INTRODUCTION

THE poet Kabir, a selection from whose songs is here for the first time offered to English readers, is one of the most interesting personalities in the history of Indian mysticism. Born in or near Benares, of Mohammedian parents, and probably about the year 1440, he became in early life a disciple of the celebrated Hindu ascetic Ramananda. Ramananda had brought to Northern India the religious revival which Ramanuja, the great twelfth-century reformer of Brahmanism, had initiated in the South. This revival was in part a reaction against the increasing formalism of the orthodox cult, in part an assertion of the demands of the heart as against
the intense intellectualism of the Vedānta philosophy, the exaggerated monism which that philosophy proclaimed. It took in Rāmānuja’s preaching the form of an ardent personal devotion to the God Vishnu, as representing the personal aspect of the Divine Nature: that mystical “religion of love” which everywhere makes its appearance at a certain level of spiritual culture, and which creeds and philosophies are powerless to kill.

Though such a devotion is indigenous in Hinduism, and finds expression in many passages of the Bhagavad Gītā, there was in its mediæval revival a large element of syncretism. Rāmānanda, through whom its spirit is said to have reached Kabir, appears to have been a man of wide religious culture, and full of missionary enthusiasm. Living at the moment in which the impassioned poetry and deep philoso-
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play of the great Persian mystics, Attār, Sādī, Jalālu’ddīn Rūmī, and Hāfiz, were exercising a powerful influence on the religious thought of India, he dreamed of reconciling this intense and personal Mohammedan mysticism with the traditional theology of Brāhmaṇism. Some have regarded both these great religious leaders as influenced also by Christian thought and life; but as this is a point upon which competent authorities hold widely divergent views, its discussion is not attempted here. We may safely assert, however; that in their teachings, two — perhaps three — apparently antagonistic streams of intense spiritual culture met, as Jewish and Hellenistic thought met in the early Christian Church: and it is one of the outstanding characteristics of Kabīr’s genius that he was able in his poems to fuse them into one.
A great religious reformer, the founder of a sect to which nearly a million northern Hindus still belong, it is yet supremely as a mystical poet that Kabir lives for us. His fate has been that of many revealers of Reality. A hater of religious exclusivism, and seeking above all things to initiate men into the liberty of the children of God, his followers have honoured his memory by re-erecting in a new place the barriers which he laboured to cast down. But his wonderful songs survive, the spontaneous expressions of his vision and his love; and it is by these, not by the didactic teachings associated with his name, that he makes his immortal appeal to the heart. In these poems a wide range of mystical emotion is brought into play: from the loftiest abstractions, the most otherworldly passion for the Infinite, to the most intimate and personal realiza-
tion of God, expressed in homely metaphors and religious symbols drawn indifferently from Hindu and Mohammedan belief. It is impossible to say of their author that he was Brāhman or Sūfī, Vedāntist or Vaishnavite. He is, as he says himself, "at once the child of Allah and of Rām." That Supreme Spirit Whom he knew and adored, and to Whose joyous friendship he sought to induct the souls of other men, transcended whilst He included all metaphysical categories, all credal definitions; yet each contributed something to the description of that Infinite and Simple Totality Who revealed Himself, according to their measure, to the faithful lovers of all creeds.

Kabīr's story is surrounded by contradictory legends, on none of which reliance can be placed. Some of these emanate from a Hindu, some from a
Mohammedan source, and claim him by turns as a Sūfī and a Brāhman saint. His name, however, is practically a conclusive proof of Moslem ancestry: and the most probable tale is that which represents him as the actual or adopted child of a Mohammedan weaver of Benares, the city in which the chief events of his life took place.

In fifteenth-century Benares the syncretistic tendencies of Bhakti religion had reached full development. Sūfīs and Brāhmans appear to have met in disputation: the most spiritual members of both creeds frequenting the teachings of Rāmānanda, whose reputation was then at its height. The boy Kabīr, in whom the religious passion was innate, saw in Rāmānanda his destined teacher; but knew how slight were the chances that a Hindu guru would accept a Mohammedan as disciple. He therefore hid upon the
steps of the river Ganges, where Rāmānanda was accustomed to bathe; with the result that the master, coming down to the water, trod upon his body unexpectedly, and exclaimed in his astonishment, "Rām! Rām!" — the name of the incarnation under which he worshipped God. Kabir then declared that he had received the mantra of initiation from Rāmānanda’s lips, and was by it admitted to discipleship. In spite of the protests of orthodox Brāhmans and Mohammedans, both equally annoyed by this contempt of theological landmarks, he persisted in his claim; thus exhibiting in action that very principle of religious synthesis which Rāmānanda had sought to establish in thought. Rāmānanda appears to have accepted him, and though Mohammedan legends speak of the famous Sūfi Pīr, Takkī of Jhansī, as Kabir’s master in later life, the
Hindu saint is the only human teacher to whom in his songs he acknowledges indebtedness.

The little that we know of Kabir's life contradicts many current ideas concerning the Oriental mystic. Of the stages of discipline through which he passed, the manner in which his spiritual genius developed, we are completely ignorant. He seems to have remained for years the disciple of Rāmānanda, joining in the theological and philosophical arguments which his master held with all the great Mullahs and Brāhmans of his day; and to this source we may perhaps trace his acquaintance with the terms of Hindu and Sūfī philosophy. He may or may not have submitted to the traditional education of the Hindu or the Sūfī contemplative: it is clear, at any rate, that he never adopted the life of the professional ascetic, or retired from the
world in order to devote himself to bodily mortifications and the exclusive pursuit of the contemplative life. Side by side with his interior life of adoration, its artistic expression in music and words — for he was a skilled musician as well as a poet — he lived the same and diligent life of the Oriental craftsman. All the legends agree on this point: that Kabir was a weaver, a simple and unlettered man, who earned his living at the loom. Like Paul the tentmaker, Boehme the cobbler, Bunyan the tinker, Tersteegen the ribbon-maker, he knew how to combine vision and industry; the work of his hands helped rather than hindered the impassioned meditation of his heart. Hating mere bodily austerities, he was no ascetic, but a married man, the father of a family — a circumstance which Hindu legends of the monastic type vainly attempt to
conceal or explain — and it was from out of the heart of the common life that he sang his rapturous lyrics of divine love. Here his works corroborate the traditional story of his life. Again and again he extols the life of home, the value and reality of diurnal existence, with its opportunities for love and renunciation; pouring contempt upon the professional sanctity of the Yogi, who “has a great beard and matted locks, and looks like a goat,” and on all who think it necessary to flee a world pervaded by love, joy, and beauty — the proper theatre of man’s quest — in order to find that One Reality Who has “spread His form of love throughout all the world.”

