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INTRODUCTION

THE title of this book sufficiently explains why it is included in a Series 'exemplifying the adventures and labours of individual seekers or groups of seekers in quest of reality.' Sufism, the religious philosophy of Islam, is described in the oldest extant definition as 'the apprehension of divine realities,' and Mohammedan mystics are fond of calling themselves *Ahl al-Haqq*, 'the followers of the Real.' {*Al-Haqq* is the term generally used by Sufis when they refer to God.} In attempting to set forth their central doctrines from this point of view, I shall draw to some extent on materials which I have collected during the last twenty years for a general history of Islamic mysticism--a subject so vast and many-sided that several large volumes would be required to do it anything like justice. Here I can only sketch

in broad outline certain principles, methods, and characteristic features of the inner life as it has been lived by Moslems of every class and condition from the eighth century of our era to the present day. Difficult are the paths which they threaded, dark and bewildering the pathless heights beyond; but even if we may not hope to accompany the travellers to their journey's end, any information that we have gathered concerning their religious environment and spiritual history will help us to understand the strange experiences of which they write.

In the first place, therefore, I propose to offer a few remarks on the origin and historical development of Sufism, its relation to Islam, and its general character. Not only are these matters interesting to the student of comparative religion; some knowledge of them is indispensable to any serious student of Sufism itself. It may be said, truly enough, that all mystical experiences ultimately meet in a single point; but that point assumes widely different aspects according to the mystic's religion, race, and temperament, while the converging lines of approach admit of almost infinite variety. Though all the great types of mysticism have something in common, each is marked by peculiar characteristics resulting from the circum-

stances in which it arose and flourished. Just as the Christian type cannot be understood without reference to Christianity, so the Mohammedan type must be viewed in connexion with the outward and inward development of Islam.

The word 'mystic,' which has passed from Greek religion into European literature, is represented in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, the three chief languages of Islam, by 'Sufi.' The terms, however, are not precisely synonymous, for 'Sufi' has a specific religious connotation, and is restricted by usage to those mystics who profess the Mohammedan faith. And the Arabic word, although in course of time it appropriated the high significance of the Greek--lips sealed by holy mysteries, eyes closed in visionary rapture--bore a humbler meaning when it first gained currency (about 800 A.D.). Until recently its derivation was in dispute. Most Sufis, flying in the face of etymology, have derived it from an Arabic root which conveys the notion of 'purity'; this would make 'Sufi' mean 'one who is pure in heart' or 'one of the elect.' Some European scholars identified it with «*sophós*» in the sense of 'theosophist.' But Nöldeke, in an article written twenty years ago, showed conclusively that the name was derived from *suf* (wool), and was originally applied to those Moslem

ascetics who, in imitation of Christian hermits, clad themselves in coarse woollen garb as a sign of penitence and renunciation of worldly vanities.

The earliest Sufis were, in fact, ascetics and quietists rather than mystics. An overwhelming consciousness of sin, combined with a dread--which it is hard for us to realise--of Judgment Day and the torments of Hell-fire, so vividly painted in the Koran, drove them to seek salvation in flight from the world. On the other hand, the Koran warned them that salvation depended entirely on the inscrutable will of Allah, who guides aright the good and leads astray the wicked. Their fate was inscribed on the eternal tables of His providence, nothing could alter it. Only this was sure, that if they were destined to be saved by fasting and praying and pious

works--then they would be saved. Such a belief ends naturally in quietism, complete and unquestioning submission to the divine will, an attitude characteristic of Sufism in its oldest form. The mainspring of Moslem religious life during the eighth century was fear--fear of God, fear of Hell, fear of death, fear of sin--but the opposite motive had already begun to make its influence felt, and produced in the saintly woman Rabi'a at least one conspicuous example of truly mystical self-abandonment.

* * *

So far, there was no great difference between the Sufi and the orthodox Mohammedan zealot, except that the Sufis attached extraordinary importance to certain Koranic doctrines, and developed them at the expense of others which many Moslems might consider equally essential. It must also be allowed that the ascetic movement was inspired by Christian ideals, and contrasted sharply with the active and pleasure-loving spirit of Islam. In a famous sentence the Prophet denounced monkish austerities and bade his people devote themselves to the holy war against unbelievers; and he gave, as is well known, the most convincing testimony in favour of marriage. Although his condemnation of celibacy did not remain without effect, the conquest of Persia, Syria, and Egypt by his successors brought the Moslems into contact with ideas which profoundly modified their outlook on life and religion. European readers of the Koran cannot fail to be struck by its author's vacillation and inconsistency in dealing with the greatest problems. He himself was not aware of these contradictions, nor were they a stumbling-block to his devout followers, whose simple faith accepted the Koran as the Word of God. But the rift was there, and soon produced far-reaching results.

Hence arose the Murjites, who set faith

above works and emphasised the divine love and goodness; the Qadarites who affirmed, and the Jabarites who denied, that men are responsible for their actions; the Mu'tazilites, who built a theology on the basis of reason, rejecting the qualities of Allah as incompatible with His unity, and predestinarianism as contrary to His justice; and finally the Ash'arites, the scholastic theologians of Islam, who formulated the rigid metaphysical and doctrinal system that underlies the creed of orthodox Mohammedans at the present time. All these speculations, influenced as they were by Greek theology and philosophy, reacted powerfully upon Sufism. Early in the third century of the Hegira--the ninth after Christ--we find manifest signs of the new leaven stirring within it. Not that Sufis ceased to mortify the flesh and take pride in their poverty, but they now began to regard asceticism as only the

first stage of a long journey, the preliminary training for a larger spiritual life than the mere ascetic is able to conceive. The nature of the change may be illustrated by quoting a few sentences which have come down to us from the mystics of this period.

"Love is not to be learned from men: it is one of God's gifts and comes of His grace."

"None refrains from the lusts of this world save him in whose heart there is a light that keeps him always busied with the next world."

"When the gnostic's spiritual eye is opened, his bodily eye is shut: he sees nothing but God."

"If gnosis were to take visible shape all who looked thereon would die at the sight of its beauty and loveliness and goodness and grace, and every brightness would become dark beside the splendour thereof." {Compare Plato, Phædrus (Jowett's translation): "For sight is the keenest of our bodily senses; though not by that is wisdom seen; her loveliness would have been transporting if there had been a visible image of her." }

"Gnosis is nearer to silence than to speech."

"When the heart weeps because it has lost, the spirit laughs because it has found."

"Nothing sees God and dies, even as nothing sees God and lives, because His life is everlasting: whoever sees it is thereby made everlasting."

"O God, I never listen to the cry of animals or to the quivering of trees or to the murmuring of water or to the warbling of birds or to the rustling wind or to the crashing thunder without feeling them to be an evidence of Thy unity and a proof that there is nothing like unto Thee."

* * *

"O my God, I invoke Thee in public as lords are invoked, but in private as loved ones are invoked. Publicly I say, 'O my God!' but privately I say, 'O my Beloved!'"

These ideas--Light, Knowledge, and Love--form, as it were, the keynotes of the new Sufism, and in the following chapters I shall endeavour to show how they were developed. Ultimately they rest upon a pantheistic faith which deposed the One transcendent God of Islam and worshipped in His stead One Real Being who dwells and works everywhere, and whose throne is not less, but more, in the human heart than in the heaven of heavens. Before going further, it will be convenient to answer a question which the reader may have asked himself--Whence did the Moslems of the ninth century derive this doctrine?

Modern research has proved that the origin of Sufism cannot be traced back to a single definite cause, and has thereby discredited the sweeping generalisations

which represent it, for instance, as a reaction of the Aryan mind against a conquering Semitic religion, and as the product, essentially, of Indian or Persian thought. Statements of this kind, even when they are partially true, ignore the principle that in order to establish an historical connexion between A and B, it is not enough to bring

forward evidence of their likeness to one another, without showing at the same time (1) that the actual relation of B to A was such as to render the assumed filiation possible, and (2) that the possible hypothesis fits in with all the ascertained and relevant facts. Now, the theories which I have mentioned do not satisfy these conditions. If Sufism was nothing but a revolt of the Aryan spirit, how are we to explain the undoubted fact that some of the leading pioneers of Mohammedan mysticism were natives of Syria and Egypt, and Arabs by race? Similarly, the advocates of a Buddhistic or Vedantic origin forget that the main current of Indian influence upon Islamic civilisation belongs to a later epoch, whereas Moslem theology, philosophy, and science put forth their first luxuriant shoots on a soil that was saturated with Hellenistic culture. The truth is that Sufism is a complex thing, and therefore no simple answer can be given to the question how it originated. We shall have gone far, however, towards answering that question when we have distinguished the various movements and forces which moulded Sufism, and determined what direction it should take in the early stages of its growth.

