

PROLOGUE TO IQBAL'S ASRAR-I-KHUDI

Translated by

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When the world-illuminating sun
Waylaid Night like a highwayman,
My tears bedewed the rose's face
And washed away all trace
Of slumber from the eyes
Of the narcissus, and my cries
Aroused the sleeping grass.
The gardener tried the power of my verse:
He sowed a pattern-line and reaped a sword.
My tears thenceforward were the only seeds he sowed.
He wove the woof of my lament across
The garden's warp. Though I am but a mote,
The radiant sun belongs to me. I nurse
A hundred mornings in my lap
My dust is brighter far

Than Jamshed's world-reflecting cup;
For I know things that are
Still in the future's womb. My thought,
A hunter, has, slung from its saddle, deer
That have as yet to leap forth from
Non-being's thicket. Grass as yet to grow
Lends beauty to my lawn,
And roses yet to blow
Are gathered in my gown.
I struck dumb the musicians where
They had assembled to perform,
Because I smote
The heartstrings of the universe.
My genius is a lute
With a rare melody.
Strange even to my comrades is my verse.
I am a newborn sun,
Unused to the ways of the sky;
The stars are not yet on the run

Before my light's advance;
The mercury in me
Has yet to be
Astir; my rays have yet to dance
On the sea's surface; and
The mountains stand
Still untouched by my crimson dye.
Creation's eye
Is still unused to me.
I tremble with the fear
Of having to appear;
For night has ceased to be
And dawns at last my day.
A fresh dew settles on
The world's rose. I await
Those early risers who at dawn
Wake up to pray.
O happy they who will adore my fire.
I am that music which does not require

A plectrum to pluck it from strings.
I am tomorrow's poet's voice,
Which in today's void sings.
My age does not appreciate
The meaning of life's mysteries.
The Joseph I am will not fetch a price
In the slave-market of today.
I have no hope in my contemporaries.
My Sinai is all lit up for
A Moses who is on his way.
My comrades' sea is silent to the core
Like dew, whereas my very dew
Is like a storm-tossed sea.
My song is from another world,
A world as yet to be.
It is a call to the road, a bell tolled
For caravans not yet in view.
O many poets were reborn
After their death: they shut their own

Eyes, but they opened ours.
They issued forth again
From non-being's domain,
And grew upon their graves as flowers.
Though many caravans have crossed
The desert, yet they passed
As silently as the steps of a dromedary.
But lover that I am, to wail
Is my vocation, and a boom
Of lamentation like the crack of doom
Heralds my progress on the trail
I blaze. My voice outsings
My instrument's capacity.
But I am not afraid to snap its strings
In drawing from it a fit melody.
Mere drops had better keep
Clear of the flood I generate:
Only the bosom of the deep
Can bear the fury of its spate.

Mere rivulets cannot contain
My sea: my storm is only for the main.
Buds not grown into whole rose gardens are
Unworthy of my vernal showers.
In my soul thunders lie at rest.
Desert and mountain are at best
Mere passages my spirit scours
In journeying afar
Are you a desert? If so, try
To suck my ocean dry.
A Sinai? If so, brave my lightning's stroke.
I have been granted access to the springs
Of everlasting life, and I evoke
The living soul of things.
Mere specks of dust are quickened by
My song and, growing wings of light, they fly
Like glow-worms. There has been
No one before me who has sung
Of truths that lie concealed,

No one whose thought has strung
Pure pearls of wisdom such as mine.
If you desire to have revealed
To you the secret of eternal bliss,
Then come to me: I will give you both this
And full dominion over earth and sky.
It was the Old Man of the Sky who told
Me all the secrets of the spheres,
And I do not think I
Should try to hold
Them back from my confreres.

Come, saki, fill my cup with wine;
Make me forget all griefs of mine.
Give me that liquid fire, as pure
As Zam Zam's water, which for sure
Can make mere beggars feel like kings,
Which lends imagination wings,
Endows the eye with keener sight,

Bestows upon a leaf of grass
The weight of a whole mountain's mass,
Gives to a fox a lion's might,
Uplifts dust to the Pleiades,
Expands drops into boundless seas,
Turns silence to the din of Judgment Day,
Dyes partridges' claws red with falcons' blood.
Come, saki, fill my cup and flood
My intellect's night with the light
Of moon-bright wine that I might lead
Back to the right path those who stray,
Give idle eyes the zest
To see, advance on a new quest,
Be animated by a fresh desire,
Become the pupil of the eye
Of people with insight,
Re-echo as a vibrant cry
In the world's ears,
Uplift to a new height

The worth of poesy,
Increasing for the buyer
My goods' weight by
Besprinkling them with tears,
And, last of all, rehearse
The sealed-up book of secret lore
With guidance from the Master of Rum's verse.
He was a soul always aflame;
I am a brief spark, nothing more.
He flung his flame at me,
The moth, and his wine came
Flooding my cup. His alchemy
Transmuted me, mere dust, to gold,
And built in me untold
Realms of epiphany. A grain of sand
Set forth to gain
The sun's domain.
I am a sea wave, and
Will lodge myself in Rumi's sea

To make a shining pearl my property.