It does not need much experience of ascetic literature to recognize the boldness and originality of this attitude in such a time and place. From the

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1 Cf. Poems Nos. XXI, XL, XLI, LXVI, LXXVI.
point of view of orthodox sanctity, whether Hindu or Mohammedan, Kābīr was plainly a heretic; and his frank dislike of all institutional religion, all external observance—which was as thorough and as intense as that of the Quakers themselves—completed, so far as ecclesiastical opinion was concerned, his reputation as a dangerous man. The "simple union" with Divine Reality which he perpetually extolled, as alike the duty and the joy of every soul, was independent both of ritual and of bodily austerities; the God whom he proclaimed was "neither in Kaaba nor in Kailāsh." Those who sought Him needed not to go far; for He awaited discovery everywhere, more accessible to "the washerwoman and the carpenter" than to the self-righteous holy man.¹ Therefore the whole apparatus of piety, Hindu and Moslem

¹ Poems I, II, XLI.
LIKE — the temple and mosque, idol and holy water, scriptures and priests — were denounced by this inconveniently clear-sighted poet as mere substitutes for reality; dead things intervening between the soul and its love —

The images are all lifeless, they cannot speak:
I know, for I have cried aloud to them.
The Purāna and the Korān are mere words:
lifting up the curtain, I have seen.¹

This sort of thing cannot be tolerated by any organized church; and it is not surprising that Kabīr, having his head-quarters in Benares, the very centre of priestly influence, was subjected to considerable persecution. The well-known legend of the beautiful courtesan sent by the Brāhmans to tempt his virtue, and converted, like the Magdalen, by her sudden encounter with the initiate of a higher love, preserves the memory of the fear and dis-

¹ Poems XLII, LXV, LXVII.
like with which he was regarded by the ecclesiastical powers. Once at least, after the performance of a supposed miracle of healing, he was brought before the Emperor Sikandar Lodí, and charged with claiming the possession of divine powers. But Sikandar Lodí, a ruler of considerable culture, was tolerant of the eccentricities of saintly persons belonging to his own faith. Kabîr, being of Mohammedan birth, was outside the authority of the Brâhmans, and technically classed with the Sûfîs, to whom great theological latitude was allowed. Therefore, though he was banished in the interests of peace from Benares, his life was spared. This seems to have happened in 1495, when he was nearly sixty years of age; it is the last event in his career of which we have definite knowledge. Thenceforth he appears to have moved about amongst various
cities of northern India, the centre of a group of disciples; continuing in exile that life of apostle and poet of love to which, as he declares in one of his songs, he was destined "from the beginning of time." In 1518, an old man, broken in health, and with hands so feeble that he could no longer make the music which he loved, he died at Maghar near Gorakhpur.

A beautiful legend tells us that after his death his Mohammedan and Hindu disciples disputed the possession of his body; which the Mohammedans wished to bury, the Hindus to burn. As they argued together, Kabir appeared before them, and told them to lift the shroud and look at that which lay beneath. They did so, and found in the place of the corpse a heap of flowers; half of which were buried by the Mohammedans at Maghar, and half carried by the Hindus to the holy
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city of Benares to be burned — fitting conclusion to a life which had made fragrant the most beautiful doctrines of two great creeds.

II

The poetry of mysticism might be defined on the one hand as a temperamental reaction to the vision of Reality: on the other, as a form of prophecy. As it is the special vocation of the mystical consciousness to mediate between two orders, going out in loving adoration towards God and coming home to tell the secrets of Eternity to other men; so the artistic self-expression of this consciousness has also a double character. It is love-poetry, but love-poetry which is often written with a missionary intention.

Kabir's songs are of this kind: outbirths at once of rapture and of charity. Written in the popular Hindī, not in
the literary tongue, they were deliber-
ately addressed — like the vernacular
poetry of Jacopone da Todi and
Richard Rolle — to the people rather
than to the professionally religious class;
and all must be struck by the constant
employment in them of imagery drawn
from the common life, the universal
experience. It is by the simplest meta-
phors, by constant appeals to needs,
passions, relations which all men under-
stand — the bridegroom and bride, the
guru and disciple, the pilgrim, the
farmer, the migrant bird — that he
drives home his intense conviction of
the reality of the soul’s intercourse
with the Transcendent. There are in
his universe no fences between the
“natural” and “supernatural” worlds;
everything is a part of the creative
Play of God, and therefore — even in
its humblest details — capable of re-
vealing the Player’s mind.
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This willing acceptance of the here-and-now as a means of representing supernal realities is a trait common to the greatest mystics. For them, when they have achieved at last the true theopæathetic state, all aspects of the universe possess equal authority as sacramental declarations of the Presence of God; and their fearless employment of homely and physical symbols—often startling and even revolting to the unaccustomed taste—is in direct proportion to the exaltation of their spiritual life. The works of the great Sūfīs, and amongst the Christians of Jacopone da Todî, Ruysbroeck, Boehme, abound in illustrations of this law. Therefore we must not be surprised to find in Kabîr's songs—his desperate attempts to communicate his ecstasy and persuade other men to share it—a constant juxtaposition of concrete and meta-
physical language; swift alternations between the most intensely anthropomorphic, the most subtly philosophical, ways of apprehending man's communion with the Divine. The need for this alternation, and its entire naturalness for the mind which employs it, is rooted in his concept, or vision, of the Nature of God; and unless we make some attempt to grasp this, we shall not go far in our understanding of his poems.