Let us first consider the most important external, *i.e.* non-Islamic, influences.

I. CHRISTIANITY

It is obvious that the ascetic and quietistic tendencies to which I have referred were in harmony with Christian theory and drew nourishment therefrom. Many Gospel texts and apocryphal sayings of Jesus are cited in the oldest Sufi biographies, and the Christian anchorite (*rahib*) often appears in the rôle of a teacher giving instruction and advice to wandering Moslem ascetics. We have seen that the woollen dress, from which the name 'Sufi' is derived, is of Christian origin: vows of silence, litanies (*dhikr*), and other ascetic practices may be traced to the same source. As regards the doctrine of divine love, the following extracts speak for themselves:

"Jesus passed by three men. Their bodies were lean and their faces pale. He asked them, saying, 'What hath brought you to this plight?' They answered, 'Fear of the Fire.' Jesus said, 'Ye fear a thing created, and it behoves God that He should save those who fear.' Then he left them and passed by three others, whose faces were

paler and their bodies leaner, and asked them, saying, 'What hath brought you to this plight?' They answered, 'Longing for Paradise.' He said, 'Ye desire a thing created, and it behoves God that He should give you that which ye hope for.' Then he went on and passed by three others of exceeding paleness and leanness, so that their faces were as mirrors of light, and he said, 'What hath brought you to this?' They answered, 'Our love of God.' Jesus said, 'Ye are the nearest to Him, ye are the nearest to Him.'"

The Syrian mystic, Ahmad ibn al-Hawari, once asked a Christian hermit:

"'What is the strongest command that ye find in your Scriptures?' The hermit replied: 'We find none stronger than this: "Love thy Creator with all thy power and might.'"

Another hermit was asked by some Moslem ascetics:

"'When is a man most persevering in devotion?' 'When love takes possession of his heart,' was the reply; 'for then he hath no joy or pleasure but in continual devotion.'"

The influence of Christianity through its hermits, monks, and heretical sects (*e.g.* the Messalians or Euchitæ) was twofold: ascetic and mystical. Oriental Christian mysticism, however, contained a Pagan element: it had long ago absorbed the ideas and adopted the language of Plotinus and the Neo-platonic school.

II. NEOPLATONISM

Aristotle, not Plato, is the dominant figure in Moslem philosophy, and few Mohammedans are familiar with the name of Plotinus, who was more commonly called 'the Greek Master' (*al-Sheykh al-Yaunani*). But since the Arabs gained their first knowledge of Aristotle from his Neoplatonist commentators, the system with which they became imbued was that of Porphyry and Proclus. Thus the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, of which an Arabic version appeared in the ninth century, is actually a manual of Neoplatonism.

Another work of this school deserves particular notice: I mean the writings falsely attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite, the convert of St. Paul. The pseudo-Dionysius--he may have been a Syrian monk--names as his teacher a certain Hierotheus, whom Frothingham has identified with Stephen Bar Sudaili, a prominent Syrian gnostic and a contemporary of Jacob of Saruj (451-521 A.D.). Dionysius quotes some fragments of erotic hymns by this Stephen, and a complete

work, the *Book of Hierotheus on the Hidden Mysteries of the Divinity*, has come down to us in a unique manuscript which is now in the British Museum. The Dionysian writings, turned into Latin by John Scotus Erigena,

founded medieval Christian mysticism in Western Europe. Their influence in the East was hardly less vital. They were translated from Greek into Syriac almost immediately on their appearance, and their doctrine was vigorously propagated by commentaries in the same tongue. "About 850 A.D. Dionysius was known from the Tigris to the Atlantic."

Besides literary tradition there were other channels by which the doctrines of emanation, illumination, gnosis, and ecstasy were transmitted, but enough has been said to convince the reader that Greek mystical ideas were in the air and easily accessible to the Moslem inhabitants of Western Asia and Egypt, where the Sufi theosophy first took shape. One of those who bore the chief part in its development, Dhu 'l-Nun the Egyptian, is described as a philosopher and alchemist--in other words, a student of Hellenistic science. When it is added that much of his speculation agrees with what we find, for example, in the writings of Dionysius, we are drawn irresistibly to the conclusion (which, as I have pointed out, is highly probable on general grounds) that Neoplatonism poured into Islam a large tincture of the same mystical element in which Christianity was already steeped.

III. GNOSTICISM

{Cf. Goldziher, "Neuplatonische und gnostische Elemente im Hadit," in *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, xxii. 317 ff.}

Though little direct evidence is available, the conspicuous place occupied by the theory of gnosis in early Sufi speculation suggests contact with Christian Gnosticism, and it is worth noting that the parents of Ma'ruf al-Karkhi, whose definition of Sufism as 'the apprehension of divine realities' was quoted on the first page of this Introduction, are said to have been Sabians, *i.e.* Mandæans, dwelling in the Babylonian fenland between Basra and Wasit. Other Moslem saints had learned 'the mystery of the Great Name.' It was communicated to Ibrahim ibn Adham by a man whom he met while travelling in the desert, and as soon as he pronounced it he saw the prophet Khadir (Elias). The ancient Sufis borrowed from the Manichæans the term *siddiq*, which they apply to their own spiritual adepts, and a later school, returning to the dualism of Mani, held the view that the diversity of phenomena arises from the admixture of light and darkness.

"The ideal of human action is freedom from the taint of darkness; and the freedom of light from darkness means the self-consciousness of light as light." {Shaikh Muhammad Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* (1908), p. 150.}

The following version of the doctrine of the seventy thousand veils as explained by a modern Rifa'i dervish shows clear traces of Gnosticism and is so interesting that I cannot refrain from quoting it here:

"Seventy Thousand Veils separate Allah, the One Reality, from the world of matter and of sense. And every soul passes before his birth through these seventy thousand. The inner half of these are veils of light: the outer half, veils of darkness. For every one of the veils of light passed through, in this journey towards birth, the soul puts *off* a divine quality: and for every one of the dark veils, it puts *on* an earthly quality. Thus the child is born *weeping*, for the soul knows its separation from Allah, the One Reality. And when the child cries in its sleep, it is because the soul remembers something of what it has lost. Otherwise, the passage through the veils has brought with it forgetfulness (*nisyan*): and for this reason man is called *insan*. He is now, as it were, in prison in his body, separated by these thick curtains from Allah.

* * *

"But the whole purpose of Sufism, the Way of the dervish, is to give him an escape from this prison, an apocalypse of the Seventy Thousand Veils, a recovery of the original unity with The One, *while still in this body*. The body is not to be put off; it is to be refined and made spiritual--a help and not a hindrance to the spirit. It is like a metal that has to be refined by fire and transmuted. And the sheikh tells the aspirant that he has the secret of this transmutation. 'We shall throw you into the fire of Spiritual Passion,' he says, 'and you will emerge refined.'" {"*The Way*" of a *Mohammedan Mystic*, by W. H. T. Gairdner (Leipzig, 1912), pp. 9 f.}

IV. BUDDHISM

Before the Mohammedan conquest of India in the eleventh century, the teaching of Buddha exerted considerable influence in Eastern Persia and Transoxania. We hear of flourishing Buddhist monasteries in Balkh, the metropolis of ancient Bactria, a city famous for the number of Sufis who resided in it. Professor Goldziher has called attention to the significant circumstance that the Sufi ascetic, Ibrahim ibn Adham, appears in Moslem legend as a prince of Balkh who abandoned his throne and

became a wandering dervish--the story of Buddha over again. The Sufis learned the use of rosaries from Buddhist monks, and, without entering into details, it may be safely asserted that the method of Sufism, so far as it is one of ethical self-culture, ascetic meditation, and intellectual abstraction, owes a good deal to Buddhism. But the features which the two systems have in common only accentuate the fundamental difference between them. In spirit they are poles apart. The Buddhist moralises himself, the Sufi becomes moral only through knowing and loving God.

The Sufi conception of the passing-away (*fana*) of individual self in Universal Being is certainly, I think, of Indian origin. Its first great exponent was the Persian mystic, Bayazid of Bistam, who may have received it from his teacher, Abu 'Ali of Sind (Scinde). Here are some of his sayings:

"Creatures are subject to changing 'states,' but the gnostic has no 'state,' because his vestiges are effaced and his essence annihilated by the essence of another, and his traces are lost in another's traces."

