refused to surrender to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella; and writes of Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad az-Zaghall, who was briefly the Sultan of Grenada (1485-86).[112] During this period, there was a romanticization in Western societies of the Greek and other ancient societies from which Western civilization could supposedly trace its legacy. It seems logical that some British Muslims would highlight alternative moments; golden ages in Muslim history.

Part of the Turkophilia of the British Muslims can be explained by the fact that they looked to the Ottoman Sultan-Caliph to reinvigorate the Muslim world and propel it to its former glory. In a poem published in *The Crescent* in 1905, Parkinson salutes the Ottoman bloodline, through Osman, Suleiman, to Abdulhamid II:

> Great son of Osman's glorious line,
> Long may thy Star and Crescent shine;
> Long may thy flag and tempest ride,
> Tho' winds of war be circling wide;
> May victory for ever grace
> The sword of Osman's royal race.
> . . .
> Of great Mahommed's stem a shoot,
> A branch of Islam's fertile root;
> A shoot of power, a branch of might,
> The Conqueror's fire in thee relight;
> The fire that burned when Suleiman
> The trembling west with troops o'erran;
> With flaunting banners, sturdy spears,
> Nor Christendom produced their peers.[113]

[112] Parkinson's poems, along with those of other LMI members, were published in both *The Crescent* and *The Islamic World* and can be conveniently found in Brent Singleton's anthology, see footnote 105.
[113] Yehya-en-Nasr Parkinson, "H.I.M. Abdul-Hamid Ghazi Khan, Sultan of Turkey, Emir-el-Mumooneen," *The Crescent* 25, No. 640, (April 19, 1905).

In this poem, Parkinson shows support for Abdulhamid II and expresses hope that he will be as successful as Suleiman the Magnificent, the longest-reigning (r. 1520-1566) and arguably most powerful sultan of the Ottoman Empire, who conquered much of the Christian Balkans and laid siege to Vienna in 1529. In another poem published in *The Crescent* a few months later, Parkinson calls for Muslims to "Rally round, ye best and bravest / of the valiant Turkish race" and questions the idea that the Sultan-Caliph must "Bow before the Christian yoke." Such language is a challenge to the notion of the 'sick man of Europe' and the 'Eastern Question', decline narratives which presented the Ottoman Empire as a problem to be solved. Parkinson suggested in his poetry that at the height of Ottoman power Muslims had no equal amongst the Christian powers, and that such a golden age in Islamic history could make itself manifest once more. "Are the sons of Islam sleeping / Is the sword of Islam broke?," he asks. In one of the final stanzas of his poem, Parkinson supplicates the Muslim world to rise to action: "Wake ye silent dead! I say, / Waken from the sleep of ages!"[114]

Notice that Parkinson did not escape the world-dividing binary that Europeans generally situated themselves within. He also did not suggest that the commonly accepted decline narratives were false; in fact, he portrayed Islam as being in a state of sleep. His call to wake Muslims "from the sleep of ages" suggests that he believed that the Ottoman decline could be reversed, but also that he found it to be an accurate description.

Quilliam also believed that the Muslim world was in decline and had fallen far from its historical pinnacle from which it produced the world's greatest artists, scientists, and philosophers. In the third issue of *The Crescent* he reprinted a letter he had received from Mahmoud Salem, an Egyptian judge, who also made the point: "Moslems who unhappily, in

[114] Yehya-en-Nasr Parkinson, "The Clarion of Islam," *The Crescent* 26, No. 674, (December 13, 1905).

these latter days, have all but forgotten their incomparable law, will light anew their lamp of faith at the torch of their English brethren, whose politico-secular liberty has accustomed them to dwell in thought on the mighty truths. The myriad evil habits, mistaken for genuine rules of doctrine – thanks to following blind tyranny – will disappear. All those errors grafted during the centuries on Islam's Tree of Knowledge by the ignorance of the masses, will be dissipated . . . So we shall have a new Mussulman culture compared with which any previous civilisation will be as nought; science will light her lamp again."[115] And again a few months later, in September, 1893, Quilliam reprinted this letter from another Egyptian, the editor of *al-Adab*, a Cairene journal, Mahomed Massoud Effendi: "The religion of Islam carries in itself the germ of all sciences and all the virtues . . . Compare the two civilizations, the actual European civilization and the old Arab civilization, the benefits of which are not ignored even by the most fanatical Christians, and you will find that the latter carries on the face of it, purity and light and that it fell not through anarchy, socialism or revolution but by the impiety and jealousy of savage nations, the enemies of progress."[116] Both of these Egyptians were happy to hear of the Muslim community in Liverpool and requested to be kept updated on its doings. They saw in it the potential for the revitalization of the Muslim world.