Kabir belongs to that small group of supreme mystics — amongst whom St. Augustine, Ruysbroeck, and the Sufi poet Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī are perhaps the chief — who have achieved that which we might call the synthetic vision of God. These have resolved the perpetual opposition between the personal and impersonal, the transcendent and immanent, static and dynamic aspects of the Divine Nature; between the Absolute of philosophy and the "sure
true Friend” of devotional religion. They have done this, not by taking these apparently incompatible concepts one after the other; but by ascending to a height of spiritual intuition at which they are, as Ruysbroeck said, “melted and merged in the Unity,” and perceived as the completing opposites of a perfect Whole. This proceeding entails for them—and both Kabir and Ruysbroeck expressly acknowledge it—a universe of three orders: Becoming, Being, and that which is “More than Being,” i.e., God.¹ God is here felt to be not the final abstraction, but the one actuality. He inspires, supports, indeed inhabits, both the durational, conditioned, finite world of Becoming and the unconditioned, non-successional, infinite world of Being; yet utterly transcends them both. He is the omnipresent

¹ Nos. VII and XLIX.
Reality, the "All-pervading" within Whom "the worlds are being told like beads." In His personal aspect He is the "beloved Fakir," teaching and companioning each soul. Considered as Immanent Spirit, He is "the Mind within the mind." But all these are at best partial aspects of His nature, mutually corrective: as the Persons in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity — to which this theological diagram bears a striking resemblance — represent different and compensating experiences of the Divine Unity within which they are resumed. As Ruysbroeck discerned a plane of reality upon which "we can speak no more of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but only of One Being, the very substance of the Divine Persons"; so Kabir says that "beyond both the limited and the limitless is He, the Pure Being." ¹

¹ No. VII.
Brahma, then, is the Ineffable Fact compared with which "the distinction of the Conditioned from the Unconditioned is but a word": at once the utterly transcendent One of Absolutist philosophy, and the personal Lover of the individual soul—"common to all and special to each," as one Christian mystic has it. The need felt by Kabīr for both these ways of describing Reality is a proof of the richness and balance of his spiritual experience; which neither cosmic nor anthropomorphic symbols, taken alone, could express. More absolute than the Absolute, more personal than the human mind, Brahma therefore exceeds whilst He includes all the concepts of philosophy, all the passionate intuitions of the heart. He is the Great Affirmation, the font of energy, the source of life and love, the unique satisfaction of desire. His creative word is the Om
or "Everlasting Yea." The negative philosophy which strips from the Divine Nature all Its attributes and — defining Him only by that which He is not — reduces Him to an "Emptiness," is abhorrent to this most vital of poets. Brahma, he says, "may never be found in abstractions." He is the One Love who pervades the world, discerned in His fullness only by the eyes of love; and those who know Him thus share, though they may never tell, the joyous and ineffable secret of the universe.¹

Now Kabir, achieving this synthesis between the personal and cosmic aspects of the Divine Nature, eludes the three great dangers which threaten mystical religion.

First, he escapes the excessive emotionalism, the tendency to an exclusively anthropomorphic devotion,

¹ Nos. VII, XXVI, LXXVI, XC.
which results from an unrestricted cult of Divine Personality, especially under an incarnational form; seen in India in the exaggerations of Krishna worship, in Europe in the sentimental extravagances of certain Christian saints.

Next, he is protected from the soul-destroying conclusions of pure monism, inevitable if its logical implications are pressed home: that is, the identity of substance between God and the soul, with its corollary of the total absorption of that soul in the Being of God as the goal of the spiritual life. For the thorough-going monist the soul, in so far as it is real, is substantially identical with God; and the true object of existence is the making patent of this latent identity, the realization which finds expression in the Vedāntist formula "That art thou." But Kabīr says that Brahma and the creature are
“ever distinct, yet ever united”; that the wise man knows the spiritual as well as the material world to “be no more than His footstool.”¹ The soul’s union with Him is a love union, a mutual inhabitation; that essentially dualistic relation which all mystical religion expresses, not a self-mergence which leaves no place for personality. This eternal distinction, the mysterious union-in-separateness of God and the soul, is a necessary doctrine of all sane mysticism; for no scheme which fails to find a place for it can represent more than a fragment of that soul’s intercourse with the spiritual world. Its affirmation was one of the distinguishing features of the Vaishnavite reformation preached by Rāmānuja; the principle of which had descended through Rāmānanda to Kabīr.

Last, the warmly human and direct

¹ Nos. VII and IX.
apprehension of God as the supreme Object of love, the soul’s comrade, teacher, and bridegroom, which is so passionately and frequently expressed in Kabir’s poems, balances and controls those abstract tendencies which are inherent in the metaphysical side of his vision of Reality: and prevents it from degenerating into that sterile worship of intellectual formulæ which became the curse of the Vedāntist school. For the mere intellectualist, as for the mere pietist, he has little approbation. Love is throughout his “absolute sole Lord”: the unique source of the more abundant life which he enjoys, and the common factor which unites the finite and infinite worlds. All is soaked in love: that love which he described in almost Johannine language as the “Form of God.” The whole of creation is the Play of the Eternal Lover;

1 Cf. especially Nos. LIX, LXVII, LXXV, XC, XCI.
the living, changing, growing expression of Brahma’s love and joy. As these twin passions preside over the generation of human life, so “beyond the mists of pleasure and pain” Kabir finds them governing the creative acts of God. His manifestation is love; His activity is joy. Creation springs from one glad act of affirmation: the Everlasting Yea, perpetually uttered within the depths of the Divine Nature.¹ In accordance with this concept of the universe as a Love-Game which eternally goes forward, a progressive manifestation of Brahma — one of the many notions which he adopted from the common stock of Hindu religious ideas, and illuminated by his poetic genius — movement, rhythm, perpetual change, forms an integral part of Kabir’s vision of Reality. Though the Eternal and Absolute is

¹ Nos. XVII, XXVI, LXXVI, LXXXII.
ever present to his consciousness, yet his concept of the Divine Nature is essentially dynamic. It is by the symbols of motion that he most often tries to convey it to us: as in his constant reference to dancing, or the strangely modern picture of that Eternal Swing of the Universe which is "held by the cords of love."  