"Thirty years the high God was my mirror, now I am my own mirror," *i.e.* according to the explanation given by his biographer, "that which I was I am no more, for 'I' and 'God' is a denial of the unity of God. Since I am no more, the high God is His own mirror."
"I went from God to God, until they cried from me in me, 'O Thou I!'"

This, it will be observed, is not Buddhism, but the pantheism of the Vedanta. We cannot identify *fana* with Nirvana unconditionally. Both terms imply the passing-away of individuality, but while Nirvana is purely negative, *fana* is accompanied by *baqa*, everlasting life in God. The rapture of the Sufi who has lost himself in ecstatic contemplation of the divine beauty is entirely opposed to the passionless intellectual serenity of the Arahant. I emphasise this contrast because, in my opinion, the influence of Buddhism on Mohammedan thought has been exaggerated. Much is attributed to Buddhism that is Indian rather than specifically Buddhist: the *fana* theory of the Sufis is a case in point. Ordinary Moslems held the followers of Buddha in abhorrence, regarding them as idolaters, and were not likely to seek personal intercourse with them. On the other hand, for nearly a thousand years before the Mohammedan conquest, Buddhism had been powerful in Bactria and Eastern Persia generally: it must, therefore, have affected the development of Sufism in these regions.

While *fana* in its pantheistic form is

radically different from Nirvana, the terms coincide so closely in other ways that we cannot regard them as being altogether unconnected. *Fana* has an ethical aspect: it involves the extinction of all passions and desires. The passing-away of evil qualities and of the evil actions which they produce is said to be brought about by the continuance of the corresponding good qualities and actions. Compare this with the definition of Nirvana given by Professor Rhys Davids:

"The extinction of that sinful, grasping condition of mind and heart, which would otherwise, according to the great mystery of Karma, be the cause of renewed individual existence. That extinction is to be brought about by, and runs parallel with, the growth of the opposite condition of mind and heart; and it is complete when that opposite condition is reached."

Apart from the doctrine of Karma, which is alien to Sufism, these definitions of *fana* (viewed as a moral state) and Nirvana, agree almost word for word. It would be out of place to pursue the comparison further, but I think we may conclude that the Sufi theory of *fana* was influenced to some extent by Buddhism as well as by Perso-Indian pantheism.

The receptivity of Islam to foreign ideas has been recognised by every unbiassed inquirer, and the history of Sufism is only a single instance of the general rule. But this fact should not lead us to seek in such ideas an explanation of the whole question which I am now discussing, or to identify Sufism itself with the extraneous ingredients which it absorbed and assimilated in the course of its development. Even if Islam had been miraculously shut off from contact with foreign religions and philosophies, some form of mysticism would have arisen within it, for the seeds were already there. Of course, we cannot isolate the internal forces working in this direction, since they were subject to the law of spiritual gravitation. The powerful currents of thought discharged through the Mohammedan world by the great non-Islamic systems above mentioned gave a stimulus to various tendencies within Islam which affected Sufism either positively or negatively. As we have seen, its oldest type is an ascetic revolt against luxury and worldliness; later on, the prevailing rationalism and scepticism provoked counter-movements towards intuitive knowledge and emotional faith, and also an orthodox reaction which in its turn drove many earnest Moslems into the ranks of the mystics.

How, it may be asked, could a religion founded on the simple and austere monotheism of Mohammed tolerate these new

doctrines, much less make terms with them? It would seem impossible to reconcile the transcendent personality of Allah with an immanent Reality which is the very life and soul of the universe. Yet Islam has accepted Sufism. The Sufis, instead of being excommunicated, are securely established in the Mohammedan church, and the *Legend of the Moslem Saints* records the wildest excesses of Oriental pantheism.

Let us return for a moment to the Koran, that infallible touchstone by which every Mohammedan theory and practice must be proved. Are any germs of mysticism to be found there? The Koran, as I have said, starts with the notion of Allah, the One, Eternal, and Almighty God, far above human feelings and aspirations--the Lord of His slaves, not the Father of His children; a judge meting out stern justice to sinners, and extending His mercy only to those who avert His wrath by repentance, humility, and unceasing works of devotion; a God of fear rather than of love. This is one side, and certainly the most prominent side, of Mohammed's teaching; but while he set an impassable gulf between the world and Allah, his deeper instinct craved a direct revelation from God to the soul. There are no contradictions in the logic of feeling. Mohammed, who had in him something of the mystic, felt God both as far and

near, both as transcendent and immanent. In the latter aspect, Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth, a Being who works in the world and in the soul of man.

"If My servants ask thee about Me, lo, I am near" ([Kor. 2.182](#)); "We (God) are nearer to him than his own neck-vein" ([50.15](#)); "And in the earth are signs to those of real faith, and in yourselves. What! do ye not see?" ([51.20-21](#)).

It was a long time ere they saw. The Moslem consciousness, haunted by terrible visions of the wrath to come, slowly and painfully awoke to the significance of those liberating ideas.

The verses which I have quoted do not stand alone, and however unfavourable to mysticism the Koran as a whole may be, I cannot assent to the view that it supplies no basis for a mystical interpretation of Islam. This was worked out in detail by the Sufis, who dealt with the Koran in very much the same way as Philo treated the Pentateuch. But they would not have succeeded so thoroughly in bringing over the mass of religious Moslems to their side, unless the champions of orthodoxy had set about constructing a system of scholastic philosophy that reduced the divine nature to a purely formal, changeless, and absolute unity, a bare will devoid of all affections

and emotions, a tremendous and incalculable power with which no human creature could have any communion or personal intercourse whatsoever. That is the God of Mohammedan theology. That was the alternative to Sufism. Therefore, "all thinking, religious Moslems are mystics," as Professor D. B. Macdonald, one of our best authorities on the subject, has remarked. And he adds: "All, too, are pantheists, but some do not know it."

The relation of individual Sufis to Islam varies from more or less entire conformity to a merely nominal profession of belief in Allah and His Prophet. While the Koran and the Traditions are generally acknowledged to be the unalterable standard of religious truth, this acknowledgment does not include the recognition of any external authority which shall decide what is orthodox and what is heretical. Creeds and catechisms count for nothing in the Sufi's estimation. Why should he concern himself with these when he possesses a doctrine derived immediately from God? As he reads the Koran with studious meditation and rapt attention, lo, the hidden meanings--infinite, inexhaustible--of the Holy Word flash upon his inward eye. This is what the Sufis call *istinbat*, a sort of intuitive deduction; the mysterious inflow of divinely revealed knowledge into hearts made pure

by repentance and filled with the thought of God, and the outflow of that knowledge upon the interpreting tongue. Naturally, the doctrines elicited by means of *istinbat* do not agree very well either with Mohammedan theology or with each other, but the discord is easily explained. Theologians, who interpret the letter, cannot be expected to reach the same conclusions as mystics, who interpret the spirit; and if both classes differ amongst themselves, that is a merciful dispensation of divine wisdom, since theological controversy serves to extinguish religious error, while the variety of mystical truth corresponds to the manifold degrees and modes of mystical experience.

In the chapter on the gnosis I shall enter more fully into the attitude of the Sufis towards positive religion. It is only a rough-and-ready account of the matter to say that many of them have been good Moslems, many scarcely Moslems at all, and a third party, perhaps the largest, Moslems after a fashion. During the early Middle Ages Islam was a growing organism, and gradually became transformed under the influence of diverse movements, of which Sufism itself was one. Mohammedan orthodoxy in its present shape owes much to Ghazali, and Ghazali was a Sufi. Through his work and example the Sufistic inter-

pretation of Islam has in no small measure been harmonised with the rival claims of reason and tradition, but just because of this he is less valuable than mystics of a purer type to the student who wishes to know what Sufism essentially is.

Although the numerous definitions of Sufism which occur in Arabic and Persian books on the subject are historically interesting, their chief importance lies in showing that Sufism is undefinable. Jalaluddin Rumi in his *Masnavi* tells a story about an elephant which some Hindoos were exhibiting in a dark room. Many people gathered to see it, but, as the place was too dark to permit them to see the elephant, they all felt it with their hands, to gain an idea of what it was like. One felt its trunk, and said that the animal resembled a water-pipe; another felt its ear, and said it must be a large fan; another its leg, and thought it must be a pillar; another felt its back, and declared that the beast must be like an immense throne. So it is with those who define Sufism: they can only attempt to express what they themselves have felt, and there is no conceivable formula that will comprise every shade of personal and intimate religious feeling. Since, however, these definitions illustrate with convenient brevity certain aspects and characteristics of Sufism, a few specimens may be given.