It is crucial to note that Quilliam did not attribute Europe's supplanting of this Muslim world to the power of Christianity. Instead, he attributed it to secular forces: "The progress of Europe," he told the members of the LMI at one of its annual meetings, "commenced when it threw off the shackles of ecclesiasticism; it commenced with the emancipation of the mind from the thraldom of the Church. Voltaire and his contemporaries were the pioneers of modern

[115] "An Encouraging Letter from the Land of the Pharaos," *The Crescent* 1, No. 3, (1893), 22.
[116] "An Encouraging Letter from Egypt," *The Crescent* 2, No. 34, (September 9, 1893).

progress, and not the divines of the two sects into which Christianity became divided in the sixteenth century."[117] Quilliam's worldview, then, as it pertains to historical progress, is as follows: A rational, simple religion, devoid of superstition, is the cause of the advancement of nations – of civilization – as it fosters improvement within the arts and sciences; or, absent a rational and simple religion, Deism, a personal spirituality, or even no religion at all, can be the causes of progress so long as they foster rational, reason-based thinking. Arabian civilization in the first centuries following the life of Mohammed, Muslim Spain, and the Ottoman Empire of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries best demonstrate the fruits that a rational Islam can produce. But Christian conquest and the ignorance of the masses had sent these Muslim civilizations into decline, to be overtaken on the path of historical progress by European civilization, not because Christianity was a rational religion akin to Islam, but because Enlightenment rationality had emancipated the European mind from Christian ignorance and superstition. To Quilliam, then, Enlightenment rationality and Islam were more similar than Islam and most forms of Christianity. This particular understanding of Islam and Christianity in relation to history and modern progress is to be found throughout *The Crescent* and *The Islamic World*.

Allies in Agnostics and Unitarians

In 1893, Quilliam gave a lecture, attended by many non-Muslims, entitled "The Prophets as Naturalists." He noted that in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ asked his followers to consider the birds of the air and lilies of the fields, and that in the Qur'an the faithful are asked to reflect on bees.[118] Both the verses in question deal with how God provides for humanity. Christ was

[117] *The Islamic World* 6, No. 67, (1901), 182.
[118] Matthew 6:25-33; Qur'an 16:68-69.

telling his followers to not be anxious over what they shall eat or what they shall wear because, as God provides food and shelter even for the birds, so too shall he provide for humans. The Surah asks one to reflect on the production and healing properties of honey as a sign of God's majesty. Quilliam understood these passages in the New Testament and the Qur'an to mean that both prophets were asking their followers to look at nature, free of irrationality and superstition, and recognize God's majesty within it. According to the summary of the lecture which was published in *The Crescent*, at its close Quilliam invited the Christians who were present to "throw away the idle ceremonies and man made creeds which formed part of their modern faith, and return to the primitive teaching of Christ which they would find was simply the pure religion of Islam as taught by our prophet."[119] In *The Crescent* and *The Islamic World*, Islam was always presented as a simple religion – a return to the purity of Abraham's uncomplicated monotheism.

In fact, Quilliam's Islam was so 'uncomplicated' that he easily found common ground with deists and spiritualists, and whereas his relationship with many forms of Christianity was antagonistic, to say the least, his view of atheists, and agnostics in particular, was much more favourable. Part of this, perhaps, is because their opinion of him tended to be more generous than their view of Christians. At the 1896 annual meeting of the LMI, Quilliam spoke on how the Muslim community was being perceived by others and noted that the *Agnostic Journal*, *Watt's Literary Guide*, and *The Freethinker* had "all been most fair in the tone of their articles" and that it was "a pity that some of the Christian press [did] not take a lesson in politeness and fairness from these papers." Whereas Christian journals were in Quilliam's opinion "intolerant, mendacious and unfair" towards the Liverpool Muslim community, agnostic publications, on the

[119] *The Crescent* 1, No. 3, (1893), 21.

other hand, "as a rule dealt fairly" with the community.[120] As such, whenever Quilliam reprinted something from the *Christian Soldier*, for instance, it was either to attack or deflect an attack, whereas articles from agnostic publications such as the *Agnostic Journal* were reprinted in the spirit of friendship and mutual agreement. In fact, these journals at times even seemed to have respect for Quilliam on a personal level.