It is a marked characteristic of mystical literature that the great contemplatives, in their effort to convey to us the nature of their communion with the supersensuous, are inevitably driven to employ some form of sensuous imagery: coarse and inaccurate as they know such imagery to be, even at the best. Our normal human consciousness is so completely committed to dependence on the senses, that the fruits of intuition itself are instinctively referred to them. In that intuition it seems

\(^1\) No. XVI.
to the mystics that all the dim cravings and partial apprehensions of sense find perfect fulfilment. Hence their constant declaration that they see the uncreated light, they hear the celestial melody, they taste the sweetness of the Lord, they know an ineffable fragrance, they feel the very contact of love. "Him verily seeing and fully feeling, Him spiritually hearing and Him delectably smelling and sweetly swallowing," as Julian of Norwich has it. In those amongst them who develop psycho-sensorial automatisms, these parallels between sense and spirit may present themselves to consciousness in the form of hallucinations: as the light seen by Suso, the music heard by Rolle, the celestial perfumes which filled St. Catherine of Siena’s cell, the physical wounds felt by St. Francis and St. Teresa. These are excessive dramatizations of the symbolism under
which the mystic tends instinctively to represent his spiritual intuition to the surface consciousness. Here, in the special sense-perception which he feels to be most expressive of Reality, his peculiar idiosyncrasies come out.

Now Kabir, as we might expect in one whose reactions to the spiritual order were so wide and various, uses by turn all the symbols of sense. He tells us that he has "seen without sight" the effulgence of Brahma, tasted the divine nectar, felt the ecstatic contact of Reality, smelt the fragrance of the heavenly flowers. But he was essentially a poet and musician: rhythm and harmony were to him the garments of beauty and truth. Hence in his lyrics he shows himself to be, like Richard Rolle, above all things a musical mystic. Creation, he says again and again, is full of music: it is music. At the heart of the Universe
“white music is blossoming”: love weaves the melody, whilst renunciation beats the time. It can be heard in the home as well as in the heavens; discerned by the ears of common men as well as by the trained senses of the ascetic. Moreover, the body of every man is a lyre on which Brahma, “the source of all music,” plays. Everywhere Kabir discerns the “Unstruck Music of the Infinite”—that celestial melody which the angel played to St. Francis, that ghostly symphony which filled the soul of Rolle with ecstatic joy.\(^1\)

The one figure which he adopts from the Hindu Pantheon and constantly uses, is that of Krishna the Divine Flute Player.\(^2\) He sees the supernal music, too, in its visual embodiment, as rhythmical movement: that mysterious dance of the universe before the

\(^1\)Nos. XVII, XVIII, XXXIX, XLI, LIV, LXXVI, LXXXIII, LXXXIX, XCVII. \(^2\)Nos. L, LIII, LXVIII.
face of Brahma, which is at once an act of worship and an expression of the infinite rapture of the Immanent God.¹

Yet in this wide and rapturous vision of the universe Kabîr never loses touch with diurnal existence, never forgets the common life. His feet are firmly planted upon earth; his lofty and passionate apprehensions are perpetually controlled by the activity of a sane and vigorous intellect, by the alert commonsense so often found in persons of real mystical genius. The constant insistence on simplicity and directness, the hatred of all abstractions and philosophizings,² the ruthless criticism of external religion: these are amongst his most marked characteristics. God is the Root whence all manifestations, "material" and "spiritual," alike proceed; and God is the only need of

¹ Nos. XXVI, XXXII, LXXVI.
² Nos. LXXV, LXXVIII, LXXX, XC.
man — “happiness shall be yours when you come to the Root.”¹ Hence to those who keep their eye on the “one thing needful,” denominations, creeds, ceremonies, the conclusions of philosophy, the disciplines of asceticism, are matters of comparative indifference. They represent merely the different angles from which the soul may approach that simple union with Brahma which is its goal; and are useful only in so far as they contribute to this consummation. So thorough-going is Kabir’s eclecticm, that he seems by turns Vedântist and Vaishnavite, Pantheist and Transcendentalist, Brâhman and Sûfî. In the effort to tell the truth about that ineffable apprehension, so vast and yet so near, which controls his life, he seizes and twines together — as he might have woven together contrasting threads upon his loom —

¹ No. LXXX.
symbols and ideas drawn from the most violent and conflicting philosophies and faiths. All are needed, if he is ever to suggest the character of that One whom the Upanishad called "the Sun-coloured Being who is beyond this Darkness": as all the colours of the spectrum are needed if we would demonstrate the simple richness of white light. In thus adapting traditional materials to his own use he follows a method common amongst the mystics; who seldom exhibit any special love for originality of form. They will pour their wine into almost any vessel that comes to hand: generally using by preference—and lifting to new levels of beauty and significance—the religious or philosophic formulæ current in their own day. Thus we find that some of Kabir's finest poems have as their subjects the commonplaces of Hindu philosophy and religion: the
Lilā or Sport of God, the Ocean of Bliss, the Bird of the Soul, Māyā, the Hundred-petalled Lotus, and the “Formless Form.” Many, again, are soaked in Sūfī imagery and feeling. Others use as their material the ordinary surroundings and incidents of Indian life: the temple bells, the ceremony of the lamps, marriage, suttee, pilgrimage, the characters of the seasons; all felt by him in their mystical aspect, as sacraments of the soul’s relation with Brahma. In many of these a particularly beautiful and intimate feeling for Nature is shown.¹

In the collection of songs here translated there will be found examples which illustrate nearly every aspect of Kabīr’s thought, and all the fluctuations of the mystic’s emotion: the ecstasy, the despair, the still beatitude, the eager self-devotion, the flashes of wide illumi-

¹ Nos. XV, XXIII, LXVII, LXXXVII, XCVIII.
nation, the moments of intimate love. His wide and deep vision of the universe, the "Eternal Sport" of creation (LXXXII), the worlds being "told like beads" within the Being of God (XIV, XVI, XVII, LXXVI), is here seen balanced by his lovely and delicate sense of intimate communion with the Divine Friend, Lover, Teacher of the soul (X, XI, XXIII, XXXV, LI, LXXXV, LXXXVI, LXXXVIII, XCII, XCIIL; above all, the beautiful poem XXXIV). As these apparently paradoxical views of Reality are resolved in Brähma, so all other opposites are reconciled in Him: bondage and liberty, love and renunciation, pleasure and pain (XVII, XXV, XL, LXXXIX). Union with Him is the one thing that matters to the soul, its destiny and its need (LI, LII, LIV, LXX, LXXIV, XCIIL, XCVI); and this union, this discovery of God, is the simplest and most natural
of all things, if we would but grasp it (XLI, XLVI, LVI, LXXII, LXXVI, LXXVIII, XCVII). The union, however, is brought about by love, not by knowledge or ceremonial observances (XXXVIII, LIV, LV, LIX, XCI); and the apprehension which that union confers is ineffable—"neither This nor That," as Ruysbroeck has it (IX, XLVI, LXXVI). Real worship and communion is in Spirit and in Truth (XL, XLI, LVI, LXIII, LXV, LXX), therefore idolatry is an insult to the Divine Lover (XLII, LXIX) and the devices of professional sanctity are useless apart from charity and purity of soul (LIV, LXV, LXVI). Since all things, and especially the heart of man, are God-inhabited, God-possessed (XXVI, LVI, LXXVI, LXXXIX, XCIV), He may best be found in the here-and-now: in the normal, human, bodily existence, the "mud" of material
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life (III, IV, VI, XXI, XXXIX, XL, XLIII, XLVIII, LXXII). "We can reach the goal without crossing the road" (LXXVI) — not the cloister but the home is the proper theatre of man’s efforts: and if he cannot find God there, he need not hope for success by going farther afield. "In the home is reality." There love and detachment, bondage and freedom, joy and pain play by turns upon the soul; and it is from their conflict that the Unstruck Music of the Infinite proceeds. "Kabir says: None but Brahma can evoke its melodies."

