INTRODUCTION

The Asrár-i Khudí was first published at Lahore in 1915. I read it soon afterwards and thought so highly of it that I wrote to Iqbal, whom I had the pleasure of meeting at Cambridge some fifteen years ago, asking leave to prepare an English translation. My proposal was cordially accepted, but in the meantime I found other work to do, which caused the translation to be laid aside until last year. Before submitting it to the reader, a few remarks are necessary concerning the poem and its author.¹

¹ The present translation follows the text of the second edition.
Iqbal is an Indian Moslem. During his stay in the West he studied modern philosophy, in which subject he holds degrees from the Universities of Cambridge and Munich. His dissertation on the development of metaphysics in Persia—an illuminating sketch—appeared as a book in 1908. Since then he has developed a philosophy of his own, on which I am able to give some extremely interesting notes communicated by himself. Of this, however, the Asrár-i Khudí gives no systematic account, though it puts his ideas in a popular and attractive form. While the Hindu philosophers, in explaining the doctrine of the unity of being, addressed themselves to the head, Iqbal, like the Persian poets who teach the same doctrine, takes a more dangerous course and aims at the heart. He is no mean poet, and his verse can rouse or persuade even if his logic fail to
convince. His message is not for the Mohammedans of India alone, but for Moslems everywhere: accordingly he writes in Persian instead of Hindustani—a happy choice, for amongst educated Moslems there are many familiar with Persian literature, while the Persian language is singularly well adapted to express philosophical ideas in a style at once elevated and charming.

Iqbal comes forward as an apostle, if not to his own age, then to posterity—

"I have no need of the car of To-day,
I am the voice of the poet of To-morrow"—

and after Persian fashion he invokes the Saki to fill his cup with wine and pour moonbeams into the dark night of his thought,

"That I may lead home the wanderer,
And imbue the idle looker-on with restless impatience,
And advance hotly on a new quest,
And become known as the champion of a new spirit."
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Let us begin at the end. What is the far-off goal on which his eyes are fixed? The answer to that question will discover his true character, and we shall be less likely to stumble on the way if we see whither we are going. Iqbal has drunk deep of European literature, his philosophy owes much to Nietzsche and Bergson, and his poetry often reminds us of Shelley; yet he thinks and feels as a Moslem, and just for this reason his influence may be great. He is a religious enthusiast, inspired by the vision of a New Mecca, a world-wide, theocratic, Utopian state in which all Moslems, no longer divided by the barriers of race and country, shall be one. He will have nothing to do with nationalism and imperialism. These, he says, "rob us of Paradise": they make us strangers to each other, destroy feelings of brotherhood, and sow the bitter seed of war. He dreams
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of a world ruled by religion, not by politics, and condemns Machiavelli, that "worshipper of false gods," who has blinded so many. It must be observed that when he speaks of religion he always means Islam. Non-Moslems are simply unbelievers, and (in theory, at any rate) the Jihád is justifiable, provided that it is waged "for God's sake alone." A free and independent Moslem fraternity, having the Ka'ba as its centre and knit together by love of Allah and devotion to the Prophet—such is Iqbal's ideal. In the Āsrár-i Khudí and the Rumúz-i Békhudí he preaches it with a burning sincerity which we cannot but admire, and at the same time points out how it may be attained. The former poem deals with the life of the individual Moslem, the latter with the life of the Islamic community.