One writer who used to reside in Liverpool wrote that, prior to Quilliam's conversion to Islam, he "was chiefly noted for his defence in court and out of court of poor shopkeepers who were fined for selling . . . sweets on the day when all good Christians and most of the bad ones were counting their beads, and uttering abracadabras to Mumbo Jumbo."[121] Clearly, the writer appreciated that Quilliam had been undogmatic as a Christian and openminded as a lawyer. He went on to wish the Liverpool Muslims luck and hoped that their presence would lead to a better understanding of the Islamic faith. Many of the agnostic articles which Quilliam reprinted attacked 'Christian ignorance' and pointed out their unwillingness to learn about other faiths, notably Islam.

Take these brief excerpts which Quilliam printed side-by-side as an example. The title of the short piece was "Seen Through Different Spectacles: Pleasant for the Sheikh." The 'pleasantness' he enjoyed was a product of the comical juxtaposition between the two editorial stances: to the *Christian Soldier* "Sheikh Quilliam is standing on the brink of hell and damnation"; to the *Agnostic Journal* "Sheikh Quilliam . . . will probably be one of the 10,000 angels who drag the car full of infidels to their doom."[122] Quilliam often brought attention to the attacks made against him by Christian publications, and he often reprinted retorts from agnostic

[120] *The Crescent* 8, No. 191, (September 9, 1896), 993.
[121] Reprinted from *The Agnostic Journal* in *The Crescent* 7, No. 158, (January 22, 1896), 477.
[122] *The Crescent* 7, No. 178, (June 10, 1896), 778.

publications in his defence. On one occasion, the *Christian Soldier* had read the minutes of the Annual Report of the LMI and, in their words, learned "the sad news that Mahommedanism is still making headway in Christian England." The *Agnostic Journal* read this article in the *Christian Soldier* and responded in their own paper as follows: "I am not a disciple of the Arab camel-driver, but I certainly prefer him to the Jewish carpenter. The ignorance and prejudice of Christians against Mohometanism are colossal. The policy of the Christian is to know no faith except his own, and to curse all other faiths without taking the trouble to examine them. As far as Christianity is concerned, ignorance is, indeed, the mother of devotion."[123] Agnostic journals used Quilliam's presence in Liverpool as a club to hit Christianity over the head with. They often drew attention to the fact that Christian missionaries had few successes abroad; Muslim inroads within England itself offered an especially appealing avenue of attack. Quilliam was all too happy to be the club and seemingly reprinted every instance he could find of agnostic journals invoking his name against Christianity, not passing by an opportunity to ridicule Christianity even if it meant reprinting ill-willed references to the prophet Muhammed such as 'the Arab camel-driver'.

In fact, on at least one occasion a Liverpudlian Muslim wrote for the *Agnostic Journal*. W.D. Halliday's article, "Islam and Civilisation," argued that the Christian assertion that Islam was incompatible with civilization was disproved by history, "for when gross darkness covered the greater portion of Europe, the arts and science flourished and learning was encouraged under the Empire founded by the followers of the prophet. Islam is the accumulated wisdom of the East."[124] The editors of the *Agnostic Journal* often took the position that no one religion had

[123] Reprinted from *Christian Soldier* and *The Agnostic Journal* in *The Crescent* 8, No. 196, (October 14, 1896), 1082.
[124] Reprinted from *The Agnostic Journal* in *The Crescent* 8, No. 192, (September 16, 1896), 1020-1.

primacy over the others: either they all had a modicum of truth (some more than others), or none of them were true. The agnostics behind the journal understood that in the fin-de-siècle the world's religions existed within a global, religious marketplace in which everything could be bought whole or in part – or you could leave with nothing. Their commitment to the notion that all religious existed on somewhat equal footing – a notion which was largely levied as an attack against Christians – was strong enough that they decided that even a convert to Islam should get some space within their journal.

This relativizing notion that Christianity was but a single religious formulation among many was a key point of agreement between agnostic journals and the Muslim community. For instance, Quilliam's own assertion, that modern, Western ascendancy was due to Enlightenment rationality and not Christianity, was echoed by an article he reprinted from *The Freethinker*: "Christians claim that our civilisation is due to Christianity. The claim is not true. The cause is mistaken for the effect. Our civilisation has modified Christianity. It was once a Christian duty to murder Freethinkers and witches, and to uphold slavery. Christians now deny that such things were ever right. Christianity has changed. New interpretations have been put on Scripture to make it less repulsive to mankind. Christianity is following up the march of civilisation, but keeps a long distance in the rear."[125] This mirrors Quilliam's own view that Europe's supremacy was due more to Voltaire and the Enlightenment than any priest or church.

