

Book Review

A.R. Tariq, Secrets of Ego. Lahore: Islamic Book Service, 1977. Printed on good paper, full cloth bound. Demy 8vo., pp. 227. Price Rs: 45.00

The book purports to be a “descriptive and comprehensive Translation of Allama Iqbal's 'Asrār-i-Khudi' “. The use of the word “descriptive” in this context and the omission of the definite article from before “Ego” in the book's title struck the Reviewer as somewhat odd. But the blurb on the cover-flap claims: “And here is the most emphatic and enlightening English translation of his [Iqbal's] unique work.” It further tells us that “The Translator has been studying Iqbal's Persian and Urdu works for the last thirty years, and he has dived deep into his Philosophy.” These declarations raised high the Reviewer's expectations when he started reading the book.

The translation is preceded by a Preface covering no less than 36 pages. Apparently the Translator is quite uninhibited in the use of hyperbole. He talks of the original text as dealing with “all the possible Aspects of 'Ego' in a philosophical and convincing style.” He adds: “In its language and expression, it is most musical and emphatic! In its meaning, it is highly educative, constructive and inspiring! In its literary beauties, it is Unique! As a matter of fact, there is a Divinity reflecting itself in all the verses of this book, without a single exception” (p. 9). This some-what bewildering spate of words is interlarded with interjections and italics. At pp. 10-11 of the Preface, one comes across the sentence: “He [Iqbal] devoted his entire life to the preachment of this innate and divine feeling in man.” The Chamber's Twentieth Century Dictionary gives the meaning of “preachment” as “a sermon in contempt; a discourse affectedly solemn”. The Reviewer feels sure that the Translator did not intend to attribute such an artificial stance to Iqbal. The choice of the word is injudicious. At pp. 11 and 13 again, one encounters captions such as “‘Ego' as proved by Holy Quran,” “‘Ego' as

proved by the Holy Prophet” and “Ego' as proved by Great Saints and Mystics”. Under the first caption occur the words: “How many and how great honours, distinctions and favours, Man has from Allah? —The Holy Quran represents them and explains them from the very beginning to the end!” The use of the words “proved” and “represents them” are likely to raise literary eyebrows. By the time the Reviewer had waded through half the reface, his mind began to be assailed by doubts about the linguistic equipment of the Translator, for the arduous task he had undertaken with such over-weening self-confidence.

Other unusual expressions came to light as the Reviewer proceeded further. At p.15, while discussing factors that strengthen the ego, the Translator mentions, inter alia, “A good 'Ideal”. The redundancy of the adjective here is obvious. At p. 16, Nietzsche's Superman is described as the “Beyond Man”. At p. 18, he says about a Perfect Man: “He is not a narrow-minded or prejudicial person at all, but is very generous and broad-minded by nature, to serve every human being, regardless of colour, creed and nationality.” Apart from the involved construction of the sentence, the word “prejudicial” has been wrongly used for “prejudiced”. In a footnote at p. 19, the Translator talks of “Space' however long it is!” Here “long” seems to be doing service for “extensive”.

Quotations from Western authors, which in the Translator's estimation are akin to Iqbal's views on the ego, cover pp. 20-26 of the Preface. The relevancy of most of them is open to grave question. The quotations are also marred by numerous misprints. The word “has been translated at p. 31 inaptly as “outer space”. It should have been “non-space”. The Translator's thirty years 'study of Iqbal his apparently failed to reveal to him the fact that “God's Trust” offered to Man (The Qur'ān, xxxiii. 72), is, according to Iqbal, the trust of a free personality and not Law, as he has specified at p. 12, probably in conformity with orthodox opinion.

Professor Nicholson's translation of the .Asrār-i Khudī, despite a few mistakes here and there, has held the field so far as a standard to be emulated. A fresh translation could be justified only if it at least equals if it does not supersede it. The Reviewer has discovered such identities or near identities between the present translation and Professor Nicholson's as would raise a strong suspicion that the present work may not be the product of a wholly original intellectual exercise. There is no word of acknowledgment of this indebtedness. The Translator has indeed tried to introduce some variations from Nicholson's version, to gain credibility for his work as an independent venture. Nicholson's translation is line by line, but Mr. Tariq has split up the two lines of a verse so as to form a stanza of three or four lines. He has either altered or omitted a word here or added a word there or in some instances changed the order of words and gratuitously introduced capital letters, italics and interjection marks to give his creation a fresh look. But these stratagems are too transparent for the camouflage to be effective. Where the Translator has departed from Professor Nicholson's rendering, the result has been more often than not disappointing. Given below are some instances of close correspondence between the two translations (T. indicates Tariq's translation and N. stands for Nicholson's).

Prologue:

T

(1) When the world-illuminating Sun Attacked the Night like a Bandit,

My Tears bedewed the cheek of Rose!

(2) My Tears washed away Sleep From the Eye of the Narcissus! My cries wakened the Grass And made it Grow!

(7) My Thought has hunted the Deer,

And slung it from my Saddle, Which has not yet leaped forth

N.

When the world-illuming Sun rushed upon Night like a brigand,

My weeping bedewed the face of the rose.