* * *

"Sufism is this: that actions should be passing over the Sufi (*i.e.* being done upon him) which are known to God only, and that he should always be with God in a way that is known to God only."

"Sufism is wholly self-discipline."

"Sufism is, to possess nothing and to be possessed by nothing."

"Sufism is not a system composed of rules or sciences but a moral disposition; *i.e.* if it were a rule, it could be made one's own by strenuous exertion, and if it were a science, it could be acquired by instruction; but on the contrary it is a disposition, according to the saying, 'Form yourselves on the moral nature of God'; and the moral nature of God cannot be attained either by means of rules or by means of sciences."

"Sufism is freedom and generosity and absence of self-constraint."

"It is this: that God should make thee die to thyself and should make thee live in Him."

"To behold the imperfection of the phenomenal world, nay, to close the eye to everything imperfect in contemplation of Him who is remote from all imperfection--that is Sufism."

"Sufism is control of the faculties and observance of the breaths."

* * *

"It is Sufism to put away what thou hast in thy head, to give what thou hast in thy hand, and not to recoil from whatsoever befalls thee."

The reader will perceive that Sufism is a word uniting many divergent meanings, and that in sketching its main features one is obliged to make a sort of composite portrait, which does not represent any particular type exclusively. The Sufis are not a sect, they have no dogmatic system, the *tariqas* or paths by which they seek God "are in number as the souls of men" and vary infinitely, though a family likeness may be traced in them all. Descriptions of such a Protean phenomenon must differ widely from one another, and the impression produced in each case will depend on the choice of materials and the prominence given to this or that aspect of the many-sided whole. Now, the essence of Sufism is best displayed in its extreme type, which is pantheistic and speculative rather than ascetic or devotional. This type, therefore, I have purposely placed in the foreground. The advantage of limiting the field is obvious enough, but entails some loss of proportion. In order to form a fair judgment of Mohammedan mysticism, the following chapters should be supplemented by a companion picture drawn especially from those moderate types which, for want of space, I have unduly neglected.

CHAPTER I

THE PATH

MYSTICS of every race and creed have described the progress of the spiritual life as a Journey or a pilgrimage. Other symbols have been used for the same purpose, but this one appears to be almost universal in its range. The Sufi who sets out to seek God calls himself a 'traveller' (*salik*); he advances by slow 'stages' (*maqamat*) along a 'path' (*tariqat*) to the goal of union with Reality (*fana fi 'l-Haqq*). Should he venture to make a map of this interior ascent, it will not correspond exactly with any of those made by previous explorers. Such maps or scales of perfection were elaborated by Sufi teachers at an early period, and the unlucky Moslem habit of systematising has produced an enormous aftercrop. The 'path' expounded by the author of the *Kitab al-Luma'*, perhaps the oldest comprehensive treatise on Sufism that we now possess, consists of the following seven 'stages', each of which (except the first member of the series) is the result of the 'stages' immediately

preceding it--(1) Repentance, (2) abstinence, (3) renunciation, (4) poverty, (5) patience, (6) trust in God, (7) satisfaction. The 'stages' constitute the *ascetic and*

ethical discipline of the Sufi, and must be carefully distinguished from the so-called 'states' (*ahwal*, plural of *hal*), which form a similar *psychological* chain. The writer whom I have just quoted enumerates ten 'states'--Meditation, nearness to God, love, fear, hope, longing, intimacy, tranquillity, contemplation, and certainty. While the 'stages' can be acquired and mastered by one's own efforts, the 'states' are spiritual feelings and dispositions over which a man has no control:

"They descend from God into his heart, without his being able to repel them when they come or to retain them when they go."

The Sufi's 'path' is not finished until he has traversed all the 'stages,' making himself perfect in every one of them before advancing to the next, and has also experienced whatever 'states' it pleases God to bestow upon him. Then, and only then, is he permanently raised to the higher planes of consciousness which Sufis call 'the Gnosis' (*ma'rifat*) and 'the Truth' (*haqiqat*), where the 'seeker' (*talib*) becomes the 'knower' or 'gnostic' (*'arif*), and realises that knowledge, knower, and known are One.

* * *

Having sketched, as briefly as possible, the external framework of the method by which the Sufi approaches his goal, I shall now try to give some account of its inner workings. The present chapter deals with the first portion of the threefold journey--the Path, the Gnosis, and the Truth--by which the quest of Reality is often symbolised.

The first place in every list of 'stages' is occupied by repentance (*tawbat*). This is the Moslem term for 'conversion,' and marks the beginning of a new life. In the biographies of eminent Sufis the dreams, visions, auditions, and other experiences which caused them to enter on the Path are usually related. Trivial as they may seem, these records have a psychological basis, and, if authentic, would be worth studying in detail. Repentance is described as the awakening of the soul from the slumber of heedlessness, so that the sinner becomes aware of his evil ways and feels contrition for past disobedience. He is not truly penitent, however, unless (1) he at once abandons the sin or sins of which he is conscious, and (2) firmly resolves that he will never return to these sins in the future. If he should fail to keep his vow, he must again turn to God, whose mercy is infinite. A certain well-known Sufi repented seventy times and fell back into sin seventy times before he made a

lasting repentance. The convert must also, as far as lies in his power, satisfy all those whom he has injured. Many examples of such restitution might be culled from the *Legend of the Moslem Saints*.

According to the high mystical theory, repentance is purely an act of divine grace, coming from God to man, not from man to God. Some one said to Rabi'a:

"I have committed many sins; if I turn in penitence towards God, will He turn in mercy towards me?" "Nay," she replied, "but if He shall turn towards thee, thou wilt turn towards Him."

The question whether sins ought to be remembered after repentance or forgotten illustrates a fundamental point in Sufi ethics: I mean the difference between what is taught to novices and disciples and what is held as an esoteric doctrine by adepts. Any Mohammedan director of souls would tell his pupils that to think humbly and remorsefully of one's sins is a sovereign remedy against spiritual pride, but he himself might very well believe that real repentance consists in forgetting everything except God.

"The penitent," says Hujwiri, "is a lover of God, and the lover of God is in contemplation of God: in contemplation it is wrong to remember

sin, for recollection of sin is a veil between God and the contemplative."

Sin appertains to self-existence, which itself is the greatest of all sins. To forget sin is to forget self.

This is only one application of a principle which, as I have said, runs through the whole ethical system of Sufism and will be more fully explained in a subsequent chapter. Its dangers are evident, but we must in fairness allow that the same theory of conduct may not be equally suitable to those who have made themselves perfect in moral discipline and to those who are still striving after perfection.

Over the gate of repentance it is written:

"All *self* abandon ye who enter here!"

The convert now begins what is called by Christian mystics the Purgative Way. If he follows the general rule, he will take a director (Sheykh, Pir, Murshid), *i.e.* a holy man of ripe experience and profound knowledge, whose least word is absolute law to his disciples. A 'seeker' who attempts to traverse the 'Path' without

assistance receives little sympathy. Of such a one it is said that 'his guide is Satan,' and he is likened to a tree that for want of the gardener's care brings forth 'none or bitter fruit.' Speaking of the Sufi Sheykhs, Hujwiri says:

* * *

"When a novice joins them, with the purpose of renouncing the world, they subject him to spiritual discipline for the space of three years. If he fulfil the requirements of this discipline, well and good; otherwise, they declare that he cannot be admitted to the 'Path.' The first year is devoted to service of the people, the second year to service of God, and the third year to watching over his own heart. He can serve the people, only when he places himself in the rank of servants and all others in the rank of masters, *i.e.* he must regard all, without exception, as being better than himself, and must deem it his duty to serve all alike. And he can serve God, only when he cuts off all his selfish interests relating either to the present or to the future life, and worships God for God's sake alone, inasmuch as whoever worships God for any thing's sake worships himself, not God. And he can watch over his heart, only when his thoughts are collected and every care is dismissed, so that in communion with God he guards his heart from the assaults of heedlessness. When these qualifications are possessed by the novice, he may wear the *muraqqa'at* (the patched frock worn by dervishes) as a true

mystic, not merely as an imitator of others."