And it was attacks such as Voltaire's, on specific Christian doctrines and dogmas, which resonated equally with agnostics and the Liverpool Muslims. In 1895, Quilliam printed a longer piece from the *Agnostic Journal* in *The Islamic World.* It argued, brandishing Enlightenment reason, that the virgin birth and the divinity of Christ were "but the evolutionary outcome of . . .

[125] Reprinted in *The Crescent* 7, No. 159, (January 29, 1896), 493.

earlier [Pagan] beliefs. Darwin's theory of evolution holds as firmly in the history of religion as in the history of man." But it was not just evolutionary theory which could be wielded as a weapon against theological claims. History and archeology, too, made them doubtful. "Look into those New Testament fables by the light of Egyptian records," the *Agnostic Journal* implored its readers, "and ask yourselves, Christian apologists, how much foothold you have for an historical Christ. Turn which way you will, build what bridge of history over the gulf of time you please, make your Jesus a Socialist or a Theosophist, and your Christ a god, it matters not; you are confronted at every turn by the old gods, who have broken the silence of centuries and bid you begone." Whereas the study of world religions made it possible to view Christianity as just one faith among many, the study of history and archeology, and the rediscovery, new to Europeans, of the ancient mythologies of Egyptians, Sumerians, and so on, made it possible to point at the undeniably pagan elements of Christianity and view it as one system of myths among others. The article reprinted in *The Islamic World* ends thusly: "One can almost see the spirit of an old Egyptian smiling mournfully at millions of Pagans masquerading as Christians. Go, Virgin Maia, Meri, Mary, with your fatherless boy, and take your place with Isis, Ishtar, Astarte, and the rest, equally worshipped, and doubtless equally loved, by once teeming millions now dust." "It must be war," declares the agnostic writer, "war to the death – between Rationalism and Christianity."[126]

Quilliam engaged in this war, on the side of rationalism, as a Muslim. Despite the fact that Islam was, to him, solidly on the side of rationalism in this global struggle, he still had to contend with the fact that Islam had made little headway in Europe beyond Muslim-controlled lands. He did so, in part, by blaming the centuries of Christian dogma and superstition which he

[126] "The Virgin and her Son," reprinted in *The Islamic World* 3, No. 30, (October 1895).

believed had prevented people from using their own powers of discernment in order to judge the claims of each religion for themselves. As Christian superstition had supressed reason, it had also foreclosed the possibilities of Islam's spread deeper into Europe. However, he believed that in his day, secular rationalism (oftentimes agnostic, atheistic, or even anti-theistic) was in the process of casting away dogmas and superstitions and freeing the rational mind. A secular, agnostic person, then, in Quilliam's view, was a person who had accepted reason and rationalism and all the Islamic critiques of Christianity, they simply had yet to take the final step: become a Muslim.

This understanding of just how close the 'agnostic position' was to Islam is evident in Quilliam's long homage to Huxley following his death in 1895, which was published in parts across multiple issues of *The Islamic World*. It was entitled "The Late Professor Huxley from a Muslim point of view."[127] Quilliam recounted the story of Huxley's time at the Metaphysical Society. Most of its members had been '-ists' of one sort or another and Huxley, in his words, was uneasy about being "the man without a rag of a label to cover himself with." He thus came up with the term 'agnostic', a term antithetic to the 'gnostic' of Church history who was sure of so many of the things that Huxley was so uncertain about. Quilliam found Qur'anic support for Huxley's agnosticism, the idea that some questions – such as the nature of God or a spiritual plane – are simply unknowable. He cites multiple verses in defence of Huxley's agnostic position: "Wherefore liken not anything unto God; for God knoweth, but ye know not"; "Unto God only is known that which is sacred in heaven and earth; and unto Him shall the whole master be referred"; "Judgment belongeth only unto God; He will determine the truth; and He is

[127] The article begins in *The Islamic World* 3, No. 27, (July 1895), 73.

the best discerner. With Him are the keys of the secret things; none knoweth them besides Himself."[128]

