INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: SÜRAT Al-Mulk, 67.

We have now done fourteen-fifteenths of the Qurān, and have followed step by step the development of its argument establishing the Ummat or Brotherhood of Islam.

There is a logical break here. The remaining fifteenth consists of short Lyrics, mostly of the Makkah period, dealing mainly with the inner life of man, and in its individual aspects. They may be compared to Hymns or Psalms in other religious literature. But these short Quranic Sūras have a grandeur, a beauty, and a force of earnestness under persecution, all their own. With their sources in the sublimest regions of heaven; their light penetrates into the darkest recesses of Life, into the concrete facts which are often mistaken for the whole of Reality, though they are but an insignificant portion and on the surface and fleeting.

It is the contrast between the shadows of Reality here and the eternal Reality, between the surface world and the profound inner World, that is urged on our attention here.

This Sūra of 30 verses belongs to the Middle Makkah period, just before S. lxix. and S. lxx. Allah is mentioned here by the name Rahmān (Most Gracious), as He is mentioned by the names of Rabb (Lord and Cherisher) and Rahmān (Most Gracious) in S. xix.
In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

1. Blessed be He In Whose hands Is Dominion; And He over all things Hath Power;--

2. He Who created Death And Life, that He May try which of you Is best in deed:

5554. What do we mean when we bless the name of Allah, or proclaim (in the optative mood) that the whole Creation should bless the name of the Lord? We mean that we recognise and proclaim His beneficence to us; for all increase and happiness is through Him, “in His hands”, —in the hands of Him Who also holds Dominion or Power. In our human affairs we sometimes see the separation of Dominion or Power from Goodness or Beneficence: in the divine nature we recognise that there is no separation or antithesis.

5555. Mulk: Dominion, Lordship, Sovereignty, the Right to carry out His Will, or to do all that He wills. Power (in the clause following) is the Capacity to carry out His Will, so that nothing can resist or neutralise it. Here is beneficence completely identified with Lordship and Power; and it is exemplified in the verses following. Note that “Mulk” here has a different shade of meaning from Malakūt in xxxvi. 83. Both words are from the same root, and I have translated both by the word “Dominion”. But Malakūt refers to Lordship in the invisible World, while Mulk to Lordship in the visible World. Allah is Lord of both.

5556. “Created Death and Life.” Death is here put before Life, and it is created. Death is therefore not merely a negative state. In ii. 28 we read: “Seeing that ye were without life (literally, dead), and He gave you life: then will He cause you to die, and will again bring you to life; and again to Him will ye return.” In lii. 44, again, Death is put before Life. Death, then, is (1) the state before life began, which may be non-existence or existence in some other form: (2) the state in which Life as we know it ceases, but existence does not cease; a state of Barzakh (xxiii. 100), or Barrier or Partition, after our visible Death and before Judgment; after that will be the new Life, which we conceive of under the term Eternity.

5557. Creation, therefore, is not in mere sport, or without a purpose with reference to man. The state before our present Life, or the state after, we can scarcely understand. But our present Life is clearly given to enable us to strive by good deeds to reach a nobler state.
And He is the Exalted\textsuperscript{5558} In Might, Oft-Forgiving;-

3. He Who created The seven heavens\textsuperscript{5559} One above another: No want of proportion Wilt thou see In the Creation Of The Most Gracious. So turn thy vision again: Seest thou any flaw?

4. Again turn thy vision\textsuperscript{5560} A second time: (thy) vision Will come back to thee Dull and discomfited, In a state worn out.

5. And We have, (From of old), Adorned the lowest heaven\textsuperscript{5561} With Lamps, and We

\textsuperscript{5558} All this is possible, because Allah is so Exalted in Might that He can perfectly carry out His Will and Purpose, and that Purpose is Love, Mercy, and Goodness to His creatures.

\textsuperscript{5559} Cf. lxv. 12, and n. 5526-27. The heavens as they appear to our sight seem to be arranged in layers one above another, and ancient astronomy accounted for the motions of the heavenly bodies in an elaborate scheme of spheres. What we are concerned with here is the order and beauty of the vast spaces and the marvellous bodies that follow regular laws of motion in those enormous spaces in the visible world. From these we are to form some conception of the vastly greater Invisible World, for which we want special spiritual vision.