Shibli was a pupil of the famous theosophist Junayd of Baghdad. On his conversion, he came to Junayd, saying:

"They tell me that you possess the pearl of divine knowledge: either give it me or sell it." Junayd answered: "I cannot sell it, for you have not the price thereof; and if I give it you, you will have gained it cheaply. You do not know its value. Cast yourself headlong, like me, into this ocean, in order that you may win the pearl by waiting patiently."

Shibli asked what he must do.

"Go," said Junayd, "and sell sulphur."

At the end of a year he said to Shibli:

"This trading makes you well known. Become a dervish and occupy yourself solely with begging."

During a whole year Shibli wandered through the streets of Baghdad, begging of the passers-by, but no one heeded him. Then he returned to Junayd, who exclaimed:

"See now! You are nothing in people's eyes. Never set your mind on them or take any account of them at all. For some time" (he continued) "you were a chamberlain and acted as

governor of a province. Go to that country and ask pardon of all those whom you have wronged."

Shibli obeyed and spent four years in going from door to door, until he had obtained an acquittance from every person except one, whom he failed to trace. On his return, Junayd said to him:

"You still have some regard to reputation. Go and be a beggar for one year more."

Every day Shibli used to bring the alms that were given him to Junayd, who bestowed them on the poor and kept Shibli without food until the next morning. When a year had passed in this way, Junayd accepted him as one of his disciples on condition that he should perform the duties of a servant to the others. After a year's service, Junayd asked him:

"What think you of yourself now?" Shibli replied: "I deem myself the meanest of God's creatures." " Now," said the master, "your faith is firm."

I need not dwell on the details of this training--the fasts and vigils, the vows of silence, the long days and nights of solitary meditation, all the weapons and tactics, in short, of that battle against one's self which the Prophet declared to be more painful and meritorious than the Holy War. On the other hand, my readers will expect me to

describe in a general way the characteristic theories and practices for which the 'Path' is a convenient designation. These may be treated under the following heads: Poverty, Mortification, Trust in God, and Recollection. Whereas poverty is negative in nature, involving detachment from all that is worldly and unreal, the three remaining terms denote the positive counterpart of that process, namely, the ethical discipline by which the soul is brought into harmonious relations with Reality.

The fatalistic spirit which brooded darkly over the childhood of Islam--the feeling that all human actions are determined by an unseen Power, and in themselves are worthless and vain--caused renunciation to become the watchword of early Moslem asceticism. Every true believer is bound to abstain from unlawful pleasures, but the ascetic acquires merit by abstaining from those which are lawful. At first, renunciation was understood almost exclusively in a material sense. To have as few worldly goods as possible seemed the surest means of gaining salvation. Dawud al-Ta'i owned nothing except a mat of rushes, a brick which he used as a pillow, and a leathern vessel which served him for drinking and washing. A certain man dreamed that he saw Malik ibn Dinar and Mohammed ibn Wasi' being led into Para-

dise, and that Malik was admitted before his companion. He cried out in astonishment, for he thought Mohammed ibn Wasi' had a superior claim to the honour. "Yes," came the answer, "but Mohammed ibn Wasi' possessed two shirts, and Malik only one. That is the reason why Malik is preferred."

The Sufi ideal of poverty goes far beyond this. True poverty is not merely lack of wealth, but lack of desire for wealth: the empty heart as well as the empty hand. The 'poor man' (*faqir*) and the 'mendicant' (*dervish*) are names by which the Mohammedan mystic is proud to be known, because they imply that he is stripped of every thought or wish that would divert his mind from God. "To be severed entirely from both the present life and the future life, and to want nothing besides the Lord of the present life and the future life--that is to be truly poor." Such a *faqir* is denuded of individual existence, so that he does not attribute to himself any action, feeling, or quality. He may even be rich, in the common meaning of the word, though spiritually he is the poorest of the poor; for, sometimes, God endows His saints with an outward show of wealth and worldliness in order to hide them from the profane.

No one familiar with the mystical writers will need to be informed that their terminology is ambiguous, and that the same word

frequently covers a group, if not a multitude, of significations diverging more or less widely according to the aspect from which it is viewed. Hence the confusion that is apparent in Sufi text-books. When 'poverty,' for example, is explained by one interpreter as a transcendental theory and by another as a practical rule of

religious life, the meanings cannot coincide. Regarded from the latter standpoint, poverty is only the beginning of Sufism. *Faqirs*, Jami says, renounce all worldly things for the sake of pleasing God. They are urged to this sacrifice by one of three motives: (a) Hope of an easy reckoning on the Day of Judgment, or fear of being punished; (b) desire of Paradise; (c) longing for spiritual peace and inward composure. Thus, inasmuch as they are not disinterested but seek to benefit themselves, they rank below the Sufi, who has no will of his own and depends absolutely on the will of God. It is the absence of 'self' that distinguishes the Sufi from the *faqir*.

Here are some maxims for dervishes:

"Do not beg unless you are starving. The Caliph Omar flogged a man who begged after having satisfied his hunger. When compelled to beg, do not accept more than you need."

"Be good-natured and uncomplaining and thank God for your poverty."

* * *

"Do not flatter the rich for giving, nor blame them for withholding."

"Dread the loss of poverty more than the rich man dreads the loss of wealth."

"Take what is voluntarily offered: it is the daily bread which God sends to you: do not refuse God's gift."

"Let no thought of the morrow enter your mind, else you will incur everlasting perdition."

"Do not make God a springe to catch alms."

The Sufi teachers gradually built up a system of asceticism and moral culture which is founded on the fact that there is in man an element of evil--the lower or appetitive soul. This evil self, the seat of passion and lust, is called *nafs*; it may be considered broadly equivalent to 'the flesh,' and with its allies, the world and the devil, it constitutes the great obstacle to the attainment of union with God. The Prophet said: "Thy worst enemy is thy *nafs*, which is between thy two sides." I do not intend to discuss the various opinions as to its nature, but the proof of its materiality is too curious to be omitted. Mohammed ibn 'Ulyan, an eminent Sufi, relates that one day something like a young fox came forth from his throat, and God caused him to know that

it was his *nafs*. He trod on it, but it grew bigger at every kick that he gave it. He said:

"Other things are destroyed by pain and blows: why dost thou increase?" " Because I was created perverse," it replied; "what is pain to other things is pleasure to me, and their pleasure is my pain."

The *nafs* of Hallaj was seen running behind him in the shape of a dog; and other cases are recorded in which it appeared as a snake or a mouse.

Mortification of the *nafs* is the chief work of devotion, and leads, directly or indirectly, to the contemplative life. All the Sheykhhs are agreed that no disciple who neglects this duty will ever learn the rudiments of Sufism. The principle of mortification is that the *nafs* should be weaned from those things to which it is accustomed, that it should be encouraged to resist its passions, that its pride should be broken, and that it should be brought through suffering and tribulation to recognise the vileness of its original nature and the impurity of its actions. Concerning the outward methods of mortification, such as fasting, silence, and solitude, a great deal might be written, but we must now pass on to the higher ethical discipline which completes the Path.

Self-mortification, as advanced Sufis

understand it, is a moral transmutation of the inner man. When they say, "Die before ye die," they do not mean to assert that the lower self can be essentially destroyed, but that it can and should be purged of its attributes, which are wholly evil. These attributes--ignorance, pride, envy, uncharitableness, etc.--are extinguished, and replaced by the opposite qualities, when the will is surrendered to God and when the mind is concentrated on Him. Therefore 'dying to self' is really 'living in God.' The mystical aspects of the doctrine thus stated will occupy a considerable part of the following chapters; here we are mainly interested in its ethical import.

The Sufi who has eradicated self-will is said, in technical language, to have reached the 'stages' of 'acquiescence' or 'satisfaction' (*rida*) and 'trust in God' (*tawakkul*).

A dervish fell into the Tigris. Seeing that he could not swim, a man on the bank cried out, "Shall I tell some one to bring you ashore?" "No," said the dervish.

"Then do you wish to be drowned?" "No." "What, then, do you wish?" The dervish replied, "God's will be done! What have I to do with wishing?"