III

This version of Kabir’s songs is chiefly the work of Mr. Rabindranath Tagore, the trend of whose mystical genius makes him — as all who read these poems will see — a peculiarly sympathetic interpreter of Kabir’s
vision and thought. It has been based upon the printed Hindi text with Bengali translation of Mr. Kshiti Mohan Sen; who has gathered from many sources — sometimes from books and manuscripts, sometimes from the lips of wandering ascetics and minstrels — a large collection of poems and hymns to which Kabīr’s name is attached, and carefully sifted the authentic songs from the many spurious works now attributed to him. These painstaking labours alone have made the present undertaking possible.

We have also had before us a manuscript English translation of 116 songs made by Mr. Ajit Kumār Chakravarty from Mr. Kshiti Mohan Sen’s text, and a prose essay upon Kabīr from the same hand. From these we have derived great assistance. A considerable number of readings from the translation have been adopted by us;
whilst several of the facts mentioned in the essay have been incorporated into this introduction. Our most grateful thanks are due to Mr. Ajit Kumār Chakravarty for the extremely generous and unselfish manner in which he has placed his work at our disposal.

E. U.
The reference of the headlines of the poems is to:
Śāntiniketana; Kabīr by Śrī Kshiti-mohan Sen, 4 parts, Brahmacharyā-śrama, Bolpur, 1910–1911.
For some assistance in normalizing the transliteration we are indebted to Professor J. F. Blumhardt.
KABIR’S POEMS

I

I. 13. mo ko kahān dhūnro bande

O SERVANT, where dost thou seek Me?

Lo! I am beside thee.

I am neither in temple nor in mosque:
   I am neither in Kaaba nor in Kailash:
Neither am I in rites and ceremonies,
   nor in Yoga and renunciation.
If thou art a true seeker, thou shalt at once see Me: thou shalt meet Me in a moment of time.

Kabir says, “O Sadhu! God is the breath of all breath.”

II

I. 16. Santan jāt na pūcho nirgunāiyān

It is needless to ask of a saint the caste to which he belongs;
For the priest, the warrior, the tradesman, and all the thirty-six castes, alike are seeking for God.
It is but folly to ask what the caste of a saint may be;
The barber has sought God, the washerwoman, and the carpenter—
Even Raidas was a seeker after God.
The Rishi Swapacha was a tanner by caste.
Hindus and Moslems alike have achieved that End, where remains no mark of distinction.

III

I. 57. sādho bhāī, jīvat hī karo āsā

O FRIEND! hope for Him whilst you live, know whilst you live, understand whilst you live: for in life deliverance abides.
If your bonds be not broken whilst living, what hope of deliverance in death?
It is but an empty dream, that the soul shall have union with Him because it has passed from the body:
If He is found now, He is found then,
If not, we do but go to dwell in the City of Death.
If you have union now, you shall have it hereafter.
Bathe in the truth, know the true Guru, have faith in the true Name!
Kabir says: “It is the Spirit of the quest which helps; I am the slave of this Spirit of the quest.”

IV
I. 58.  bāgo nā jā re nā jā
Do not go to the garden of flowers!
O Friend! go not there;
In your body is the garden of flowers.
Take your seat on the thousand petals of the lotus, and there gaze on the Infinite Beauty.
I. 63. \textit{avadhū, māyā tajī na jāy}

TELL me, Brother, how can I renounce Maya?
When I gave up the tying of ribbons,
still I tied my garment about me:
When I gave up tying my garment,
still I covered my body in its folds.
So, when I give up passion, I see that anger remains;
And when I renounce anger, greed is with me still;
And when greed is vanquished, pride and vainglory remain;
When the mind is detached and casts Maya away, still it clings to the letter.
Kabir says, "Listen to me, dear Sadhu! the true path is rarely found."
VI

I. 83. candā jhalkai yahi ghaṭ māhin

The moon shines in my body, but my blind eyes cannot see it:
The moon is within me, and so is the sun.
The unstruck drum of Eternity is sounded within me; but my deaf ears cannot hear it.

So long as man clamours for the I and the Mine, his works are as naught:
When all love of the I and the Mine is dead, then the work of the Lord is done.
For work has no other aim than the getting of knowledge:
When that comes, then work is put away.

The flower blooms for the fruit: when the fruit comes, the flower withers.
The musk is in the deer, but it seeks it not within itself: it wanders in quest of grass.

VII

I. 85.  Sādho, Brahm alakh lakhāyā

WHEN He Himself reveals Himself, Brahma brings into manifestation That which can never be seen.

As the seed is in the plant, as the shade is in the tree, as the void is in the sky, as infinite forms are in the void —

So from beyond the Infinite, the Infinite comes; and from the Infinite the finite extends.

The creature is in Brahma, and Brahma is in the creature: they are ever distinct, yet ever united.

He Himself is the tree, the seed, and the germ.
He Himself is the flower, the fruit, and the shade.
He Himself is the sun, the light, and the lighted.
He Himself is Brahma, creature, and Maya.
He Himself is the manifold form, the infinite space;
He is the breath, the word, and the meaning.
He Himself is the limit and the limitless: and beyond both the limited and the limitless is He, the Pure Being.
He is the Immanent Mind in Brahma and in the creature.

