The Caliphs' love of justice

226 That blessed age, which was the best of eras, while the pillars of the Caliphate endured,
While the shadow of the Apostleship still showed the way, while the atmosphere of welfare and auspiciousness was ever being strengthened, When all were bedecked with the ornaments of justice, when the rose garden of Ahmad was flourishing and in bloom,

227* That age's happiest quality lay in this fact, that everyone's neck bowed before advice.
When the truth was spoken, they did not for their part fall silent, nor did words of truth seem bitter to them.
Masters were constrained by their slaves, and a single old woman would take issue with the Caliph.

228* They whom the Prophet called the Pride of the Community, who had received the glad tidings of paradise,
They whose justice was acknowledged throughout the world, and by whom the throne of the Caliphate was honoured,
Used to go about secretly from door to door at night, in order that they might be put to shame by hearing of their faults.

But we, who are surpassed even by wild beasts, have no virtue in us, either manifest or concealed.

Neither are we honoured among our contemporaries and equals, nor do we possess the excellence of our ancestors and forebears.

So ill do we take advice that it is as if we recognized our real selves.

230 If the office of Prophet had not come to an end with the Arabs, and if some prophet were to be sent to us,
Then, just as the general ruin of the Jews and Christians is recorded in the Quran,
So the Book which would be revealed to that prophet would make known all our acts of wickedness.

Once during the reign of Umar some merchants came and camped outside the city. At night, in accordance with their usual custom, Umar and Abd al-Rahman ibn Auf went there. They heard a child crying three times during the night. Each time, Umar went to the tent and upbraided the mother. 'What sort of mother are you,' he asked, 'for your child to be restless from the beginning of the night?' Finally the woman said, 'Oh creature of God, you have troubled me all night. I am weaning him.' He persisted, however, and asked why. 'Because,' she said, 'a child allowance is not granted otherwise.' He wept greatly and said to himself, 'God knows how many Muslim chilldren have been killed because of me.' Inmediately he had it announced that no one was to wean their child too soon, and he sent orders throughout the land that an allowance was to be paid for every Muslim child as soon as it was born.

When Umar was Caliph, he addressed an assembly of Muhajirs and Ansar, asking them three times how they would behave if he were slack in performing the duties of the Caliphate. Bashir ibn Sa'd answered, 'We'd sort you out like a dog.' 'What can I say?' said Umar.

Once Umar was banning the practice of giving large dowries, when an old woman got up and recited this verse: In ātaitum ihdāhunna qintāran fa-lā ta'khudhū minhu shai'an (Quran 4:20) 'Even if ye had given the latter a whole treasure for dower, take not the least bit of it back.' 'You are Caliph,' she said, 'and do not understand the Quran.' Umar replied, 'Everyone knows more than Umar, even old women,' and withdrew his ban.

Lack of worldly skills

The arts which we possess are all known. All sciences and skills are non-existent.
 All our ways and manners are despicable. We are deprived of affluent ease and wealth.
 Ignorance does not leave our side for an instant. Bigotry does not allows us to advance for a single step.

The wisdom of the Greeks

- 232* That out-dated almanac of the Greeks, their philosophy which is a screen for deception,
 Which true faith has proved useless, and which practice has come and rejected,
 Is considered by us, it may be said without exaggeration, superior to divine revelation.
- 233 The Psalms, Torah, Gospel and Quran are, by general consensus, deserving of abrogation and oblivion.
 But there is no possibility of abrogating or modifying those principles written down by the Greeks.
 As long as the foundation of the world remains intact, not one jot of their writings will be erased.
- 234* The results of Western science and art have been apparent in India for a hundred years, But bigotry has put such blinkers on us that we cannot see the manifestation of Truth. The theories of the Greeks are implanted in our hearts, but we do not believe in the revelation presently granted us.
- Those who are now enamoured of that philosophy, who sing the praises of the Shifā and the Almagest,
 Who prostrate themselves at Aristotle's threshold, and who blindly follow Plato,
 Are just like the proverbial oilman's bullock. All their lives they go round and round, and are just where they were.
- When they have completed their studies and tied the turban of learning and accomplishment on their heads,

 Then, if they naturally possess any intelligence, their greatest skill lies in this:

 If they proclaim day to be night, they will leave the world only after getting it all to agree with them.