'Trust in God,' in its extreme form, involves the renunciation of every personal initiative and volition; total passivity like

that of a corpse in the hands of the washer who prepares it for burial; perfect indifference towards anything that is even remotely connected with one's self. A special class of the ancient Sufis took their name from this 'trust,' which they applied, so far as they were able, to matters of everyday life. For instance, they would not seek food, work for hire, practise any trade, or allow medicine to be given them when they were ill. Quietly they committed themselves to God's care, never doubting that He, to whom belong the treasures of earth and heaven, would provide for their wants, and that their allotted portion would come to them as surely as it comes to the birds, which neither sow nor reap, and to the fish in the sea, and to the child in the womb.

These principles depend ultimately on the Sufistic theory of the divine unity, as is shown by Shaqiq of Balkh in the following passage:

"There are three things which a man is bound to practise. Whosoever neglects any one of them must needs neglect them all, and whosoever cleaves to any one of them must needs cleave to them all. Strive, therefore, to understand, and consider heedfully,

"The *first* is this, that with your mind and your tongue and your actions you declare God to be One; and that,

having declared Him to be One, and having declared that none benefits you or harms you except Him, you devote all your actions to Him alone. If you act a single jot of your actions for the sake of another, your thought and speech are corrupt, since your motive in acting for another's sake must be hope or fear; and when you act from hope or fear of other than God, who is the lord and sustainer of all things, you have taken to yourself another god to honour and venerate.

"*Secondly*, that while you speak and act in the sincere belief that there is no God except Him, you should trust Him more than the world or money or uncle or father or mother or any one on the face of the earth.

"*Thirdly*, when you have established these two things, namely, sincere belief in the unity of God and trust in Him, it behoves you to be satisfied with Him and not to

be angry on account of anything that vexes you. Beware of anger! Let your heart be with Him always, let it not be withdrawn from Him for a single moment."

The 'trusting' Sufi has no thought beyond the present hour. On one occasion Shaqiq asked those who sat listening to his discourse:

* * *

"If God causes you to die to-day, think ye that He will demand from you the prayers of to-morrow?" They answered: "No; how should He demand from us the prayers of a day on which we are not alive?" Shaqiq said: "Even as He will not demand from you the prayers of to-morrow, so do ye not seek from Him the provender of to-morrow. It may be that ye will not live so long."

In view of the practical consequences of attempting to live 'on trust,' it is not surprising to read the advice given to those who would perfectly fulfil the doctrine: "Let them dig a grave and bury themselves." Later Sufis hold that active exertion for the purpose of obtaining the means of subsistence is quite compatible with 'trust,' according to the saying of the Prophet, "Trust in God and tie the camel's leg." They define *tawakkul* as an habitual state of mind, which is impaired only by self-pleasing thoughts; *e.g.* it was accounted a breach of 'trust' to think Paradise a more desirable place than Hell.

What type of character is such a theory likely to produce? At the worst, a useless drone and hypocrite preying upon his fellow-creatures; at the best, a harmless dervish who remains unmoved in the midst of sorrow, meets praise and blame with equal

indifference, and accepts insults, blows, torture, and death as mere incidents in the eternal drama of destiny. This cold morality, however, is not the highest of which Sufism is capable. The highest morality springs from nothing but love, when self-surrender becomes self-devotion. Of that I shall have something to say in due time.

Among the positive elements in the Sufi discipline there is one that Moslem mystics unanimously regard as the keystone of practical religion. I refer to the *dhikr*, an exercise well known to Western readers from the careful description given by Edward Lane in his *Modern Egyptians*, and by Professor D. B. Macdonald in his recently published *Aspects of Islam*. The term *dhikr*--'recollection' seems to me the most appropriate equivalent in English--signifies

'mentioning,' 'remembering,' or simply 'thinking of'; in the Koran the Faithful are commanded to "remember God often," a plain act of worship without any mystical savour. But the Sufis made a practice of repeating the name of God or some religious formula, e.g. "Glory to Allah" (*subhan Allah*), "There is no god but Allah" (*la ilaha illa 'llah*), accompanying the mechanical intonation with an intense concentration of every faculty upon the single word or phrase; and they attach greater value to this irregular

litany, which enables them to enjoy uninterrupted communion with God, than to the five services of prayer performed, at fixed hours of the day and night, by all Moslems. Recollection may be either spoken or silent, but it is best, according to the usual opinion, that tongue and mind should co-operate. Sahl ibn 'Abdallah bade one of his disciples endeavour to say "Allah! Allah!" the whole day without intermission. When he had acquired the habit of doing so, Sahl instructed him to repeat the same words during the night, until they came forth from his lips even while he was asleep. "Now," said he, "be silent and occupy yourself with recollecting them." At last the disciple's whole being was absorbed by the thought of Allah. One day a log fell on his head, and the words "Allah, Allah" were seen written in the blood that trickled from the wound.

Ghazali describes the method and effects of *dhikr* in a passage which Macdonald has summarised as follows:

"Let him reduce his heart to a state in which the existence of anything and its non-existence are the same to him. Then let him sit alone in some corner, limiting his religious duties to what is absolutely necessary, and not occupying himself either with reciting the Koran or considering its meaning or with

books of religious traditions or with anything of the sort. And let him see to it that nothing save God most High enters his mind. Then, as he sits in solitude, let him not cease saying continuously with his tongue, 'Allah, Allah,' keeping his thought on it. At last he will reach a state when the motion of his tongue will cease, and it will seem as though the word flowed from it. Let him persevere in this until all trace of motion is removed from his tongue, and he finds his heart persevering in the thought. Let him still persevere until the form of the word, its letters and shape, is removed from his heart, and there remains the idea alone, as though clinging to his heart, inseparable from it. So far, all is dependent on his will and choice; but to bring the mercy of God does not stand in his will or choice. He has now laid

himself bare to the breathings of that mercy, and nothing remains but to await what God will open to him, as God has done after this manner to prophets and saints. If he follows the above course, he may be sure that the light of the Real will shine out in his heart. At first unstable, like a flash of lightning, it turns and returns; though sometimes it hangs back. And if it returns, sometimes it

abides and sometimes it is momentary. And if it abides, sometimes its abiding is long, and sometimes short."

Another Sufi puts the gist of the matter in a sentence, thus:

"The first stage of *dhikr* is to forget self, and the last stage is the effacement of the worshipper in the act of worship, without consciousness of worship, and such absorption in the object of worship as precludes return to the subject thereof."

Recollection can be aided in various ways. When Shibli was a novice, he went daily into a cellar, taking with him a bundle of sticks. If his attention flagged, he would beat himself until the sticks broke, and sometimes the whole bundle would be finished before evening; then he would dash his hands and feet against the wall. The Indian practice of inhaling and exhaling the breath was known to the Sufis of the ninth century and was much used afterwards. Among the Dervish Orders music, singing, and dancing are favourite means of inducing the state of trance called 'passing-away' (*fana*), which, as appears from the definition quoted above, is the climax and *raison d'être* of the method.

In 'meditation' (*muraqabat*) we recognise a form of self-concentration similar to the Buddhistic *dhyana* and *samadhi*. This is

what the Prophet meant when he said, "Worship God as though thou sawest Him, for if thou seest Him not, yet He sees thee." Anyone who feels sure that God is always watching over him will devote himself to meditating on God, and no evil thoughts or diabolic suggestions will find their way into his heart. Nuri used to meditate so intently that not a hair on his body stirred. He declared that he had learned this habit from a cat which was observing a mouse-hole, and that she was far more quiet than he. Abu Sa'id ibn Abi 'l-Khayr kept his eyes fixed on his navel. It is said that the Devil is smitten with epilepsy when he approaches a man thus occupied, just as happens to other men when the Devil takes possession of them.

This chapter will have served its purpose if it has brought before my readers a clear view of the main lines on which the preparatory training of the Sufi is conducted. We must now imagine him to have been invested by his Sheykh with the patched frock (*muraqqa'at* or *khirqat*), which is an outward sign that he has successfully emerged from the discipline of the 'Path,' and is now advancing with uncertain steps towards the Light, as when toil-worn travellers, having gained the summit of a deep gorge, suddenly catch glimpses of the sun and cover their eyes.

CHAPTER II

ILLUMINATION AND ECSTASY

GOD, who is described in the Koran as "the Light of the heavens and the earth," cannot be seen by the bodily eye. He is visible only to the inward sight of the 'heart.' In the next chapter we shall return to this spiritual organ, but I am not going to enter into the intricacies of Sufi psychology any further than is necessary. The 'vision of the heart' (*ru'yat al-qalb*) is defined as "the heart's beholding by the light of certainty that which is hidden in the unseen world." This is what 'Ali meant when he was asked, "Do you see God?" and replied: "How should we worship One whom we do not see?" The light of intuitive certainty (*yaqin*) by which the heart sees God is a beam of God's own light cast therein by Himself; else no vision of Him were possible.