The cry "Back to the Koran! Back
to Mohammed! "has been heard before, and the responses have hitherto been somewhat discouraging. But on this occasion it is allied with the revolutionary force of Western philosophy, which Iqbal hopes and believes will vitalise the movement and ensure its triumph. He sees that Hindu intellectualism and Islamic pantheism have destroyed the capacity for action, based on scientific observation and interpretation of phenomena, which distinguishes the Western peoples "and especially the English." Now, this capacity depends ultimately on the conviction that *khudi* (selfhood, individuality, personality) is real and is not merely an illusion of the mind. Iqbal, therefore, throws himself with all his might against idealistic philosophers and pseudo-mystical poets, the authors, in his opinion, of the decay prevailing in Islam, and argues that
only by self-affirmation, self-expression, and self-development can the Moslems once more become strong and free. He appeals from the alluring raptures of Hafiz to the moral fervour of Jalál-u’ddín Rúmí, from an Islam sunk in Platonic contemplation to the fresh and vigorous monotheism which inspired Mohammed and brought Islam into existence.¹ Here, perhaps, I should guard against a possible misunderstanding. Iqbal’s philosophy is religious, but he does not treat philosophy as the handmaid of religion. Holding that the full development of the individual presupposes a society, he finds the ideal society in what he considers to be the Prophet’s conception of Islam. Every Moslem, in striving to make himself a

¹ His criticism of Hafiz called forth angry protests from Súfi circles in which Hafiz is venerated as a master-hierophant. Iqbal made no recantation, but since the passage had served its purpose and was offensive to many, he cancelled it in the second edition of the poem. It is omitted in my translation.
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more perfect individual, is helping to establish the Islamic kingdom of God upon earth.¹

The Asrâr-i Khudi is composed in the metre and modelled on the style of the famous Masnavi. In the prologue Iqbal relates how Jalâlu’ddîn Rûmî, who is to him almost what Virgil was to Dante, appeared in a vision and bade him arise and sing. Much as he dislikes the type of Sûfism exhibited by Hafiz, he pays homage to the pure and profound genius of Jalâlu’ddîn, though he rejects the doctrine of self-abandonment taught by the great Persian

¹ The principles of Islam, regarded as the ideal society, are set forth in the author’s second poem, the Rumûz-i Bêkhudi or “Mysteries of Selflessness.” He explains the title by pointing out that the individual who loses himself in the community reflects both the past and the future as in a mirror, so that he transcends mortality and enters into the life of Islam, which is infinite and everlasting. Among the topics discussed are the origin of society, the divine guidance of man through the prophets, the formation of collective life-centres, and the value of History as a factor in maintaining the sense of personal identity in a people.
mystic and does not accompany him in his pantheistic flights.

To European readers the *Aṣrūr-i Khudī* presents certain obscurities which no translation can entirely remove. These lie partly in the form and would not be felt, as a rule, by any one conversant with Persian poetry. Often, however, the ideas themselves, being associated with peculiarly Oriental ways of thinking, are hard for our minds to follow. I am not sure that I have always grasped the meaning or rendered it correctly; but I hope that such errors are few, thanks to the assistance so kindly given me by my friend Muhammad Shafi, now Professor of Arabic at Lahore, with whom I read the poem and discussed many points of difficulty. Other questions of a more fundamental character have been solved for me by the author himself. At my request he drew up a statement of his philosophical
views on the problems touched and suggested in the book. I will give it in his own words as nearly as possible. It is not, of course, a complete statement, and was written, as he says, "in a great hurry," but apart from its power and originality it elucidates the poetical argument far better than any explanation that could have been offered by me.

"1. The Philosophical Basis of the Askāri Khudī"

"'That experience should take place in finite centres and should wear the form of finite this-ness is in the end inexplicable.' These are the words of Prof. Bradley. But starting with these inexplicable centres of experience, he ends in a unity which he calls Absolute and in which the finite centres lose their finiteness and distinctness. According to him, therefore, the finite centre is only an appearance. The test
of reality, in his opinion, is all-inclusiveness; and since all finiteness is 'infected with relativity,' it follows that the latter is a mere illusion. To my mind, this inexplicable finite centre of experience is the fundamental fact of the universe. All life is individual; there is no such thing as universal life. God himself is an individual: He is the most unique individual.\(^1\) The universe, as Dr. McTaggart says, is an association of individuals; but we must add that the orderliness and adjustment which we find in this association is not eternally achieved and complete in itself. It is the result of instinctive or conscious effort. We are gradually travelling from chaos to cosmos and are helpers in this achievement. Nor are the members of the association fixed; new members are ever coming to birth to

