

IQBAL'S ADAPTATION OF A MINOR POEM BY TENNYSON

Mohammad Ahmad Shamsi

Iqbal, the philosopher, the prophet of Ego, the critic of the West, the dreamer of Pakistan, the man who breathed a new life in the Muslims of the subcontinent, has cast such a spell on his critics and readers alike that Iqbal the great poet, the pure artist, the songster *par excellence*, has been relegated to the gloom of forgetfulness. That is why his rare poetic gifts, his unique artistry in coining new words and phrases, his imaginative flights into the realm of subtle thoughts and feelings, his wonderful transmutations of the dross of everyday experiences into things of matchless beauty have aroused little interest and received less attention. His admirers and critics are all the time so busy discussing the philosophy and the thought-content of his poems that they forget he was a poet first and last, that he became a legend in his own life-time and still reigns supreme over the hearts of his readers primarily because he is a past master of the art of clothing his thoughts and feelings in the garb of chiselled phrases and felicitous expressions.

What a great poet he is and how his mere touch works wonders with whatever he takes in his hands, can be seen in those poems of his first collection *Bāng-i Darā* which are acknowledged adapta of English poems. Within the framework of the original Poem he works like an inspired artist, bringing out into full play t is latent in it. He often makes alterations and additions of own, but they are always in complete harmony with and Present to greater advantage the meaning of the original poet. "Thus he often weaves into a finer fabric of Urdu verse what is Just a minor or even an insignificant poem in English.

The following poem of Tennyson is a composition of his under graduate days and it is published as part of his juvenilia on page 33 in *The Poems and Plays of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, by the Modern Library, New York:

Love and Death

What time the mighty moon was gathering light

Love paced the thy my plots of Paradise,

And all about him roll'd his lustrous eyes;
When, turning round a cassia, full in view,
Death, walking all alone, beneath a yew,
And talking to 'himself, first met his sight.
"You must be gone," said Death, "these walks are mine."
Love wept and spread his sheeny vans for flight;
Yet ere he parted said, "This hour is thine;
Thou art the shadow of life, and as the tree
Stands in the sun and shadows all beneath,
So in the light of great eternity
Life eminent creates the shadow of death:
The shadow passeth when the tree shall fall,
But I shall reign for ever over all."

In the poem Tennyson makes Love concede temporary victory) --rather temporal victory — to its adversary, but, with the help of a logical conceit, exposes the transitory and dependent nature of Death. The central idea of the poem is contained in Love's declaration of his ultimate triumph over Death, though at the moment the former is depicted as weeping and spreading "his sheen) vans for flight" from "the thy my plots of Paradise" which are claimed by the latter to be his own. This declaration is preceded by a brief description of the time when the moon was still gathering light, and Love met with Death that ordered him to be gone. He goes away but only after he has argued his case to his own satisfaction. According to his way of reasoning, Death is as unsubstantial and unreal as a shadow; it is caused by the sun of eternity shining on the tree of earthly life. When the tree is no more there, its shadow will automatically be extinct. And then Love shall dominate over all for ever.

This fifteen-line poem is woven round a poetic fancy, buttressed. by a logical conceit, a little tinged with myth and couched in an emotion-charged language. It bears obvious marks of shaky craftsmanship. "Thy my plots" and "sheeny vans" smack of oversweetness of expression and "beneath" is made

to rhyme with "Death". Besides, the dramatic element is confined to the moment when, "turning round a cassia," Death first meets Love's sight. To the former's one-line-long bragging of his authority the latter answers with his seven-line-long self-assertion. This is all the dialogue that there is in the poem. It is, therefore, little wonder why no critic or anthologist has ever taken any notice of this very small piece of Tennyson. Even Harold Nicolson, who speaks approvingly of a few other pieces of the poet's juvenilia, passes over "Love and Death" in silence.

Before answering the question why Iqbal should have been drawn towards the poem, let us see how he recasts it into the mould of Urdu. Its title is the only part of it which he retains in its original form in the Urdu adaptation which is published as poem number 27 on page 57 in the thirty-first edition of *Bāng-i Darā* by Sh. Ghulam Ali & Sons, Lahore.