The Supreme Soul is seen within the soul,
The Point is seen within the Supreme Soul,
And within the Point, the reflection is seen again.
SONGS OF KABIR

Kabir is blest because he has this supreme vision!

VIII

I. 101. *is ghat antar bāg bagīce*

**WITHIN** this earthen vessel are bowers and groves, and within it is the Creator:
Within this vessel are the seven oceans and the unnumbered stars.
The touchstone and the jewel-appraiser are within;
And within this vessel the Eternal soundeth, and the spring wells up.
Kabir says: "Listen to me, my Friend! My beloved Lord is within."

IX

I. 104. *aisā lo nahiṁ taisā lo*

O HOW may I ever express that secret word?
O how can I say He is not like this, and He is like that?
If I say that He is within me, the universe is ashamed:
If I say that He is without me, it is falsehood.
He makes the inner and the outer worlds to be indivisibly one;
The conscious and the unconscious, both are His footstools.
He is neither manifest nor hidden, He is neither revealed nor unrevealed:
There are no words to tell that which He is.

TO Thee Thou hast drawn my love,
O Fakir!
I was sleeping in my own chamber, and
Thou didst awaken me; striking me with Thy voice, O Fakir!
I was drowning in the deeps of the
SONGS OF KABIR

ocean of this world, and Thou didst save me: upholding me with Thine arm, O Fakir!

Only one word and no second—and Thou hast made me tear off all my bonds, O Fakir!

Kabir says, “Thou hast united Thy heart to my heart, O Fakir!”

XI

I. 131. nīṣ din khelat rahī sakhiyān sang

PLAYED day and night with my comrades, and now I am greatly afraid.

So high is my Lord’s palace, my heart trembles to mount its stairs: yet I must not be shy, if I would enjoy His love.

My heart must cleave to my Lover; I must withdraw my veil, and meet Him with all my body:
SONGS OF KABIR

Mine eyes must perform the ceremony
of the lamps of love.
Kabir says: "Listen to me, friend: he
understands who loves. If you
feel not love's longing for your
Beloved One, it is vain to adorn
your body, vain to put unguent
on your eyelids."

XII

II. 24. hamsā, kaho purātan vāt

Tell me, O Swan, your ancient
tale.
From what land do you come, O Swan?
to what shore will you fly?
Where would you take your rest, O
Swan, and what do you seek?

Even this morning, O Swan, awake,
arise, follow me!
There is a land where no doubt nor
sorrow have rule: where the terror
of Death is no more.
There the woods of spring are a-bloom,
and the fragrant scent "He is I"
is borne on the wind:
There the bee of the heart is deeply
immersed, and desires no other joy.

XIII

II. 37. aṅgadhīya devā

O LORD Increate, who will serve Thee?
Every votary offers his worship to the God of his own creation: each day he receives service—
None seek Him, the Perfect: Brahma, the Indivisible Lord.
They believe in ten Avatars; but no Avatar can be the Infinite Spirit, for he suffers the results of his deeds:
The Supreme One must be other than this.
The Yogi, the Sanyasi, the Ascetics, are disputing one with another:
Kabir says, "O brother! he who has seen that radiance of love, he is saved."

XIV

II. 56. dariyā kī lahar dariyāo hai jī

The river and its waves are one surf: where is the difference between the river and its waves? When the wave rises, it is the water; and when it falls, it is the same water again. Tell me, Sir, where is the distinction?

Because it has been named as wave, shall it no longer be considered as water?

Within the Supreme Brahma, the worlds are being told like beads: Look upon that rosary with the eyes of wisdom.
XV

II. 57. \textit{jānh khelat vasant riturāj}

Where Spring, the lord of the seasons, reigneth, there: the Unstruck Music sounds of itself, There the streams of light flow in all directions; Few are the men who can cross to that shore!

There, where millions of Krishnas stand with hands folded. Where millions of Vishnus bow their heads, Where millions of Brahmas are reading the Vedas, Where millions of Shivas are lost in contemplation, Where millions of Indras dwell in the sky, Where the demi-gods and the munis are unnumbered, Where millions of Saraswatis, Goddess of Music, play on the vina —
There is my Lord self-revealed: and the scent of sandal and flowers dwells in those deeps.

XVI

II. 59. *jāṅh cet acet khambh dōū*

Between the poles of the conscious and the unconscious, there has the mind made a swing:
Thereon hang all beings and all worlds,
and that swing never ceases its sway.

Millions of beings are there: the sun and the moon in their courses are there:

Millions of ages pass, and the swing goes on.

All swing! the sky and the earth and the air and the water; and the Lord Himself taking form:
And the sight of this has made Kabir a servant.
II. 61. *grah candra tapan jot varat hai*

The light of the sun, the moon, and the stars shines bright:
The melody of love swells forth, and the rhythm of love’s detachment beats the time.
Day and night, the chorus of music fills the heavens; and Kabir says
“My Beloved One gleams like the lightning flash in the sky.”

Do you know how the moments perform their adoration?
Waving its row of lamps, the universe sings in worship day and night,
There are the hidden banner and the secret canopy:
There the sound of the unseen bells is heard.
Kabir says: “There adoration never ceases; there the Lord of the Universe sitteth on His throne.”
The whole world does its works and commits its errors: but few are the lovers who know the Beloved. The devout seeker is he who mingles in his heart the double currents of love and detachment, like the mingling of the streams of Ganges and Jumna; In his heart the sacred water flows day and night; and thus the round of births and deaths is brought to an end.

Behold what wonderful rest is in the Supreme Spirit! and he enjoys it, who makes himself meet for it. Held by the cords of love, the swing of the Ocean of Joy sways to and fro; and a mighty sound breaks forth in song. See what a lotus blooms there without water! and Kabir says “My heart’s bee drinks its nectar.”
What a wonderful lotus it is, that blooms at the heart of the spinning wheel of the universe! Only a few pure souls know of its true delight.

Music is all around it, and there the heart partakes of the joy of the Infinite Sea.

Kabir says: "Dive thou into that Ocean of sweetness: thus let all errors of life and of death flee away."

Behold how the thirst of the five senses is quenched there! and the three forms of misery are no more!

Kabir says: "It is the sport of the Unattainable One: look within, and behold how the moon-beams of that Hidden One shine in you."