"'Tis the sun's self that lets the sun be seen."

According to a mystical interpretation of the famous passage in the Koran where the light of Allah is compared to a candle

burning in a lantern of transparent glass, which is placed in a niche in the wall, the niche is the true believer's heart; therefore his speech is light and his works are light and he moves in light. "He who discourses of eternity," said Bayazid, "must have within him the lamp of eternity."

The light which gleams in the heart of the illuminated mystic endows him with a supernatural power of discernment (*firasat*). Although the Sufis, like all other

Moslems, acknowledge Mohammed to be the last of the prophets (as, from a different point of view, he is the Logos or first of created beings), they really claim to possess a minor form of inspiration. When Nuri was questioned concerning the origin of mystical *firasat*, he answered by quoting the Koranic verse in which God says that He breathed His spirit into Adam; but the more orthodox Sufis, who strenuously combat the doctrine that the human spirit is uncreated and eternal, affirm that *firasat* is the result of knowledge and insight, metaphorically called 'light' or 'inspiration,' which God creates and bestows upon His favourites. The Tradition, "Beware of the discernment of the true believer, for he sees by the light of Allah," is exemplified in such anecdotes as these:

Abu 'Abdallah al-Razi said:

"Ibn al-Anbari presented me with a

woollen frock, and seeing on the head of Shibli a bonnet that would just match it, I conceived the wish that they were both mine. When Shibli rose to depart, he looked at me, as he was in the habit of doing when he desired me to follow him. So I followed him to his house, and when we had gone in, he bade me put off the frock and took it from me and folded it and threw his bonnet on the top. Then he called for a fire and burnt both frock and bonnet."

Sari al-Saqati frequently urged Junayd to speak in public, but Junayd was unwilling to consent, for he doubted whether he was worthy of such an honour. One Friday night he dreamed that the Prophet appeared and commanded him to speak to the people. He awoke and went to Sari's house before daybreak, and knocked at the door. Sari opened the door and said: "You would not believe me until the Prophet came and told you."

Sahl ibn 'Abdallah was sitting in the congregational mosque when a pigeon, overcome by the intense heat, dropped on the floor. Sahl exclaimed: "Please God, Shah al-Kirmani has just died." They wrote it down, and it was found to be true.

When the heart is purged of sin and evil thoughts, the light of certainty strikes upon

it and makes it a shining mirror, so that the Devil cannot approach it without being observed. Hence the saying of some gnostic: "If I disobey my heart, I disobey God." It was a man thus illuminated to whom the Prophet said: "Consult thy heart,

and thou wilt hear the secret ordinance of God proclaimed by the heart's inward knowledge, which is real faith and divinity"--something much better than the learning of divines. I need not anticipate here the question, which will be discussed in the following chapter, how far the claims of an infallible conscience are reconcilable with external religion and morality. The Prophet, too, prayed that God would put a light into his ear and into his eye; and after mentioning the different members of his body, he concluded, "and make the whole of me one light." {The reader should be reminded that most, if not all, mystical Traditions ascribed to Mohammed were forged and fathered upon him by the Sufis, who represent themselves as the true interpreters of his esoteric teaching.} From illumination of gradually increasing splendour, the mystic rises to contemplation of the divine attributes, and ultimately, when his consciousness is wholly melted away, he becomes transubstantiated (*tajawhara*) in the radiance of the divine essence. This is the 'station' of well-doing (*ihsan*)--for "God is with the well-doers" ([Kor. 29.69](#)), and we have

Prophetic authority for the statement that "well-doing consists in worshipping God as though thou wert seeing Him."

I will not waste the time and abuse the patience of my readers by endeavouring to classify and describe these various grades of illumination, which may be depicted symbolically but cannot be explained in scientific language. We must allow the mystics to speak for themselves. Granted that their teaching is often hard to understand, it conveys more of the truth than we can ever hope to obtain from analysis and dissection.

Here are two passages from the oldest Persian treatise on Sufism, the *Kashf al-Mahjub* of Hujwiri:

"It is related that Sari al-Saqati said, 'O God, whatever punishment thou mayst inflict upon me, do not punish me with the humiliation of being veiled from Thee,' because, if I am not veiled from Thee, my torment and affliction will be lightened by the recollection and contemplation of Thee; but if I am veiled from Thee, even Thy bounty will be deadly to me. There is no punishment in Hell more painful and hard to bear than that of being veiled. If God were revealed in Hell to the people of Hell, sinful, believers would never think of Paradise, since

the sight of God would so fill them with joy that they would not feel bodily pain. And in Paradise there is no pleasure more perfect than unveiledness. If the people there enjoyed all the pleasures of that place and other pleasures a hundredfold, but were veiled from God, their hearts would be utterly broken. Therefore it is the way of God to let the hearts of those who love Him have vision of Him always, in order that the delight thereof may enable them to endure every tribulation; and they say in their visions, 'We deem all torments more desirable than to be veiled from Thee. When Thy beauty is revealed to our hearts, we take no thought of affliction.'"

"There are really two kinds of contemplation. The former is the result of perfect faith, the latter of rapturous love, for in the rapture of love a man attains to such a degree that his whole being is absorbed in the thought of his Beloved and he sees nothing else. Muhammad ibn Wasi' said: 'I never saw anything without seeing God therein,' *i.e.* through perfect faith. Shibli said: 'I never saw anything except God,' *i.e.* in the rapture of love and the fervour of contemplation. One mystic

sees the act with his bodily eye, and, as he looks, beholds the Agent with his spiritual eye; another is rapt by love of the Agent from all things else, so that he sees only the Agent. The one method is demonstrative, the other is ecstatic. In the former case, a manifest proof is derived from the evidences of God; in the latter case, the seer is enraptured and transported by desire: evidences are a veil to him, because he who knows a thing does not care for aught besides, and he who loves a thing does not regard aught besides, but renounces contention with God and interference with Him in His decrees and acts. When the lover turns his eye away from created things, he will inevitably see the Creator with his heart. God hath said, 'Tell the believers to close their eyes' ([Kor. 24.30](#)), *i.e.* to close their bodily eyes to lusts and their spiritual eyes to created things. He who is most sincere in self-mortification is most firmly grounded in contemplation. Sahl ibn 'Abdallah of Tustar said: 'If any one shuts his eye to God for a single moment, he will never be rightly guided all his life long,' because to regard other than God is to be handed over to other than God, and one who is

left at the mercy of other than God is lost. Therefore the life of contemplatives is the time during which they enjoy contemplation; time spent in ocular vision they do not reckon as life, for that to them is really death. Thus, when Bayazid was asked how old he was, he replied, 'Four years.' They said to him, 'How can that be?' He answered, 'I have been veiled from God by this world for seventy years, but I have seen Him during the last four years: the period in which one is veiled does not belong to one's life.'"

I take the following quotation from the *Mawaqif* of Niffari, an author with whom we shall become better acquainted as we proceed:

"God said to me, 'The least of the sciences of nearness is that you should see in everything the effects of beholding Me, and that this vision should prevail over you more than your gnosis of Me.'"

Explanation by the commentator:

"He means that the least of the sciences of nearness (proximity to God) is that when you look at anything, sensibly or intellectually or otherwise, you should be conscious of beholding God with a vision clearer than your vision of that thing. There are diverse

degrees in this matter. Some mystics say that they never see anything without seeing God before it. Others say, 'without seeing God after it,' or 'with it'; or they say that they see nothing but God. A certain Sufi said, 'I made the pilgrimage and saw the Ka'ba, but not the Lord of the Ka'ba.' This is the perception of one who is veiled. Then he said, 'I made the pilgrimage again, and I saw both the Ka'ba and the Lord of the Ka'ba.' This is contemplation of the Self-subsistence through which everything subsists, *i.e.* he saw the Ka'ba subsisting through the Lord of the Ka'ba. Then he said, 'I made the pilgrimage a third time, and I saw the Lord of the Ka'ba, but not the Ka'ba.' This is the 'station' of *waqfat* (passing-away in the essence). In the present case the author is referring to contemplation of the Self-subsistence."

