

# MOHAMMAD IQBAL AND GERMANY

(A CORRESPONDENCE OF THE HEART)

BY: M.A.H. HOB OHM

It is well known that the poet and philosopher Mohammad Iqbal had a deep admiration for Germany, German thought and German poetry, and there are innumerable instances in his writings, poems, letters and in recorded conversations with him which indicate clearly that the works of German philosophers and poets have been a source of great inspiration to him.

Foremost among them was Goethe to whom he refers again and again, of whom he says, 'though not a prophet he has book, namely 'Faust' and whom he compares to Ghalib, the great poet of Urdu and Persian and to illustrious sage of the East, Maulana Jalalud -Din Rumi. In a poem in 'Payam-i-Mashriq' Iqbal imagines Goethe meeting Rumi in paradise and reciting Faust to him. Rumi listens and extols Goethe as one who has really understood the Great Secret. In bringing Goethe and Rumi together, Iqbal brought together not only two of the greatest spirits of the East and West, but also the two men who have influenced him more than anyone else in his career as a thinker and as a poet.

None other than Iqbal himself has told us so. In his preface to 'Payam-i-Mashriq', the book in which Iqbal's art probably reached the height of its power and perfection, he writes these lines: 'Payam-i-Mashriq owes its inspiration to the Western Divan of Goethe, the German 'Philosopher of Life', about which, Heine, the Israelite poet of Germany, says: "This is a nosegay presented by the West to the East as a token of high regard. This

Divan bears testimony to the fact that the West, being dissatisfied with its own spiritual life is turning to the bosom of the east in search of spiritual warmth.’

‘Payam-i-Mashriq’ is Iqbal’s response to Goethe’s ‘West- ostlicher Divan’, on the title page of which I should like to

recall to our memory Goethe had written in his own hand the following words in Arabic language and script: ‘Ad Divan

Sharqi lil Muallif il Gharbi’ An Eastern Divan by a Western Author.

Iqbal’s introduction to ‘Payam-i-Mashriq’ also contains a short but extremely interesting account of the ‘Oriental Movement’ in German literature. It serves to give us a glimpse of the extent of Iqbal’s contacts with German culture, just as his philosophical work, as for instance reflected in his ‘Six Lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam’ reveals his profound knowledge of and his deep admiration for German thought, in spite of his frequent differences with German thinker as for instance Nietzsche. Though Iqbal was a great admirer of Nietzsche, and there is much that they both had in common, observes Justice Javaid ‘Iqbal, the poet’s son, in an essay on ‘Iqbal and Nietzsche’ ‘there are fundamental differences between the two, namely their sources of inspiration and, basic to their whole concept of, and outlook on life, their conception of God.’

In an article, entitled ‘Conversations with Iqbal’) by Syed Nazir Niazi, a close friend of Iqbal, who has had extensive conversations with him, which he recorded from time to time, we have another treasure trove of information on Iqbal’s preoccupations with German culture and German thought. Again it is Goethe who figures most prominently in their conversations. Writes Niazi: ‘Perhaps what life needs most are men who can understand its ultimate purpose. Goethe was such a man and so was Iqbal. And it was Iqbal who turned our attention to Goethe. It is a remarkable

episode in our history that Iqbal alone should have resisted the force of a whole literature and culture, namely English, which was dominating our life through political control. It is a fact that we accepted Goethe rather than Shakespeare. Shakespeare is, no doubt, admired but Goethe is the favourite. Shakespeare is a unique artist whom we all recognize, but Goethe is one of us - who has secured a place in our heart. If we bear this point in mind, a glimpse of the perfect man or Vicegerent of God or mo'min or Man of Faith, and his character and disposition as conceived by Iqbal, is seen to some extent in Faust a creature of Goethe's thoughts, and not for instance in the superman of Nietzsche.

The sources from which we can glean information on Iqbal's connections and contacts with Germany and the instances in his writings where he expresses himself on her poets and the thinkers are numerous and manifold.

It is my privilege today to contribute to that material by presenting to the public, for the first time, a report on a collection of letters written by Iqbal which have an immediate and direct bearing on his connections with, by Iqbal to his German language tutor in Heidelberg, Miss Emma Wegenast. Letters and postcards of which I possess are photostat copies and some are originals.

The collection is a gift which Miss Wegenast, the recipient, made in the early sixties, shortly before her death, to the Pakistan-German Forum, a bilateral cultural association of which, at the time, the late Mr. Mumtaz Hasan was President and I had the honour to be its honorary General Secretary.