To Quilliam, God's unknowability, from an Islamic standpoint, made Huxley's agnosticism admirable. To that point, Quilliam favourably quotes Huxley on his own agnosticism: "Of all the senseless babble I have ever had occasion to read the demonstrations of those philosophers who undertake to tell us about the nature of God would be the worst if they were not surpassed by the still greater absurdities of the philosophers who try to prove that there is no God."[129] Huxley endeavoured to lead his countrymen to look at the world from the point of view of reason alone, and believed the existence or nature of God to be beyond the powers of human reason. Having adopted the lens of reason and rejected many of the supernatural claims of Christian theology, Huxley, as an agnostic, was extremely close, ideologically-speaking, to Quilliam as a Muslim.

Quilliam also believed that Charles Darwin was closer than he knew to the theological and ideological tenets of Islam. In 1896, he gave a series of lectures on Darwin's work that were attended by the public – at least one man and two women converted to Islam, according to Quilliam, as a result of these lectures.[130] In one lecture, Quilliam noted that Jesus taught people to be kind to children, the elderly, and the poor, but that it was Mohammed who was the first prophet to teach compassion toward animals. Quilliam brought this up in the context of Darwin's observation that sympathy for animals is probably one of the later acquisitions of mankind. Darwin's scientific observations, on this point specifically but also his theory of

[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.
[130] The first lecture was published under the title "The Origin of Species" in *The Crescent* 8, No. 200, (November 11, 1896).

evolution in general, seemed to buttress the idea of progressive revelation and Islam's standing as a more complete religion. "While modern science," Quilliam claimed, "has pulverised into atoms the erroneous and fanciful ideas and theories of a degenerate Christianity, it has verified and established the fundamental truths taught by the last and greatest of the prophets. The necessity for such teachers as Mahomed and the other prophets, though not specifically mentioned, can also be logically deduced from perusing this work of Darwin." He went on to express that he was "tempted to declare that Darwin was a Muslim, albeit he himself was unconscious that he was following the teaching of the Mighty Man of Mecca."[131]

Quilliam also explicitly argued that Unitarians were 'part-way' to Islam. Following the British and Foreign Unitarian Association annual meeting of 1893, he noted that they were denied the Christian name and treated as little better than infidels. "Our Unitarian friends are already two-thirds of the way towards Islam," he writes. "[W]hy not come the other third?" In 1895, Quilliam even went so far as to juxtapose "the polytheistic trinity of Christianity" to "the stern and inflexible Unitarianism of Islam."[132] That same year Quilliam reprinted an article from the *Croydon Advertiser* which pointed out the error in portraying tensions between the British and Ottoman Empires as being between Christianity and the Turk. Christianity was often used as a pretext in calls to action against the Turks, "and yet the Mohammedan stands shoulder to shoulder with the English Unitarian, in that he admits the manhood and rejects only the divinity of Christ." The pieces argued that if one was to remove the titles 'Christianity' and 'Mohammedanism' and remove the doctrine of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ, there would remain a "comprehensible" and "universal religion."[133]

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[131] "Darwinism, Christianity and Islam," *The Crescent* 8, No. 202, (November 25, 1896), 1171-3.
[132] *The Crescent* 5, No. 120, (May 1, 1895), 138-9.
[133] *The Crescent* 6, No. 134, (August 7, 1895), 91-2.

In October of 1893, an unnamed man, only described as a 'young Indian Muslim' gave a speech at the annual meeting of the Unitarian Church at Ipswich. His speech was summarized in *The Crescent*. This young Indian Muslim had requested to speak at the meeting because of the "bond of sympathy" between Unitarians and Muslims: both religions rejected the Trinity as superstition. The adherents of both faiths, he argued, understood that the doctrine of the unity of God was more than an abstract, theological aspect, far removed from daily practice. Both understood that "whenever superstition was introduced into religion, sooner or later that superstition would throw its roots deep into the soil of life, would mix up with every form of thought and every system of life." The spread of religious superstition could create a situation wherein "all reason and logic were . . . confounded." The young Indian explained that for these reasons Muslims around the world were quite interested in the growth of Unitarianism within Britain.[134]

While Quilliam considered Unitarianism to be two-thirds of the way to Islam, the way his community practiced Islam was arguably part-way to Unitarianism. Although they held Friday prayers at the mosque, they also held Sunday morning religious services before the Sunday evening weekly lectures. During these religious services hymns were sung, as if in a church. While many of these hymns were written by Quilliam himself, a large number of them were taken directly from Wesley, Watts, Doddridge, Cowper, Bonar, and other evangelical Englishmen. The hymns were carefully curated and only those which affirmed the unity of God were sung. Others were altered and adapted to be appropriate for a Muslim congregation. For