\textsuperscript{5560} Reverting to the indication of the external or visible world, we are asked to observe and study it again and again, and as minutely as our powers will allow. However closely we observe it, we shall find no flaw in it. Indeed the region of enquiry is so vast and stretches so far beyond our ken, that our eyes, aided with the most powerful telescopes, will confess themselves defeated in trying to penetrate to the ultimate mysteries. We shall find no defect in Allah's handiwork: it is our own powers that we shall find fail to go beyond a certain compass.

\textsuperscript{5561} "Lowest (or nearest) heaven": see n. 4035 to xxxvii. 6.
Have made such (Lamps)
(As) missiles to drive Away Satans,
And have prepared for them
The Chastisement
Of the Blazing Fire.

6. For those who reject
Their Lord (and Cherisher) Is the Chastisement of Hell:
And evil is (such) destination.

7. When they are cast therein,
They will hear
The (terrible) drawing in Of its breath
Even as it blazes forth.

8. Almost bursting with fury:
Every time a Group

5562. The phenomenon of the shooting stars has been explained in xv. 16-18, notes 1951-54; and in xxxvii. 6-10, and notes thereon.

5563. We have seen how the fire in the stars can suggest the beauty and order of the external world; and yet, when it meets with resistance and disharmony, it can burn and destroy. So in the moral and spiritual world. What can be a greater sign of evil, disharmony, and rebellion than to reject the Cherisher and Sustainer, on Whom our life depends, and from Whom we receive nothing but goodness? The Punishment, then, is Fire in its fiercest intensity, as typified in the next two verses.

5564. For shahiq see n. 1607 to xi. 106. There shahiq (sobs) was contrasted with zafir (sighs): in the one case it is the drawing in of breath, and in the other the emission of a deep breath. Here the latter process is represented by the verb fāra, to swell, to blaze forth, to gush forth. In xi. 40, the verb fāra was applied to the gushing forth of the waters of the Flood; here the verb is applied to the blazing forth of the Fire of Punishment. Fire is personified: in its in-take it has a fierce appetite; in the flames which it throws out, it has a fierce aggressiveness. And yet in ultimate result evil meets the same fate, whether typified by water or fire.
9. They will say: “Yes indeed; A Warner did come to us, But we rejected him And said, ‘Allah never Sent down any (Message): Ye are in nothing but A grave error’”

10. They will further say: “Had we but listened Or used our intelligence, We should not (now) Be among the Companions Of the Blazing Fire!”

11. They will then confess Their sins: but far

5565. Cf. xxxix. 71, n. 4348. “Every time”: it may not be the same angels who are guarding the gates of Hell every time new inmates come in. The pure, innocent angel nature does not know the crookedness of human evil, and is surprised at so many human beings coming in for punishment: it wonders if no warning was conveyed to men, whereas in fact men have a warning in Clear Signs during all the period of their probation. The Clear Signs come from Revelation, from their own conscience, and from all nature around them.

5566. Allah’s Signs were not only rejected or defied, but their very existence was denied. Nay, more, even their possibility was denied, and alas! righteous people and Prophets were persecuted or mocked (xxxvi. 30). They were called fools or madmen, or men under a delusion!

5567. Man has himself the power given to him to distinguish good from evil, and he is further helped by the teachings of the great Messengers or World Teachers. Where such Teachers do not come into personal contact with an individual or a generation, the true meaning of their teaching can be understood by means of the Reason which Allah has given to every human soul to judge by. It is failure to follow a man’s light sincerely that leads to his degradation and destruction.

5568. The will then have passed through the fire of Judgment and will now be in the fire of Punishment. The Reality will not only now be clear to them, but after the questioning of the angels they cannot even pretend to make any excuses. They will freely confess, but that is not repentance, for repentance implies amendment, and the time for repentance and amendment will have long been past.
From Allah's mercy
Are the Companions
Of the Blazing Fire!