I, who am drunken with his wine,

Draw from his breath this life of mine.

One night my heart was so full of lament

I filled the silence with my cries to God,

Complaining of the hardness of my lot

And of the emptiness of my wine-pot.

My vision, seeking some redress abroad,

Beat its wings so hard that they bent

And broke; so it dissolved at' length

Into a dream, in which appeared to me

He who wrote the Quran in Pahlavi.

He said: "O lover of the votaries

Of Love, take a draught of Love's wine

From this wine jar of mine

At its full strength

And free from lees.

Strike hard your heartstrings, fling

A tempest at each string.
Against the goblet dash your hand
And on the lancet hurl your eye;
And of your laughter make a cry,
And let the bloodstained tears you shed
Be pieces of your heart, drops of pure blood.
How long will you stay silent like a bud?
Broadcast your fragrance as a rose
Does when it blows.
Throw yourself on the fire; like rue
You have a tumult locked up inside you.
From every organ like a bell
Send forth a loud lament, a yell.
O you are fire, set everything aglow;
Burn and make others burn with you.
Proclaim the old wine-seller's secrets: shine
Through the cup's crystal robe like wine.
Be a stone to the mirror of anxiety:
Smash your wine bottles in the market-place.

Send forth a message from the reedbed's privacy

Like a reed-flute: send glad tidings to Qais

From Laila's tribe. Invent a new style for your song.

Enliven the assembly with your lusty strains.

Arise and re-inspire all living ones.

Pronounce 'Arise' and make them all the more alive.

Arise and set your feet on a new path, and drive

Out of your head old passions you have nursed for long.

Come savour the delight of self-expression: sing.

O caravan bell, ring."

These words set my whole soul afire

And filled me with a strong desire

To break into song like a flute,

And be no longer mute.

So I arose as music does from strings

And sang as one in frenzy sings.

I unveiled the Self's mysteries

And showed its wonders to men's eyes.

My being was a statue incomplete,
Ungainly, worthless and rough-hewn.
Love chiselled me into a man,
And then made known
The secrets of the universe to me.
To my eyes it has shown
The movements of the sinews of the sky,
The world's heartbeat,
The blood coursing in the veins of the moon.
O many a night did I cry
Over man's state and try
To tear apart the veil
From the face of life's mystery,
Until I had extracted from
The school of natural events
And human incidents
True knowledge of life's quiddity.
I, who lend beauty to this night

Like the moon's lovely light,
Am as mere dust under the feet
Of the bright milla of Islam,
Whose fame resounds in hill and dale
And the life-giving heat
Of whose fresh songs warms up the heart.
It sowed an atom, and it reaped a sun:
Its harvest was a galaxy of stars
A hundred Rumis and Attars,
A master everyone
Of the poetic art.
I am an ardent sigh,
And will mount up the sky.
Though mere smoke, I am sprung from fire:
To soar upward I must aspire.
My pen, driven by
Thoughts that fly high,
Has laid bare things that lie
Behind the nine veils of the sky,

So that the merest drop may stand
Co-equal with the sea,
And every grain of sand
Attain the Sahara's immensity.

The purpose of this *mathnawi*
Is not composing poetry:
No images of beauty have I made,
No love songs have I sung.
I am an Indian not much skilled
In writing in the Persian tongue.
A new-born crescent moon am I
With a cup as yet to be filled.
Do not expect from my
Pen stylish writing of the grade
Of poets from Khansar and Isfahan,
Those masters of the language of Iran.
Though Urdu is as sweet as sugar, yet
The Persian mode of speech excels it.

I was enchanted by its loveliness
And my pen, so to speak, became
As a twig of the Burning Bush aflame
With the urge to reveal.

Persian, indeed, fits my thoughts' loftiness.

O you who read this book of mine,
Do not find fault with the wine glass, but feel
And concentrate on the taste of the wine.