There falls the rhythmic beat of life and death"
Rapture wells forth, and all space is radiant with light.
There the Unstruck Music is sounded; it is the music of the love of the three worlds.
There millions of lamps of sun and of moon are burning;
There the drum beats, and the lover swings in play.
There love-songs resound, and light rains in showers; and the worshipper is entranced in the taste of the heavenly nectar.
Look upon life and death; there is no separation between them,
The right hand and the left hand are one and the same.
Kabir says: "There the wise man is speechless; for this truth may never be found in Vadas or in books."

I have had my Seat on the Self-poised One,
I have drunk of the Cup of the Ineffable,
I have found the Key of the Mystery,
I have reached the Root of Union.
Travelling by no track, I have come to the Sorrowless Land: very easily has the mercy of the great Lord come upon me.
They have sung of Him as infinite and unattainable: but I in my meditations have seen Him without sight.
That is indeed the sorrowless land, and none know the path that leads there:
Only he who is on that path has surely transcended all sorrow.
Wonderful is that land of rest, to which no merit can win;
It is the wise who has seen it, it is the wise who has sung of it.
This is the Ultimate Word: but can any express its marvellous savour?
He who has savoured it once, he knows what joy it can give.

Kabir says: "Knowing it, the ignorant man becomes wise, and the wise man becomes speechless and silent;
The worshipper is utterly inebriated,
His wisdom and his detachment are made perfect;
He drinks from the cup of the in-breathings and the outbreathings of love."

There the whole sky is filled with sound, and there that music is made without fingers and without strings;
There the game of pleasure and pain does not cease.
Kabir says: "If you merge your life in the Ocean of Life, you will find your life in the Supreme Land of Bliss."

What a frenzy of ecstasy there is in
every hour! and the worshipper is pressing out and drinking the essence of the hours: he lives in the life of Brahma.

I speak truth, for I have accepted truth in life; I am now attached to truth, I have swept all tinsel away. Kabir says: “Thus is the worshipper set free from fear; thus have all errors of life and of death left him.”

There the sky is filled with music:
There it rains nectar:
There the harp-strings jingle, and there the drums beat.
What a secret splendour is there, in the mansion of the sky!
There no mention is made of the rising and the setting of the sun;
In the ocean of manifestation, which is the light of love, day and night are felt to be one.
Joy for ever, no sorrow, no struggle!
There have I seen joy filled to the brim,
perfection of joy;
No place for error is there.
Kabir says: "There have I witnessed
the sport of One Bliss!"

I have known in my body the sport of
the universe: I have escaped from
the error of this world.
The inward and the outward are be-
come as one sky, the Infinite and
the finite are united: I am drunken
with the sight of this All!
This Light of Thine fulfils the uni-
verse: the lamp of love that burns
on the salver of knowledge.
Kabir says: "There error cannot enter,
and the conflict of life and death
is felt no more."
II. 77. maddh ākāś āp jahān bāithe

THE middle region of the sky, wherein the spirit dwelleth, is radiant with the music of light; There, where the pure and white music blossoms, my Lord takes His delight.

In the wondrous effulgence of each hair of His body, the brightness of millions of suns and of moons is lost. On that shore there is a city, where the rain of nectar pours and pours, and never ceases.

Kabir says: “Come, O Dharmadas! and see my great Lord’s Durbar.”

XIX

II. 20. paramātam guru nikaṭ virājain

MY heart! the Supreme Spirit, the great Master, is near you: wake, oh wake!

Run to the feet of your Beloved: for
your Lord stands near to your head.
You have slept for unnumbered ages; this morning will you not wake?

XX

II. 22. *man tu pār utar kāṅh jaiho*

To what shore would you cross, O my heart? there is no traveller before you, there is no road:
Where is the movement, where is the rest, on that shore?
There is no water; no boat, no boatman, is there;
There is not so much as a rope to tow the boat, nor a man to draw it.
No earth, no sky, no time, no thing, is there: no shore, no ford!
There, there is neither body nor mind: and where is the place that shall still the thirst of the soul? You shall find naught in that emptiness.
Be strong, and enter into your own
body: for there your foothold is firm. Consider it well, O my heart! go not elsewhere.
Kabir says: "Put all imaginations away, and stand fast in that which you are."

XXI

II. 33. ghar ghar dipak barai

LAMPS burn in every house, O blind one! and you cannot see them.
One day your eyes shall suddenly be opened, and you shall see: and the fetters of death will fall from you.
There is nothing to say or to hear, there is nothing to do: it is he who is living, yet dead, who shall never die again.

Because he lives in solitude, therefore the Yogi says that his home is far away.
Your Lord is near: yet you are climbing the palm-tree to seek Him.
The Brahman priest goes from house to house and initiates people into faith:
Alas! the true fountain of life is beside you, and you have set up a stone to worship.
Kabir says: "I may never express how sweet my Lord is. Yoga and the telling of beads, virtue and vice — these are naught to Him."

XXII

II. 38. Sādho, so satgur mohi bhāwai

O BROTHER, my heart yearns for that true Guru, who fills the cup of true love, and drinks of it himself, and offers it then to me.
He removes the veil from the eyes, and gives the true Vision of Brahma:
He reveals the worlds in Him, and
makes me to hear the Unstruck
Music:
He shows joy and sorrow to be one:
He fills all utterance with love.
Kabir says: "Verily he has no fear,
who has such a Guru to lead him
to the shelter of safety!"

XXIII

II. 40. *tinwir sāñjh kā gahirā āwai*

THE shadows of evening fall thick
and deep, and the darkness of love
envelops the body and the mind.
Open the window to the west, and be
lost in the sky of love;
Drink the sweet honey that steeps the
petals of the lotus of the heart.
Receive the waves in your body: what
splendour is in the region of the
sea!
Hark! the sounds of conches and bells
are rising.
Kabir says: "O brother, behold! the Lord is in this vessel of my body."

XXIV

II. 48. *jis se rahani apār jagat men*

More than all else do I cherish at heart that love which makes me to live a limitless life in this world.

It is like the lotus, which lives in the water and blooms in the water: yet the water cannot touch its petals, they open beyond its reach. It is like a wife, who enters the fire at the bidding of love. She burns and lets others grieve, yet never dishonours love.