Tennyson's first line "What time the mighty moon was gat h e ring light" is expanded by Iqbal into a full-fledged stanza of sixteen lines, each line describing a particular facet of the dawn of creation. The richness of the details is only matched by the suggestiveness of the symbolic activities singled out for specific mention. How each rift of the original line is loaded with the ore of pure poetry may perhaps be illustrated by the following English paraphrase of the first stanza of Iqbal's adaptation:

"As the bud of life started blossoming, the cosmos presented a happily busy scene in which every primary creation of God was being gifted with its most distinctive attribute. Here the sun was receiving its crown of light and there the moon was getting its coronet of moonlight. In one corner the evening was being dressed in its sable cloak while, in the other, the stars were being taught how to twinkle in the sky at night. Leaves and buds were sprouting on the tree of life and angels were instructing the dew how to shed tears in the early hours of the Morning. For the first time ever the rose was being tickled to smile ; heartache was being conferred on the poet and self-consciousness was thirsting for the wine of self-forgetfulness. As heralds of a brand new beginning dark clouds were gathering thick in the firmament as if a hourie were drying its tresses in the air. Drunk with the sense of its own beauty and grandeur, the earth claimed to rival the sky while the latter laid claims to be limitless."

This flowering of a single line of the original poem into a full length stanza in Urdu testifies to Iqbal's artistic joy in his creative power which turns eight words into sixteen lines of great poetic excellence. Besides, his creative ardour works another wonder as well: this first stanza, like the rest of the poem, has all the flavour of Oriental poetry, as all its images are traditional and yet sparkling new. Thus a typical Eastern framework has been provided within which a dramatic, though brief, scene is to be enacted on the stage of the newly created cosmos. However, all this enlargement is wholly attuned to the spirit of the original poem.

In Tennyson "Love" is just "Love," no matter what connotation a man, according to his predilection or fancy, may choose to read in the word, but in Iqbal it is an angel on whose guidance bank one and all, and who is presented as an embodiment of restlessness and avidity. In Tennyson Love asks Death no questions and timorously obeys his adversary when he is authoritatively and abruptly commanded to be gone. But in the Urdu version Love asks Death: "Who are you? You, that are an eye-sore to every looker-on, what are you after?" These questions and comments present Death in an unfavourable light, put it on the defensive and save Love from the ignominy of bursting into tears at the cruel words of his opponent, as he does in Tennyson. Here once again Iqbal expands a few words into a vigorous dialogue and a dramatic moment into a full-blooded dramatic scene.

In place of the single assertion of Death in Tennyson " You must be gone... these walks are mine," Iqbal makes Death speak out his mind in boastful words which, nevertheless, end with a confession, robbing him of all his imposing looks and showing him as the hollow mockery that he really is. In the vein of a true braggart he declares:

"I am the Angel of Death. My very name is enough to explain my function. I tear to pieces the garment of existence and with a single breath of mine the candle of life is snuffed out. My looks are killing in their effects: no sooner do I fix them on anyone than he breathes his last. But there is a being in the world over whom my sway does not extend and against whom I am quite impotent. I stand in the same relation to him as does quicksilver to the fire: I cannot but perish instantaneously in his presence. That being resides in the heart of man as the spark of life and he is the apple of the Eye of the Immanent Light. It

is he who makes man shed tears in silence and solitude —tears which are sweet in their bitterness."

As Death finishes his discourse Love's face is wreathed in smiles which strike the former as a thunder-bolt and burn him out of existence then and there. "How can darkness coexist with light?" says Iqbal in the concluding line of the poem. "As soon as Death realised that he was face to face with the Soul of Immortality, he faded into nothingness." This end of the poem is far more dramatic, convincing and effective than what we find in Tennyson.

As I have already pointed out, the adaptation is published as twenty-seventh poem in *Bang-i Darā*. At this stage "Love" in Iqbal's poetry has not taken on the richer, deeper and wider con-notation which it comes to have in the creations of his maturer days. But in the traditional Urdu poetry Love has always been eulogised as the Immortal Spirit. Iqbal, therefore, may have been attracted by Tennyson's poem as it afforded a beautiful illustration of what has been a platitude among Urdu and Persian classical poets. Once drawn towards it, the artist in Iqbal woke up to the fullest realisation of the delightful possibilities of letting his poetic imagination work on what he found implicit in it. This exercise in adaptation must have given great delight to our poet as is evident from the ingenuity and skill with which he has woven a fifteen-line juvenile piece into a poem of respectable length and great artistic worth.

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—Editor, Iqbal Review