[134] *The Crescent* 2, No. 40, (October 21, 1893), 317-8.

instance, 'My God, my Father, whilst I stray,' was altered to 'My God, *Great Allah*, whilst I stray'.[135]

Overall, then, Quilliam's Islam fit comfortably within the spirit of his time and place. His understanding of history was as teleological and hierarchical as that of the European imperialists which he sometimes decried. Even though he was a Muslim, he attacked Christianity from the same vantage point as agnostics and deists; from a reason-based position firmly rooted in the Enlightenment. He recognized the common ground between his understanding of Islam and Unitarianism, and although he rejected and attacked Christianity, he kept many of its outward forms – almost as if British Islam was merely another church. In all these ways, Quilliam's Islam was a product of the Victorian age.

[135] *The Crescent* 8, No. 187, (August 12, 1896), 933-5.

CONCLUSION

Modernity and Faith

In 1906, Quilliam approvingly reprinted in *The Islamic World* Rev. H.D. Roberts' observation that while the "simple and beautiful teaching of Jesus" over time became "an elaborate doctrine of the Trinity – practically a Tritheism – and the deification of himself," Islam remained a unity. "Islam," Rev. Roberts writes, "is in this what it ever was – a rigid monotheism, unaltered, and, it seems, unalterable."[136] This statement by the Reverend reflects Quilliam's agreement with Unitarians in theological matters, but it is also a good example of how Islam was often portrayed by Europeans: as a religion unfit for modern life because it was stuck in the past, unchanged for centuries, perhaps unable to change. The irony is that Quilliam agreed that Islam was an unchanging creed. He often portrayed it as a return to Abraham's monotheism; a shedding of Jewish and Christian superstition which had accumulated over the centuries. Omar Byrne, an important and active member of the LMI (at one point its secretary) once described Islam as "a simple and lofty form of primitive monotheism."[137] Byrne argued that Islam was a *natural* religion. In Quilliam's lecture on "The Prophets as Naturalists" he made the same case, that Islam was a "return to the primitive teaching of Christ." Quilliam believed that everything in Christianity, from the Trinity, the cornerstone of orthodox Christian dogma, to Christmas festivals, had been corrupted by paganism and superstition. By "lending itself to Pagan observances and customs [Christianity]," he argued, "lost some of its primitive purity and became imbued with error and superstition, and having gradually become more and more Paganised it was necessary for a newly-inspired teacher to be sent to bring the world back to

[136] "Creed of Islam," *The Islamic World* 7, No. 79, (1906), 240.
[137] *The Crescent* 7, No. 163, (February 26, 1896), 547.

truth and simplicity. So came Mahomed, the prophet of God, and Islam was happily free from these Pagan and heathen rites."[138]

To Quilliam, Islam was a *return* to reason. The early Arab empire, Muslim Spain, and the expanding, conquering Ottoman Empire of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were examples of the heights that civilization could attain to when true, primitive religion was uncorrupted and logic and reason free to operate. Thus, to Quilliam, true Islam was unchanging yet, contrary to the accusations of its opponents, perfectly suited to modern life. What Quilliam and many of the Muslims with whom he corresponded considered 'European modernity' – its scientific and technological advancements, its renowned artists and poets – had existed before, in a sense, in past Muslim golden ages. In Quilliam's view, such levels of progress and civilization had been achieved on the Arab peninsula, Anatolia, and in Spain, through Islam; in Europe it had been achieved by Enlightenment rationalism and scientific naturalism. The ends were the same, and the only difference in the means was the belief in God, which many naturalists, including Tyndall, Huxley, and Darwin, were open to in roundabout ways.

Although one might be tempted to see Quilliam as an opponent to Western global supremacy, or European modernity, or might be tempted to place him in with Leela Gandhi's 'long-forgotten Western anti-Imperialists',[139] Quilliam's worldview was not radically different from the norm at the time for a Victorian of his class. He was radical in a sense, of course, in that Unitarians and agnostics were his closest theological and ideological allies, but he reinforced East and West binaries, a civilizational hierarchy, the supremacy of reason over faith, and a singular, teleological, global modernity in almost everything he said and did. He did sometimes

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[138] *The Crescent* 8, No. 206, (December 23, 1896), 1241.
[139] Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

come out strongly against British imperial practices, but usually only in support of Abdulhamid, his patron. On other matters, such as Indian self-rule, he was quiet. He may have bucked orthodox Christian theology more so than many of the Protestant denominations which were parting with it at the time, but not more so than the scientific naturalists and agnostics whom he so admired. In some sense, then, Quilliam was no more radical than Huxley, who today is not considered controversial in the slightest.