The Pakistan-German Forum, being an organisation whose aim was and is to promote and strengthen cultural relations between the two countries, was fully aware that Mohammad Iqbal is the greatest cultural link that exists between Germany and Pakistan. It was only natural, therefore, that when Mr. Mumtaz Hasan and I were invited to visit Germany in the summer of 1959

we made it a point not only to visit the cities and universities of Heidelberg and Munich where Iqbal had stayed and studied in 1905 and 1906 but to make every effort and attempt to trace any person still alive who had met Iqbal during his days in Germany.

It was in the pursuit of this aim that with the help of friends we were able to find and contact Miss Emma Wegenast to whom our attention had been drawn by references to her in Begum Atiya Fyzee's book on Iqbal.

Although we could not meet Miss Wegenast personally a correspondence developed between Mr. Mumtaz Hasan and her. As a result of this correspondence she made over to the Forum the letters with the request to pass them on to any archive in Pakistan where they could be accessible to scholars engaged in research into Iqbal's life and work. Mr. Mumtaz Hasan was kind enough to prepare for me a complete set of Photostat copies which he gave to me along with two original letters. Since I had to leave Pakistan on transfer soon after the letters had been received, I do not know their present whereabouts.

But before examining the letters further, let me return once again very briefly to our visit to Germany which yielded yet another fruit: we succeeded in persuading Inter Nations, a German organization founded in Bonn in 1952 to promote intercultural relations and contacts with other nations, to locate the original thesis submitted by Iqbal to the University of Munich for his Ph.D. and to have it copied for the Forum. The thesis was found and thanks to the late Dr. Richard Monnig, the Director of Inter Nations, who himself had taken a keen interest in Iqbal, some 30 photo mechanical reprints of the thesis were produced.

The thesis is preceded by a 'Lebenslauf', a curriculum vitae, presumably compiled by Iqbal himself, and signed by him, in which he gives his date of birth as the 3<sup>rd</sup> of Dhu Qa'd 1294 A.H., with the year 1876 in brackets. The method of calculation which led to this year of the Christian era was probably the one widely used by Orientalists in Germany and elsewhere at

that time. It follows the formula: year A.H. minus year A.H. divided by 33 plus 622 equals the year of the Christian era.

The thesis was submitted with the approval of Professor Dr. Friedrich Hommel, Iqbal's supervisor or doctor-father as he is called in Germany, the Faculty of Philosophy, Section I (respectively II) of the Ludwig- Maximilians University at Munich. It was published in London in 1908 by Luzac & Co., and was printed by E.J. Brill of Leiden in Holland. I should like to add the remark that at the time when Iqbal obtained his degree in Munich it was quite customary, even obligatory at German universities to submit Ph.D.-Theses, or 'Inaugural Dissertation' as they are called in German, in print, and in a set fairly large number of copies to be distributed to important libraries and relevant research Centres in the country and abroad.

But let me now turn to the letters. They are altogether 27 in number including two postcards. They cover two distinct periods, namely the year from 1907 to the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 and the years from 1931 to 1933. The long silence between these periods is only interrupted once by a letter written in 1919.

There is every possibility that I may have lost some of my photostat copies in the course of several moves from one continent to another and that the original collection is larger than mine. I have a faint recollection that there were altogether more than 40 letters plus some photographs.

As I already mentioned, the person to whom the letters were addressed is Miss Emma Wegenast. She was Iqbal's German Language tutor in Heidelberg at the 'Pension Scherer' one of those highly respectable boarding houses for students so common in German university towns before the advent of the students hostel towerblocks.

'Pension Scherer', or the Heidelberg School, as Iqbal calls it is one of his letters, seems to have been a boarding house mainly for foreign students, which explains the tutorial facilities. Fraulein Wegenast was in her twenties

when she and Iqbal met, and we have it on the authority of Begum Atiya Fyzee that she was a very beautiful and highly accomplished and polished young lady.

Iqbal was very fond of her there is no doubt about that but as the letters reveal, it was a pure and innocent fondness. I have the feeling when reading the letters, that to Iqbal Fraulein Emma Wegenast was the embodiment of all that he loved and respected, of all that he was so strongly attracted by, in German culture, in German thought, in German literature, perhaps in German life as a whole.

Iqbal addresses her throughout very formally as 'Mein liebes Fraulein Wegenast' or 'My dear Fraulein Wegenast', with only the 'Mein' hinting at his fondness for her. But it is fondness coupled with respect, for in all the letters written in German, and they all belong to the first period then his memories of her were the freshest and his feelings for her must have been the strongest, he always uses the formal and respectful 'Sie' in addressing her, not once lapsing into the intimate 'Du'.

The letters do not reveal anything sensational. They are rather ordinary letters as any two friends would exchange among themselves: no deep thoughts, no poetry, and yet they answer some of the questions about Iqbal which were still open and they certainly throw further light on Iqbal's feelings for my country.