- 237 Moreover, if anyone comes to them, they teach him, and tell him whatever they know.
 They teach all the languages which they have learnt, and make him into a parrot like themselves.
 This, in sum, is the knowledge which they have acquired, upon which their standing amongst their peers is based.
- Incapable of finding government employment or of moving their lips at court,
 Or of herding flocks in the wilds, or even of carrying loads in the market,
 Had they not studied, they could have earned their keep in a hundred ways, but they gained an education and were lost themselves.
- Should you ask, 'Sir, what is the point of all this studying which you have done?
 'Is there any worldly or spiritual benefit in it? Does it lead to results, or is the opposite the case?'
 Then they will utter some nonsense like madmen, but will be unable to answer your question.
- They can advance no argument to support the Apostleship, nor can they make known the truth of Islam,
 Nor reveal the greatness of the Quran, nor tell of God's truth.
 All their proofs are useless today. Faced with guns, their swords are of no avail.
- 241* They are utterly engrossed in this toilsome labour, not knowing the result it will lead to.
 Like sheep which have lost their way and gone on ahead, leading the whole flock by the same route,
 They do not know where they are going, whether they have lost the way or are still on it.
- Here is an obviously parallel illustration of their efforts. Some monkeys were once suffering from cold.

 For a long time they searched here and there for fire, but nowhere could they find its glow.

 But when they saw a firefly glittering, they all thought it was a spark of fire.

Text and translation

- Immediately they all went and grabbed it. They brought dry grass and heaped this over it.
 All together, they kept trying to light it, but no fire was lit, and the cold grew no less.
 Like this they wasted the whole night for nothing, without deriving any comfort from their labour.
- The animals who passed by that way, when they saw them struggling,
 Upbraided them most bitterly, telling them to be ashamed of their stupid idea.
 But they did not give up their efforts, and only snarled the more at their reviling.
- They did not realize until day dawned. In just the same way, those who are enemies of truth
 Will not shake their skirts free of the dust of idle supposition.
 But when the light of dawn gleams, it will very quickly be apparent that it was a firefly which they had thought to be a spark.

Traditional medicine

- 246 The medicine with which our doctors are entranced, which they consider to be the Messiah's work-book,
 In expounding which they show considerable reluctance, as if they were concealing some fault,
 Is just a book containing a few prescriptions which have been haded down from father to son.
- 247 They have no acquaintance with botany, and utterly lack knowledge of mineralogy.
 None feel the urge to know about diagnosis. They have no medical science or chemistry.
 They have no scientific knowledge of water or air. God alone takes care of their patients.
- There is no error in their Qānūn, and no room for objection in the Makhzan.

 Whatever is written in Sadid's commentary is correct, and every word in that of Nafis commands admiration.

 Whatever the ancients wrote down according to their ideas and suppositions are scripture which have descended from heaven.

Our poets

249 The filthy archive of poetry and odes, more foul than a cesspool in its putridity,
By which the earth is convulsed as if by an earthquake, and which makes the angels blush in heaven,
Such is the place among other branches of learning of our literature, by which learning and faith are quite devastated.

250* If there is a punishment for writing bad verse, and if it is impermissible to give tongue to vain lies,
Then in that court of which God is the judge, where penalties for the good and the bad are determined,
All sinners will be acquitted, while our poets fill up hell.

All labourers and menials in the world prosper through their own efforts. Singers are the favourites of the rich, while even tambourine players get something by begging.
But God knows what disease they who are afflicted with this hectic fever are supposed to be a cure for!

252 If there were no water-carriers, all would depart this life. The world would get dirty, if all washermen disappeared.

Things would collapse if all menials left the city. If there were a shortage of sweepers, all houses would become filthy.

But if our poets should chance to make a collective exodus, it would be a case of 'less rubbish and a cleaned-up world'.

The Arabs, who were the founders of this art in the world, who had no equal throughout its length and breadth,
Whose eloquence was universally acknowledged, have at last had all their traces wiped clean by our dear friends.
After losing all their arts and skills, they have finished by submerging poetry itself.

It was they who imparted life to letters, their style which gave lustre to faith.
They used their tongues as lances, and the thrusts of their tongues were more deadly than those of spears.
Morals were burnished by their verses, and the world was stirred into tunult by their sermons.