12. As for those who
Fear their Lord unseen,\textsuperscript{5569}
For them is Forgiveness
And a great Reward.

13. And whether ye hide
Your word or make it known,
He certainly has (full) knowledge,
Of the secrets of (all) hearts.

14. Should He not know—
He that created?\textsuperscript{5570}
And He is The Subtle
The Aware.

SECTION 2

15. It is He Who has
Made the earth manageable\textsuperscript{5571}

\textsuperscript{5569} See n. 3902 to xxxv. 18. Read "unseen" adverbially. To fear the Lord is to love Him so intensely that you fear to do anything which is against His Will, and you do it because you realise Him intensely in your hearts, though you do not see Him with your bodily senses. Nor is it of any consequences whether other people see your love or the consequences that flow from your love, for your good deeds are for the love of Allah and not for show in the eyes of men. Such intensity of love obtains forgiveness for any past, and is indeed rewarded with Allah's love, which is immeasurably precious beyond any merits you may possess.

\textsuperscript{5570} He Who creates must necessarily know His own handiwork. But lest we should measure His knowledge by such imperfect knowledge as we possess. His knowledge is further characterised as understanding the finest mysteries and being well acquainted with them (\textit{Laṣṭīf} and \textit{Khabīr}): see xxii. 63. n. 2844.

\textsuperscript{5571} \textit{Zalūl} is used in ii. 71 for an animal trained and tractable: here it is used to qualify the earth, and I have translated 'manageable'. Man has managed to make paths through deserts and over mountains: through rivers and seas by means of ships; through the air by means of airways; he has made bridges and tunnels and other means of communication. But this he has only been able to do because Allah has given him the necessary intelligence and has made the earth tractable to that intelligence.
For you, so traverse
Ye through its tracts
And enjoy of the Sustenance
Which He furnishes: but
Unto Him is the Resurrection.\[5572\]

16. Do ye feel secure that
He Who is in Heaven
Will not cause you
To be swallowed up\[5573\]
By the earth when it
Shakes (as in an earthquake)?

17. Or do ye feel secure
That He Who is in Heaven
Will not send against you
A violent tornado \[5574\]
(With showers of stones),
So that ye shall
Know how (terrible)
Was My warning?

18. But indeed men before them
Rejected (My warning):
Then how (terrible) was
My punishment (of them)?\[5575\]

5572. In describing Allah’s gifts and mercies and watchful care in this our temporary sojourn on this earth, it is made clear that the ultimate end is the Hereafter. The real Beyond, which is the goal, is the life after the Resurrection.

5573. Cf. xvii. 68 and n. 2263. Also cf. the story of Qârûn in xxviii. 76-82. If we feel safe on land, it is because Allah has made this earth amenable, manageable and serviceable to us (verse 15 above). But if we defy Allah and break His Law, have we any security, that even this comparatively unimportant safety in a fleeting world will last? Looking at it from a purely physical point of view, have there not been dreadful earthquakes, typhoons, and tornadoes?

5574. Cf. xvii. 68; and xxix. 40, n. 3462. Such a violent wind destroyed the wicked Cities which defied Lût’s warning.

19. Do they not observe
   The birds above them, 5576
   Spreading their wings
   And folding them in? 5577
   None can uphold them
   Except The Most Gracious:
   Truly it is He
   That watches over all things.

20. Nay, who is there
    That can help you,
      (Even as) an army, 5578
    Besides The Most Merciful?
    In nothing but delusion
    Are the Unbelievers.

21. Or who is there
    That can provide you 5579
    With Sustenance if He
    Were to withhold His provision?

5576. The flight of birds is one of the most beautiful and wonderful things in nature. The make and arrangement of their feathers and bones, and their stream-line shapes, from beak to tail, are instances of purposive adaptation. They soar with outstretched wings; they dart about with folded wings; their motions upwards and downwards, as well as their stabilisation in the air, and when they rest on their feet, have given many ideas to man in the science and art of aeronautics. But who taught or gave to birds this wonderful adaptation? None but Allah, Whose infinite Mercy provides for every creature just those conditions which are best adapted for its life.

5577. In the Arabic, there is an artistic touch which it is not possible to reproduce in the translation. Sāffāt (spreading their wings) is in the form of the active participle, suggesting the continuous soaring on outspread wings; while yaqbidhna (folding them in) is in the Aorist form, suggesting the spasmodic flapping of wings.