\(^1\) This view was held by the orthodox Imám Ahmad ibn Hanbal in its extreme (anthropomorphic) form.
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co-operate in the great task. Thus the universe is not a completed act: it is still in the course of formation. There can be no complete truth about the universe, for the universe has not yet become 'whole.' The process of creation is still going on, and man too takes his share in it, inasmuch as he helps to bring order into at least a portion of the chaos. The Koran indicates the possibility of other creators than God.¹

"Obviously, this view of man and the universe is opposed to that of the English Neo-Hegelians as well as to all forms of pantheistic Sufism which regard absorption in a universal life or soul as the final aim and salvation of man.² The moral and religious ideal of man is not self-negation but self-affirmation, and he attains to this ideal

¹ Kor. ch. 23, v. 14: "Blessed is God, the best of those who create."
² Cf. his note on "Islam and Mysticism" (The New Era, 1916, p. 250).
by becoming more and more individual, more and more unique. The Prophet said, ‘Takhalluqū bi-akhlāq Allah,’ ‘Create in yourselves the attributes of God.’ Thus man becomes unique by becoming more and more like the most unique Individual. What then is life? It is individual: its highest form, so far, is the Ego (Khudī) in which the individual becomes a self-contained exclusive centre. Physically as well as spiritually man is a self-contained centre, but he is not yet a complete individual. The greater his distance from God, the less his individuality. He who comes nearest to God is the completest person. Not that he is finally absorbed in God. On the contrary, he absorbs God into himself.¹

¹ Here Iqbal adds: “Maulána Rúmí has very beautifully expressed this idea. The Prophet, when a little boy, was once lost in the desert. His nurse Halima was almost beside herself with grief, but while roaming the desert in search of the boy she heard a voice saying:
The true person not only absorbs the world of matter; by mastering it he absorbs God Himself into his Ego. Life is a forward assimilative movement. It removes all obstructions in its march by assimilating them. Its essence is the continual creation of desires and ideals, and for the purpose of its preservation and expansion it has invented or developed out of itself certain instruments, e.g. senses, intellect, etc., which help it to assimilate obstructions. ¹ The greatest obstacle in the way of life is matter, Nature; yet Nature is not evil, since it enables the inner powers of life to unfold themselves.

¹ Do not grieve, he will not be lost to thee;
Nay, the whole world will be lost in him.'

The true individual cannot be lost in the world; it is the world that is lost in him. I go a step further and say, prefixing a new half-verse to a hemistich of Rûmî (Transl. l. 1325):

In his will that which God wills becomes lost:
‘How shall a man believe this saying?’”

¹ Transl. l. 289 foll.
"The Ego attains to freedom by the removal or all obstructions in its way. It is partly free, partly determined, and reaches fuller freedom by approaching the Individual who is most free—God. In one word, life is an endeavour for freedom.

"2. The Ego and Continuation of Personality

"In man the centre of life becomes an Ego or Person. Personality is a state of tension and can continue only if that state is maintained. If the state of tension is not maintained, relaxation will ensue. Since personality, or the state of tension, is the most valuable achievement of man, he should see that he does not revert to a state of relaxation. That which tends to maintain

\[1\] According to the Tradition, "The true Faith is between predestination and freewill."
the state of tension tends to make us immortal. Thus the idea of personality gives us a standard of value; it settles the problem of good and evil. That which fortifies personality is good, that which weakens it is bad. Art, religion, and ethics must be judged from the standpoint of personality. My criticism of Plato is directed against those philosophical systems which hold up death rather than life as their ideal—systems which ignore the greatest obstruction to life, namely, matter, and