That Quilliam, one of the earliest Britons to convert to Islam, and Huxley, the originator of the term 'agnostic', can fit so closely together in the same conceptual box suggests that the way modernity is sometimes thought of, as a secularizing force, is flawed. Many thinkers throughout the nineteenth century imagined, like the editors of the *Agnostic Journal*, that Christianity and rationalism were in a 'war to the death'. Karl Marx is a prime example. He famously viewed religions as 'different snake skins' which would be 'cast off by history' and believed humanity to be 'the snake who sloughed them' – a view which posits that religions are all man-made untruths and that material development (history) will negate any need for them in the future. What Quilliam's life as a Muslim demonstrates, though, is that one can adhere to all the tenets of modernity without completely abandoning faith. In fact, global modernity, by creating a more connected world, *increases* the ways of articulating a worldview that one has access to, thereby contributing to pluralism, rather than undermining it. And these new articulations are as numerous as the world's localities. The possibilities and problems created by globalization and modernity had (and still have) a different flavour in Liverpool than New Delhi, Sydney, or anywhere else. To return to Nile Green's soil analogy, even though the water may be the same, each soil will produce different fruits.

Quilliam's engagement with global forces brought together Islam and modernization, a combination which obviously has great significance for our age today. Quilliam demonstrated many of the internal logics of European imperialists, as did his Indian colleague Muhammad Barakat-Ullah and many of the numerous Egyptians, Indians, Afghanis, Syrians, and so on, who wrote to him. They accepted both the reality that Europe was more scientifically advanced and the principle that scientific progress is a laudable goal, one of the most laudable a society can collectively aspire to. Muslims such as Barakat-Ullah – and much more famously, Muhammad 'Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani – accepted these 'European attitudes'. Is it even fair, then, to refer to said attitudes as 'European'? But that is precisely what we do when we say that Islam is unchanging, or needs to modernize. Humayun Ansari has argued that "with the globalisation of modernity, Western civilisation . . . appears to have lost its specifically European character. This line of argument makes the 'clash of civilisations' thesis seem untenable. . . . [C]ivilisations have never been hermetically-sealed separate entities – the story of Asia and Europe is replete with uninterrupted mutual exchange."[140] Samuel Huntington's thesis, to which Ansari refers, is untenable because the benefits accrued and the problems unleashed by modernity are enjoyed and contended with both within 'the West' and 'the Rest'. Modernity as a global process is not something that one side 'possesses' and the other side 'lacks'.

The degree to which modernity is the product of a purely European Enlightenment, then, (and it probably isn't) is almost an irrelevant question. Christopher de Bellaigue has argued, for instance, that many Muslims did accept the Enlightenment's findings and "eat of its fruit" and that the fact that there was "No Istanbul blacksmith [who] discovered movable type [and] no

[140] Humayun Ansari, "The Muslim World in British Historical Imaginations: 'Re-Thinking Orientalism?'," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 38, No. 1 (2011): 91.

Muslim Voltaire [who] sniped at the clerics by the Nile" is wholly irrelevant to the question of whether or not Muslims live(d) in and contend(ed) with the findings and problems of modernity. "There is something wonderfully earnest," he concludes, "and yet wholly irrelevant about Westerners demanding modernity from people whose lives are drenched in it."[141] Such demands can be made of Muslims, whose lives are 'drenched in modernity,' because most of us still largely understand modernity as a single process with a singular outcome. Quilliam's life, however, demonstrates that modernity, even when understood singularly, can be grappled with in a variety of ways and thus produce unexpected outcomes. His history is that of a man who was enmeshed in the rhetoric of teleological modernity, whose life revealed the flaws in that same rhetoric. And his history is as much about local conditions in Britain and Liverpool as it is about the global forces which shaped them.

[141] Christopher de Bellaigue, *The Islamic Enlightenment: The Struggle Between Faith and Reason, 1798 to Modern Times*, (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), xxii, xvi.

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