5578. Not the greatest army that man can muster is of any use against the Wrath of Allah; while the constant watchful care of Allah is all-in-all to us, and we can never do without it. If the godless wander about in search for blessings otherwise than in the Mercy and Grace of Allah, they are wandering in vain delusions.

5579. "Sustenance" here, as elsewhere, (e.g., in xvi. 73, n. 2105), refers to all that is necessary to sustain and develop life in all its phases. Allah Most Gracious is the Source of all our Sustenance, and if we persist in looking to Vanities for our Sustenance, we are pursuing a mirage, and, if we examine the matter, we are only following obstinate impulses of rebellion and impiety.
Nay, they obstinately persist
In insolent impiety
And flight (from the Truth).

22. Is then one who
Walks headlong, with his face
Grovelling, better guided,—
Or one who walks
Evenly on a Straight Way?

23. Say: "It is He Who
Has created you,
And made
For you the faculties
Of hearing, seeing,
And understanding:
Little thanks it is ye give.

24. Say: "It is He Who
Has multiplied you
Through the earth,
And to Him shall ye
Be gathered together."

5580. Cf. xxvii. 90, and n. 3320. The man of probity is the man who walks evenly on a Straight Way, his feet guided by Allah's Light and his heart sustained by Allah's Mercy. The man who chooses evil grovels, with his face down, in paths of Darkness, stumbling on the way, and in constant distrust and fear, the fear of Evil. The two kinds of men are poles apart, although they live on the same earth, see the same Signs, and are fed with the same Mercies from Allah.

5581. Like Abraham trying to guide his unbelieving father: Cf. xix. 43.

5582. The Prophet is asked to draw constant attention to Allah, the source of all growth and development, the Giver of the faculties by which we can judge and attain to higher and higher spiritual dignity. And yet, such is our self-will, we use our faculties for wrong purposes and thus show our ingratitude to Allah.

5583. For anshaa see n. 923 to vi. 98.

5584. Mankind, from one set of parents, has been multiplied and scattered through the earth. Men have not only multiplied in numbers but they have developed different languages and characteristics, inner and outer. But they will all be gathered together at the End of Things, when the mischief created by the wrong exercise of man's will be cancelled, and the Truth of Allah will reign universally.
25. They ask: When will this promise be (fulfilled)?
If ye are telling the truth.

26. Say: "As to the knowledge of the time, it is with Allah alone. I am a plain warner."

27. At length, when they see it close at hand, griefed will be the faces of the Unbelievers, and it will be said to them: "This is the promise fulfilled, which ye were calling for!"

28. Say: "See ye? If Allah were to destroy me and those with me, or if He bestows calamities on both good and evil, you would say: 'If we get any sorrow, we take it as a mere trial to make us better, for we believe in Allah's goodness and we put our trust in Him.'"

5585. The Unbelievers are sceptical, but they are answered in the next two verses.

5586. The Judgment is certain to come. But when it will exactly come, is known to Allah alone. The Prophet's duty is to proclaim that fact openly and clearly. It is not for him to punish or to hasten the punishment of evil. Cf. xxii. 47-49.

5587. "It", i.e., the fulfilment of the promise, the Day of Judgment. When it is actually in sight, then the Unbelievers realise that those whom they used to laugh at for their Faith were in the right, and that they themselves, the sceptics, were terribly in the wrong.

5588. They had defiantly asked for it. Now that it has come near, and it is too late for repentance, there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth".

5589. The sceptics might say and do say to the righteous: "Ah well! if calamities come, they involve the good with the bad, just as you say that Allah showers His mercies on both good and evil!" The answer is: "Don't you worry about us: even supposing we are destroyed, with all who believe with us, is that any consolation to you? Your sins must bring on you suffering, and nothing can ward it off. If we get any sorrows or sufferings, we take them as a mere trial to make us better, for we believe in Allah's goodness and we put our trust in Him." See next verse.
His Mercy on us,—
Yet who can deliver
The Unbelievers from
A grievous Chastisement?

29. Say: "He is The
Most Gracious: we have
Believed in Him,
And on Him have we
Put our trust:
So, soon will ye know\textsuperscript{5590}
Which (of us) it is
That is in manifest error."

30. Say. "See ye?—
If your stream be
Some morning lost\textsuperscript{5591}
(In the underground earth),
Who then can supply you
With clear-flowing water?"