1 Transl. l. 673 foll. In a note on "Our Prophet's criticism of contemporary Arabian poetry" (The New Era, 1916, p. 251) Iqbal writes: "The ultimate end of all human activity is Life—glorious, powerful, exuberant. All human art must be subordinated to this final purpose, and the value of everything must be determined in reference to its life-yielding capacity. The highest art is that which awakens our dormant will-force and nerves us to face the trials of life manfully. All that brings drowsiness and makes us shut our eyes to Reality around, on the mastery of which alone Life depends, is a message of decay and death. There should be no opium-eating in Art. The dogma of Art for the sake of Art is a clever invention of decadence to cheat us out of life and power."

2 Ibid. l. 537 foll. 3 Ibid. l. 631 foll.
teach us to run away from it instead of absorbing it.

"As in connexion with the question of the freedom of the Ego we have to face the problem of matter, similarly in connexion with its immortality we have to face the problem of time." Bergson has taught us that time is not an infinite line (in the spatial sense of the word 'line') through which we must pass whether we wish it or not. This idea of time is adulterated. Pure time has no length. Personal immortality is an aspiration: you can have it if you make an effort to achieve it. It depends on our adopting in this life modes of thought and activity which tend to maintain the state of tension. Buddhism, Persian Súfism, and allied forms of ethics will not serve our purpose. But they are not wholly useless, because after periods of great activity we need

\[1 \text{ Ibid. I. 1531 foll.}\]
opiates, narcotics, for some time. These forms of thought and action are like nights in the days of life. Thus, if our activity is directed towards the maintenance of a state of tension, the shock of death is not likely to affect it. After death there may be an interval of relaxation, as the Koran speaks of a barzakh, or intermediate state, which lasts until the Day of Resurrection.\(^1\) Only those Egos will survive this state of relaxation who have taken good care during the present life. Although life abhors repetition in its evolution, yet on Bergson’s principles the resurrection of the body too, as Wildon Carr says, is quite possible. By breaking up time into moments we spatialise it and then find difficulty in getting over it. The true nature of time is reached when we look into our deeper self.\(^2\) Real time is life itself, which can preserve itself

\(^1\) Kor. ch. 23, v. 102.  
\(^2\) Transl. 1. 1549 foll.
by maintaining that particular state of tension (personality) which it has so far achieved. We are subject to time so long as we look upon time as something spatial. Spatialised time is a fetter which life has forged for itself in order to assimilate the present environment. In reality we are timeless, and it is possible to realise our timelessness even in this life. This revelation, however, can be momentary only.

"3. THE EDUCATION OF THE EGO

"The Ego is fortified by love (‘ishq). This word is used in a very wide sense and means the desire to assimilate, to absorb. Its highest form is the creation of values and ideals and the endeavour to realise them. Love individualises the lover as well as the beloved. The effort to realise the most unique individuality individualises the seeker

and implies the individuality of the sought, for nothing else would satisfy the nature of the seeker. As love fortifies the Ego, asking (su’ál) weakens it.¹ All that is achieved without personal effort comes under su’ál. The son of a rich man who inherits his father’s wealth is an ‘asker’ (beggar); so is everyone who thinks the thoughts of others. Thus, in order to fortify the Ego we should cultivate love, i.e. the power of assimilative action, and avoid all forms of ‘asking,’ i.e. inaction. The lesson of assimilative action is given by the life of the Prophet, at least to a Mohammedan.

“In another part of the poem² I have hinted at the general principles of Moslem ethics and have tried to reveal their meaning in connexion with the idea of personality. The Ego in its movement towards uniqueness has to pass through three stages:

¹ Ibid. l. 435 foll. ² Ibid. l. 815 foll.
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(a) Obedience to the Law.