The first question answered is the one posed by Syed Nazir Niazi in his essay on his conversations with Iqbal when he writes: 'I had always been curious to find out how far Iqbal had studied the German language ... I personally believe he had made a deep and penetrating study of German literature in original. He must have been well-versed in the German language. But he never used any German word in his conversations, not even at the time when his children were under the care of a German governess who lived in his house.'

Well, the letters certainly provide an answer to this question. All his letters written before the outbreak of the Great War except two are written in German. And although Iqbal complains in them time and again about severe shortcomings in his knowledge of that language and of his inability to express himself in the way he would like to, even apologizing for insulting the reader by his 'schlechte Deutsch', his bad German, I can only say that when Iqbal does so, he is much too modest. I find it remarkable how well he expresses himself in that language, a language after all, in which he has had tuition for only a relatively short time. No, he knew German alright, as the letters reveal, though in later years his active knowledge of that language must have progressively faded away, and quite understandably so.

In his first detailed letter after his return to his native country, dated Lahore, 11th January 1909, he gives a very lucid and fluent account in German of the overwhelming welcome accorded to him by his countrymen.

As a by-product, so to say, the letters yield another and hitherto unknown piece of information: the addresses at which Iqbal stayed in London in 1908 and again in 1931 and 1932 when he attended the Round Table Conferences. They are 49, Elsham Road in Kensington in 1908, 113 A St. James Court, Buckingham Gate in 1931, and lastly Queen Anne's Mansion, St. James Park in 1932. Now that these addresses are known the Buildings Advisory Committee of the Greater London Council should be requested to put up a blue plaque at one of these addresses, in commemoration of him, who is one of the greatest sons of Pakistan, if not the greatest.

However much I should like to do so, the -time at my disposal today does not permit me to quote extensively from the letters. I feel, however, that I owe it to you to read out one passage at least which is particularly expressive:

On receipt of the news that Fraulein Wegenasts' father had died, he sent her the following message of condolence:

‘Dear Miss Wegenast,

I am extremely sorry to hear the sad news of your father’s death; and though my letter must reach you a good many days after this sad event, yet neither time nor distance can make my sympathy with you in your bereavement any the less warm. The news has pained me very much indeed, and I pray that Almighty God may be pleased to shower his choicest blessings on the venerable old man, and to give you strength to endure your sorrow. ‘Verily we are for God and to God we return.’ This is the sacred text that we recite when we hear the news of death. And I recited this verse over and over again on reading your painful letter. Such events though, do happen in everybody’s life, and we must meet our troubles like those who left us their lives to imitate. You remember that Goethe said in the moment of his death

‘More Light!’. Death opens up the way to more light and carries us to those regions where we stand face to face with eternal Beauty and Truth. I remember the time when I read Goethe’s poems with you, and I hope you also remember those happy days when we were so near to each other so much so that I spiritually share in your sorrow. Please write to me when you feel inclined to do so. I wish I had been in Germany to convey my sympathy to you personally. May God be with you.

Yours ever,

Mohammad Iqbal.’

‘I remember the time when I read Goethe’s poems with you, and I hope you also remember those happy days when we were so near to each other spiritually speaking’. Here it is: Fraulein Wegenast, that is Goethe and Heine and Kant and Schopenhauer, it is Heidelberg, the Neckar, Germany it is those happy days! And that is the leitmotif of Iqbal letters to Emma Wegenast. ‘My body is here, my thoughts are in Germany’. ‘It is impossible for me to forget your beautiful country where I have learned so much’. ‘My



stay in Heidelberg is nothing now but a beautiful dream. How I'd wish I could repeat it!" I am very fond of Germany. It has had a great influence on my ideals, and I shall never forget my stay in that country.' 'Never shall I forget the days I spent at Heidelberg when you taught me Goethe's Faust and helped me in many ways. Those were happy days indeed'. 'I'd wish I could see you once more at Heidelberg or Heilbronn whence we shall together make a pilgrimage to the sacred grave of the great master Goethe.' 'The other day I was reading Heine, and I thought of the happy days when we read the poet together.'

And a final quotation: 'Germany was a kind of second home to my spirit. I learned much and I thought much in that country. The home of Goethe had found a permanent place in my soul.'

Yes indeed! the *Wegenast*, that is Goethe and Heine, Kant and Schopenhauer, Heidelberg, the Neckar, Germany, those happy days. And those happy days, Germany, the Neckar, Heidelberg, Schopenhauer and Kant, Heine and Goethe that to Iqbal was *Fraulein Wegenast*, as this correspondence not of the mind, not of the intellect but of the heart reveals.