My tears washed away sleep from the eye of the narcissus,

My passion wakened the grass and nude it grow.

My thought hunted down and slung from the saddle a deer

That has not yet leaped

T.

From the wilderness of Non-existence!

(29) Unless the Bud expands Into a bed of Roses,

It is unworthy of the Bounty Of my vernal Cloud!

(34) None has ever told the Secret Which I will tell!

None has ever threaded

The Pearls of Wisdom,

As I do!

(39) Such a liquor makes Thought More sober and wise!

It makes a keen Eye, Keener !

(43) Arise, and pour pure wine Into my Cup!

Pour moon-beams into the dark night

Of my Thought;--

(56) I was complaining

Of the Sorrows of the World, And was bewailing

The emptiness of my Cup !

(86) That a Drop may become Co-equal with the Sea, And the grain of Sand, Grow into a Desert !

Chapter I

(7) Its self-deceptions are The essence of life I

Like the Rose it lives

By bathing itself in Blood! (9) It produces a hundred new

N.

from the covert of non-existence.

Unless the bud expand

into a bed of roses, It is unworthy of my

spring-cloud's bounty. No one hath told the secret which I will tell Or threaded a pearl of thought like mine.

It makes thought more sober and wise,

It makes the keen eye keener.

Arise and pour pure wine into my cup,

Pour moonbeams into the dark night of my thought.

I was complaining of the sorrows of the world, And bewailing the emptiness of my cup. That the drop may

become co-equal with

the sea

And the grain of sand grow into a Sahara.

Its self-deceptions are the essence of life;

Like the rose, it lives by bathing itself in blood. For one sky it produces

T.

Moons

For one Sky,

And for only one word,

A hundred Discourses!

(12) It is the fate of Moths

To be consumed by a Flame, For their suffering is justified By the Candle!

Chapter IV

(5) Like Omar, come down

From your Camell!

Beware of incurring obligations, Beware !

(10) Oh ! Do not scatter

The handful of your Dust ! Like the Moon, scrape food From your own Side!

(13) Lest you be put to Shame Before the Holy Prophet, On the Day, when every Soul Shall be Stricken with Fear!

(14) The Moon gets her Substance From the Table of the Sun, Therefore she bears the brand Of his bounty on her heart !

Chapter VI

(4) The Tigers sprang forth From the Jungle

And rushed upon the sheep-fold.

N.

A hundred new moons, And for one word a hundred discourses.

'Tis the fate of moths to consume in flame:

The suffering of moths is justified by the candle.

Like Omar, come down from thy camel!

Beware of incurring obligations, beware

Do not scatter thy handful of dust,

Like the moon. scrape food from thine own side !

Lest thou be put to

shame before the Prophet

On the Day when every soul shall be stricken with fear.

The moon gets sustenance from the table of the sun

And bears the brand of his
bounty on her heart.

The tigers sprang forth from the jungle

And rushed upon the sheepfold.

N.

Those fierce tigers beat the drum of sovereignty,

They deprived the sheep of freedom.

In slavery, for the sake

of repelling harm,
The power of scheming
becomes quickened.

The tiger-tribe was exhausted by hard struggles,

They had set their hearts on enjoyment of luxury.

His nature drowsed and cleated a dream,

His mind's eye created a mirage.

His phantasy is sunk in the jar of heaven:

I know not whether it is

the dregs or the brick

of the wine-jar.

Life is the hunter and desire the snare.

Desire is Love's message to Beauty.

He is a Khizr, and amidst his darkness is the Fountain of Life:

All things that exist are

T.

(6) Those fierce Tigers

Beat the drum of Sovereignty, And they deprived the Sheep Of their
Freedom!

(12) In Slavery the power of Scheming

Becomes quickened

For the sake of

Repelling Harm !

(36) Since the Tiger-tribe [sic.] was already

Exhausted by hard struggle, And they had set their hearts On the
enjoyment of Luxury;---

Chapter VII

(10) His nature drowsed And creared a Dream ! His mind's eye

Produced a Mirage!

(20) His doctrine is sunk

In the of Jar of Heaven ;

I don't know whether it is the

Dregs,

Or the Brick of the wine-jar !

Chapter VIII

(4) Life is a powerful Hunter, And Desire is its Snare! Desire is Love's message To Beauty.

(16) He is a Khizr, and amidst his darkness

Is the "Fountain of Life" ! All things that exist in the

T.

Universe

Are made more Living by his Tears!

Chapter IX

(12) The Grass springs up

In obedience to the law of growth,

But when it abandons [sic.] that It is trodden underfoot!

Chapter X

(10) The dark clay,

Whose name is the "Body",—Our Reason always bemoans Its iniquity !

(17) Whosoever saddles tightly The Steed of his Body,

Sits like a Gem

On the Seal of Sovereignty !

Chapter XI

(7) I will tell you a Story

Of his Spiritual perfection, And enclose a whole Rose-bed In a single Bud !

Chapter XII

(I) A Bird was restless with thirst: The breath in his body was heaving

Like waves of Smoke !

(11) There, upon a Rose-twing [sic.]

N.

made more living by his tears.