(b) Self-control, which is the highest form of self-consciousness or Ego-hood.¹

(c) Divine vicegerency.²

"This (divine vicegerency, nīyābat-i ilāhī) is the third and last stage of human development on earth. The nā'ib (vicegerent) is the vicegerent of God on earth. He is the completest Ego, the goal of humanity,³ the acme of life both in mind and body; in him the discord of our mental life becomes a harmony. The highest power is united in him with the highest knowledge. In his life, thought and action, instinct and reason, become one. He is the last fruit of the tree of humanity, and all the trials of a painful evolution

¹ Ibid. l. 849 foll.

² Ibid. l. 893 foll.

³ Man already possesses the germ of vicegerency, as God says in the Koran (ch. 2, v. 28): "Lo, I will appoint a khalifa (vicegerent) on the earth." Cf. Transl. l. 434.
are justified because he is to come at the end. He is the real ruler of mankind; his kingdom is the kingdom of God on earth. Out of the richness of his nature he lavishes the wealth of life on others, and brings them nearer and nearer to himself. The more we advance in evolution, the nearer we get to him. In approaching him we are raising ourselves in the scale of life. The development of humanity both in mind and body is a condition precedent to his birth. For the present he is a mere ideal; but the evolution of humanity is tending towards the production of an ideal race of more or less unique individuals who will become his fitting parents. Thus the Kingdom of God on earth means the democracy of more or less unique individuals, presided over by the most unique individual possible on this earth. Nietzsche had a glimpse of this ideal race, but his atheism and
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aristocratic prejudices marred his whole conception." ¹

Every one, I suppose, will acknowledge that the substance of the Asrár-i Khudí is striking enough to command attention. In the poem, naturally, this philosophy presents itself under a different aspect. Its audacity of thought and phrase is less apparent, its logical brilliancy dissolves in the glow of feeling and imagination, and it wins the heart before taking possession of the

¹ Writing of "Muslim Democracy" in The New Era, 1916, p. 951, Iqbal says: "The Democracy of Europe—overshadowed by socialistic agitation and anarchical fear—originated mainly in the economic regeneration of European societies. Nietzsche, however, abhors this 'rule of the herd' and, hopeless of the plebeian, he bases all higher culture on the cultivation and growth of an Aristocracy of Supermen. But is the plebeian so absolutely hopeless? The Democracy of Islam did not grow out of the extension of economic opportunity; it is a spiritual principle based on the assumption that every human being is a centre of latent power, the possibilities of which can be developed by cultivating a certain type of character. Out of the plebeian material Islam has formed men of the noblest type of life and power. Is not, then, the Democracy of early Islam an experimental refutation of the ideas of Nietzsche?"
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mind. The artistic quality of the poem is remarkable when we consider that its language is not the author's own. I have done my best to preserve as much of this as a literal prose translation would allow. Many passages of the original are poetry of the kind that, once read, is not easily forgotten, e.g. the description of the Ideal Man as a deliverer for whom the world is waiting, and the noble invocation which brings the book to an end. Like Jalālu’ddīn Rūmī, Iqbal is fond of introducing fables and apologues to relieve the argument and illustrate his meaning with more force and point than would be possible otherwise.

On its first appearance the Āsrār-i Khudī took by storm the younger generation of Indian Moslems. "Iqbal," wrote one of them, "has come amongst us as a Messiah and has stirred the dead with life." It remains to be seen in
what direction the awakened ones will
march. * Will they be satisfied with a
glorious but distant vision of the City
of God, or will they adapt the new
doctrine to other ends than those which
its author has in view? Notwithstanding
that he explicitly denounces the
idea of nationalism, his admirers are
already protesting that he does not
mean what he says.

How far the influence of his work
may ultimately go I will not attempt
to prophesy. It has been said of him
that "he is a man of his age and a man
in advance of his age; he is also a man
in disagreement with his age." We
cannot regard his ideas as typical of
any section of his co-religionists. They
involve a radical change in the Moslem
mind, and their real importance is not
to be measured by the fact that such a
change is unlikely to occur within a
calculable time.