This ocean of the world is hard to cross: its waters are very deep. Kabir says: "Listen to me, O Sadhu! few there are who have reached its end."
II. 45. Hari ne apnā āp chipāyā

My Lord hides Himself, and my Lord wonderfully reveals Himself:

My Lord has encompassed me with hardness, and my Lord has cast down my limitations.

My Lord brings to me words of sorrow and words of joy, and He Himself heals their strife.

I will offer my body and mind to my Lord: I will give up my life, but never can I forget my Lord!

XXVI

II. 75. ōnkār siwae kōi sirjai

All things are created by the Ōṁ;

The love-form is His body.

He is without form, without quality, without decay:

Seek thou union with Him!
But that formless God takes a thousand forms in the eyes of His creatures:
He is pure and indestructible,
His form is infinite and fathomless,
He dances in rapture, and waves of form arise from His dance.
The body and the mind cannot contain themselves, when they are touched by His great joy.
He is immersed in all consciousness, all joys, and all sorrows;
He has no beginning and no end;
He holds all within His bliss.

XXVII

II. 81. satgur sōī dayā kar dīnhā

It is the mercy of my true Guru that has made me to know the unknown;
I have learned from Him how to walk without feet, to see without eyes,
to hear without ears, to drink
without mouth, to fly without wings;
I have brought my love and my meditation into the land where there is no sun and moon, nor day and night.
Without eating, I have tasted of the sweetness of nectar; and without water, I have quenched my thirst.
Where there is the response of delight, there is the fullness of joy. Before whom can that joy be uttered?
Kabir says: "The Guru is great beyond words, and great is the good fortune of the disciple."

XXVIII

II. 85. nirguṇ āge sarguṇ nācāi
BEFORE the Unconditioned, the Conditioned dances:
"Thou and I are one!" this trumpet proclaims.
The Guru comes, and bows down before the disciple:
This is the greatest of wonders.

XXIX

II. 87. *Kabīr kab se bhaye vairāgī*

GORAKHNATH asks Kabir:
"Tell me, O Kabir, when did your vocation begin? Where did your love have its rise?"

Kabir answers:
"When He whose forms are manifold had not begun His play: when there was no Guru, and no disciple: when the world was not spread out: when the Supreme One was alone—

Then I became an ascetic; then, O Gorakh, my love was drawn to Brahma.
Brahmā did not hold the crown on his head; the god Vishnu was not
anointed as king; the power of Shiva was still unborn; when I was instructed in Yoga.

I became suddenly revealed in Benares, and Ramananda illumined me;
I brought with me the thirst for the Infinite, and I have come for the meeting with Him.
In simplicity will I unite with the Simple One; my love will surge up.
O Gorakh, march thou with His music!"

XXX

II. 95. yā tarvar men ek pakherū

On this tree is a bird: it dances in the joy of life.
None knows where it is: and who knows what the burden of its music may be?
Where the branches throw a deep
shade, there does it have its nest: and it comes in the evening and flies away in the morning, and says not a word of that which it means. None tell me of this bird that sings within me.

It is neither coloured nor colourless: it has neither form nor outline: It sits in the shadow of love. It dwells within the Unattainable, the Infinite, and the Eternal; and no one marks when it comes and goes. Kabir says: “O brother Sadhu! deep is the mystery. Let wise men seek to know where rests that bird.”

XXXI

II. 100. *niš din sālai ghāw*

SORE pain troubles me day and night, and I cannot sleep; I long for the meeting with my Beloved, and my father’s house gives me pleasure no more.
The gates of the sky are opened, the
temple is revealed:
I meet my husband, and leave at His
feet the offering of my body and
my mind.

XXXII

II. 103. nāco re mero man, matta hoy
DANCE, my heart! dance to-day
with joy.
The strains of love fill the days and
the nights with music, and the
world is listening to its melodies:
Mad with joy, life and death dance to
the rhythm of this music. The
hills and the sea and the earth
dance. The world of man dances
in laughter and tears.
Why put on the robe of the monk, and
live aloof from the world in lonely
pride?
Behold! my heart dances in the de-
light of a hundred arts; and the Creator is well pleased.

XXXIII

II. 105. *man mast huā tab kyon bole.*

WHERE is the need of words, when love has made drunken the heart?
I have wrapped the diamond in my cloak; why open it again and again?
When its load was light, the pan of the balance went up: now it is full, where is the need for weighing?
The swan has taken its flight to the lake beyond the mountains; why should it search for the pools and ditches any more?
Your Lord dwells within you: why need your outward eyes be opened?
Kabir says: “Listen, my brother! my Lord, who ravishes my eyes, has united Himself with me.”
XXXIV

II. 110. *mohi tohi lági kaise chuţe*

*HOW* could the love between Thee and me sever?

As the leaf of the lotus abides on the water: so thou art my Lord, and I am Thy servant.

As the night-bird Chakor gazes all night at the moon: so Thou art my Lord and I am Thy servant.

From the beginning until the ending of time, there is love between Thee and me; and how shall such love be extinguished?

Kabir says: “As the river enters into the ocean, so my heart touches Thee.”

XXXV

II. 113. *vālam, āwo hamāre geh re*

*MY* body and my mind are grieved for the want of Thee;

O my Beloved! come to my house.
SONGS OF KABIR

When people say I am Thy bride, I am ashamed; for I have not touched Thy heart with my heart.

Then what is this love of mine? I have no taste for food, I have no sleep; my heart is ever restless within doors and without.

As water is to the thirsty, so is the lover to the bride. Who is there that will carry my news to my Beloved?

Kabir is restless: he is dying for sight of Him.

XXXVI

II. 126. jāg piyārī, ab kān sowai

FRIEND, awake, and sleep no more!

The night is over and gone, would you lose your day also?

Others, who have wakened, have received jewels;
O foolish woman! you have lost all whilst you slept.
Your lover is wise, and you are foolish,
O woman!
You never prepared the bed of your husband:
O mad one! you passed your time in silly play.
Your youth was passed in vain, for you did not know your Lord;
Wake, wake! See! your bed is empty:
He left you in the night.
Kabir says: “Only she wakes, whose heart is pierced with the arrow of His music.”

XXXVII

I. 36. sur. parkāś, tanh rain kahān pāïye

WHERE is the night, when the sun is shining? If it is night, then the sun withdraws its light.
Where knowledge is, can ignorance en-