The grass springs up in obedience to the law of growth:

When it abandons that, it is trodden underfoot.

The dark clay, whose name is the body—Our reason is ever bemoaning its iniquity.

Whosoever saddles tightly the steed of the body

Sits like the bezel on the seal of sovereignty.

I will tell a story of his perfection

And enclose a whole rose-bed in a single bud.

A bird was faint with thirst,

The breath in his body was heaving like waves of smoke.

Upon a rose-twig, a

T.

A drop of Dew gleamed

Like a tear in Nightingale's eye!

Chapter XIII

(9) It is a condensed

Wavelet of Smoke,

Endowed with a single Spark, *Sprung from the Furnace !

N.

drop of dew

Gleamed like the tear in a nightingale's eye:

It is a condensed wavelet of smoke,

Endowed with a single spark.

*This last line is a gratuitous addition on the original. Chapter XIV

(4) Sun and Moon were cast Like rue, on the Flame Of his Thought!

(10) The Brahmin laid the Seal Of Silence on his lips, And lent his ear

To the Sage's discourse:

Chapter XV

(32) Both, the royal Troops, And those of the Enemy, Are cloven in twain,

By the Sword of his Hunger!

Chapter XVI

(6) Since I am well-acquainted With the harmony of Life, I'll tell you what is the Secret Of Life !

(31) The Sheikh answered: “O unbelieving Muslim!

Sun and moon were cast like rue, on the flame of his thought.

The Brahmin laid the sea of silence on his lips,

And lent his ear to the Sage's discourse.

Both the royal troops and those of the enemy

Are cloven in twain by the sword of his hunger.

Since I am acquainted with the harmony of Life,

I will tell thee what is the secret of Life

The Sheikh answered, “O unbelieving

T.

This is Vision and Ecstasy !—What have you to do with it ?

Chapter XVII

(4) Its owner is exalted

Above “Hope” and “Fear”, And his hand is whiter

Than the Hand of Moses !

Chapter X VIII

(1) O You ! Who is like Soul

In the body of the Universe, You are our Soul, and yet you are
Ever fleeing from Us!

N,

Moslem,

This is vision and ecstasy: what have you to do with it?"

Its owner is exalted above hope and fear,

His hand is whiter than the hand of Moses!

O thou that art as the soul in the body of the universe,

Thou art our soul and thou art ever fleeing from us.

These are instances picked up at random from various parts of the book. They could be easily multiplied, but I refrain from adding to them for fear of overburdening this note. The discerning reader may draw his own inference from these tell-tale similarities. It would stretch the long arm of coincidence to breaking point if it is suggested that Mr Tariq shared with the late Professor Nicholson not only a common stock of English words but also his turn of phrase and style of expression.

Where Mr Tariq has departed from Professor Nicholson's version, the result is more often than not an unhappy reading. Here are some examples:

Prologue

(26) My Tune is more powerful

Than the capacity of the String

Of my Lute, yet I don't fear

If my Lute is broken!

(47) And set a high Price My song exceeds the range of the chord, Yet I do not fear that my lute will break. And sprinkle the dry

T.

*At the Pearls of Tears;

N. herbs with my tears.

*This is a translation of “r'5 yE; P ..r.I” which could be rendered as “And add my tears to my merchandise (or goods).”

(60) Strike the Tumult of Doomsday Upon your Liver !

Strike the chords of thine heart and rouse a tumultuous strain.

Mr Tariq has resorted to a too literal translation.

(80) I brought out the Almanac* Of Human Life,

From the Laboratory of Phenomena!

And extract the secret of

Life's constitution From the laboratory of

phenomena.

*The word in the original is “” which also means an almanac but here that equivalent would be clearly inappropriate.

Chapter I 1

(3) For “Self-affirmation” brings forth

The negative Self to Light !

“Negative-self” is an odd phrase to use for “ ” which occurs in the original.

(6) It carries and moves heavy weights

With the strength of its own Arm,'

That it may become conscious Of its own strength!

Mr Tariq has misread “Le” in the original text wrongly as “—”.

In the poem on Plato, Mr Tariq has translated the word “c.)4l” as “fantastic things,” whereas the 'Allāmah was clearly refer-ring to Plato's well-known theory of Ideas. Professor Nicholson

Self-affirmation brings Not-self to light.

It is slaying by the

strength of its arm That it may become

conscious of its own

strength.

had used “Ideas” as the equivalent of this word very appropriately.

In the headings of Chapters, the phrase << ,, repeatedly occurs. Mr Tariq translates it to “in the meaning of” instead of “showing” or “to the effect” as adopted by Professor Nicholson.

To be fair to Mr Tariq, I did land on one instance in which his difference from Professor Nicholson was eminently justified. The original verse (Asrār, p. 14) is:

“as I; L Unaccountably Professor Nicholson renders it as ;

“Power that is expressed and inert

Chains the faculties which lead to action.”

Mr Tariq has given a near accurate translation:

“It is a mute Power,

And is always restless for Action! And by “Action” it is bound To the means of Action”!

But this, like the proverbial solitary swallow, fails to betoken an intellectual summer. For a book of the character and antecedents outlined above, the price of the Publication is definitely on the high side.