

THE CONQUEST OF NATURE¹³⁵

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(I) The Birth of Man

Love shouted a paean, "Ah!
One with a bleeding heart draws nigh."
Beauty shuddered and said, "Look!
Here comes one with a seeing eye."

Nature was surprised to see
From its heap of passive dust appear,
All of a sudden, one who was
Of himself maker, breaker and seer.

Whispers travelled all the way
From the Heaven to Night's primeval abode.

¹³⁵ *This is a translation of Iqbal's poem "Taskhir-i Fitrat" taken from *Payam-i Masha'iq*, PP. 97-104.

"Veiled ones, beware, O,
There's one who tears up every shroud."

Ignorant of its very self,
And curled up still in Being's lap,
Desire opened its eyes wide
And found a whole new world unwrap.

Life said, "O happy day!
I writhed in dust aeon after aeon.
Now opens at long last
A door out of this ancient prison."

(2) Satan's Denial

I'm not an ignorant creature of light
That I should bow to man.
He is a base-born image of dust
And I am of fire born.

The blood in the veins of the world is
A kindle with my flame.
The tearing speed of the wind is mine
And mine is thunder's boom.

I forge the atoms' harmony and
The elements' concourse.
I burn, but also shape: I am

The fire that makes the glass.

Whatever I make I break to bits
And scatter in the dust,
In order to create new forms
From fragments of those lost.

This restlessly revolving sky
Is but a wavelet of my sea;
And in my throbbing substance dwells
The shape of things to be.

The stars' bodies were made by you;
But I'm their motive force.
I'm the spirit behind all forms:
I'm life's original source.

Imbuing body with soul is yours;
Mine is rousing the soul.
Yoy waylay with blissful peace;
Jlead with action's call.

I never begged obeisance of
slaves who always pray.
I rule without a hell: I judge
Without a judgment day.

That lowly creature of earth, man,
Of mean intelligence,
Though born in your lap, will grow old
Under my vigilance.

(3) The Temptation of Adam

A life of struggle, strain and stress
Is better than eternal rest.
When a dove is straining at its net,
An eagle's heart beats in its breast.

You're capable of nothing but
Prostrating yourself like a slave.
Like a tall cypress stand erect,
O you, who do not act but crave.

These streams of milk and honey have
Deprived you of the strength to act.
Come, take a hearty draught of wine
From the goblet of the vine direct.

Good and evil, virtue and sin,
Are myth created by your Lord.
Come, taste the pleasure of action and
Go forth to seek your due reward.

Arise, for I will show to you
The prospect of a whole new world.
Open your eyes and look around;
Go forth and see it all unfurled.

You are a tiny, worthless drop;
Become a shining, priceless pearl.
Descend from Heaven's halcyon heights
And plunge into the life-stream's whirl.

You are a brightly shining sword;
Go, dip into creation's heart.
To prove your mettle issue forth
And from your scabbord's bosom part.

Unfold your eagle-wings and soar
And shed the blood of timid quails.
For an eagle it is very death
To live within its eyrie's walls.

You have not learnt this lesson yet;
Fulfilment is desire's death.
You know what is eternal life:
To burn anew with each new breath.

(4) Adam Sings on His Exit from Paradise

O what a joy it is to make

One's life a constant, passionate glow!

And with one's breath make desert and hill
And plain like molten metal flow!

To open a door out of one's cage
Onto the garden's vast expanse!

Roam in the space of the sky,
And tell the stars one's weal and woe!

With secret yearnings and open prayers
Cast looks on Beauty's seraglio!

At times to see a single flower
In the riot of a tulip-field!

At other times tell hurtful thorns
From roses that in their midst blow!

I burn with a slow-consuming fire;
I am all an agonising desire.

I give up faith for a living doubt;
I seek, I question, I aspire.