So much concerning the theory of illumination. But, as Mephistopheles says, "*grau ist alle Theorie*"; and though to most of us the living experience is denied, we can hear its loudest echoes and feel its warmest afterglow in the poetry which it has created. Let me translate part of a Persian ode by the dervish-poet, Baba Kuhl of Shiriz, who died in 1050 A.D.

* * *

"In the market, in the cloister--only God I saw.
In the valley and on the mountain--only God I saw.
Him I have seen beside me oft in tribulation;
In favour and in fortune--only God I saw.
In prayer and fasting, in praise and contemplation,
In the religion of the Prophet--only God I saw.
Neither soul nor body, accident nor substance,
Qualities nor causes--only God I saw.

I oped mine eyes and by the light of His face around
me

In all the eye discovered--only God I saw.
Like a candle I was melting in His fire:
Amidst the flames outflashing--only God I saw.
Myself with mine own eyes I saw most clearly,
But when I looked with God's eyes--only God I saw.
I passed away into nothingness, I vanished,
And lo, I was the All-living--only God I saw."

The whole of Sufism rests on the belief that when the individual self is lost, the Universal Self is found, or, in religious language, that ecstasy affords the only means by which the soul can directly communicate and become united with God. Asceticism, purification, love, gnosis, saintship--all the leading ideas of Sufism--are developed from this cardinal principle.

Among the metaphorical terms commonly employed by the Sufis as, more or less, equivalent to 'ecstasy' are *fana* (passing-away), *wajd* (feeling), *sama* (hearing), *dhawq* (taste), *shirb* (drinking), *ghaybat* (absence from self), *jadhbat* (attraction), *sukr* (intoxication), and *hal* (emotion). It would be tedious and not, I think, specially in-

structive to examine in detail the definitions of those terms and of many others akin to them which occur in Sufi text-books. We are not brought appreciably nearer to understanding the nature of ecstasy when it is described as "a divine mystery which God communicates to true believers who behold Him with the eye of certainty," or as "a flame which moves in the ground of the soul and is produced by love-desire." The Mohammedan theory of ecstasy, however can hardly be discussed without reference to two of the above-mentioned technical expressions, namely, *fana* and *sama* '.

As I have remarked in the Introduction ([pp. 17-19](#)), the term *fana* includes different stages, aspects, and meanings. These may be summarised as follows:

1. A moral transformation of the soul through the extinction of all its passions and desires.

2. A mental abstraction or passing-away of the mind from all objects of perception, thoughts, actions, and feelings through its concentration upon the thought of God. Here the thought of God signifies contemplation of the divine attributes.

3. The cessation of all conscious thought. The highest stage of *fana* is reached when even the consciousness of having attained *fana* disappears. This is what the Sufis call 'the passing-away of passing-away'

(*fana al-fana*). The mystic is now rapt in contemplation of the divine essence.

The final stage of *fana*, the complete passing-away from self, forms the prelude to *baqa*, 'continuance' or 'abiding' in God, and will be treated with greater fullness in Chapter VI.

The first stage closely resembles the Buddhistic Nirvana. It is a 'passing-away' of evil qualities and states of mind, which involves the simultaneous 'continuance' of good qualities and states of mind. This is necessarily an ecstatic process, inasmuch as all the attributes of 'self' are evil in relation to God. No one can make himself perfectly moral, *i.e.* perfectly 'selfless.' This must be done for him, through 'a flash of the divine beauty' in his heart.

While the first stage refers to the moral 'self,' the second refers to the percipient and intellectual 'self.' Using the classification generally adopted by Christian mystics, we may regard the former as the consummation of the Purgative Life, and the latter as the goal of the Illuminative Life. The third and last stage constitutes the highest level of the Contemplative Life.

Often, though not invariably, *fana* is accompanied by loss of sensation. Sari al-Saqati, a famous Sufi of the third century, expressed the opinion that if a man in this state were struck on the face with a sword, he would not feel the blow. Abu 'l-Khayr

al-Aqta' had a gangrene in his foot. The physicians declared that his foot must be amputated, but he would not allow this to be done. His disciples said, "Cut it off while he is praying, for he is then unconscious." The physicians acted on their advice, and when Abu 'l-Khayr finished his prayers he found that the amputation had taken place. It is difficult to see how any one far advanced in *fana* could be

capable of keeping the religious law--a point on which the orthodox mystics lay great emphasis. Here the doctrine of saintship comes in. God takes care to preserve His elect from disobedience to His commands. We are told that Bayazid, Shibli, and other saints were continually in a state of rapture until the hour of prayer arrived; then they returned to consciousness, and after performing their prayers became enraptured again.

In theory, the ecstatic trance is involuntary, although certain conditions are recognised as being specially favourable to its occurrence. "It comes to a man through vision of the majesty of God and through revelation of the divine omnipotence to his heart." Such, for instance, was the case of Abu Hamza, who, while walking in the streets of Baghdad and meditating on the nearness of God, suddenly fell into an ecstasy and went on his way, neither seeing nor hearing, until he recovered his senses and found himself in

the desert. Trances of this kind sometimes lasted many weeks. It is recorded of Sahl ibn 'Abdallah that he used to remain in ecstasy twenty-five days at a time, eating no food; yet he would answer questions put to him by the doctors of theology, and even in winter his shirt would be damp with sweat. But the Sufis soon discovered that ecstasy might be induced artificially, not only by concentration of thought, recollection (*dhikr*), and other innocent methods of autohypnosis, but also by music, singing, and dancing. These are included in the term *sama*, which properly means nothing more than audition.

That Moslems are extraordinarily susceptible to the sweet influences of sound will not be doubted by any one who remembers how, in the *Arabian Nights*, heroes and heroines alike swoon upon the slightest provocation afforded by a singing-girl touching her lute and trilling a few lines of passionate verse. The fiction is true to life. When Sufi writers discuss the analogous phenomena of ecstasy, they commonly do so in a chapter entitled 'Concerning the *Sama*.' Under this heading Hujwiri, in the final chapter of his *Kashf al-Mahjub*, gives us an excellent summary of his own and other Mohammedan theories, together with numerous anecdotes of persons who were thrown into ecstasy on hearing a verse of the Koran or a heavenly voice (*hatif*) or poetry

or music. Many are said to have died from the emotion thus aroused. I may add by way of explanation that, according to a well-known mystical belief, God has

inspired every created thing to praise Him in its own language, so that all the sounds in the universe form, as it were, one vast choral hymn by which He glorifies Himself. Consequently those whose hearts He has opened and endowed with spiritual perception hear His voice everywhere, and ecstasy overcomes them as they listen to the rhythmic chant of the muezzin, or the street cry of the saqqa shouldering his waterskin, or, perchance, to the noise of wind or the bleating of a sheep or the piping of a bird.

Pythagoras and Plato are responsible for another theory, to which the Sufi poets frequently allude, that music awakens in the soul a memory of celestial harmonies heard in a state of pre-existence, before the soul was separated from God. Thus Jalaluddin Rumi:

"The song of the spheres in their revolutions
Is what men sing with lute and voice.
As we all are members of Adam,
We have heard these melodies in Paradise.
Though earth and water have cast their veil upon us,
We retain faint reminiscences of these heavenly
songs;
But while we are thus shrouded by gross earthly
veils,
How can the tones of the dancing spheres reach us?"
{E. H. Whinfield, abridged translation of the
Masnavi, p. 182.}

* * *

The formal practice of *sama'* quickly spread amongst the Sufis and produced an acute cleavage of opinion, some holding it to be lawful and praiseworthy, whilst others condemned it as an abominable innovation and incitement to vice. Hujwiri adopts the middle view expressed in a saying of Dhu 'l-Nun the Egyptian:

"Music is a divine influence which stirs the heart to seek God: those who listen to it spiritually attain unto God, and those who listen to it sensually fall into unbelief."

He declares, in effect, that audition is neither good nor bad, and must be judged by its results.

"When an anchorite goes into a tavern, the tavern becomes his cell, but when a wine-bibber goes into a cell, that cell becomes his tavern."

One whose heart is absorbed in the thought of God cannot be corrupted by hearing musical instruments. So with dancing.

"When the heart throbs and rapture grows intense, and the agitation of ecstasy is manifested, and conventional forms are gone, this is not dancing nor bodily indulgence, but a dissolution of the soul."

Hujwiri, however, lays down several precautionary rules for those who engage in audition, and he confesses that the public

concerts given by dervishes are extremely demoralising. Novices, he thinks, should not be permitted to attend them. In modern times these orgiastic scenes have frequently been described by eye-witnesses. I will now translate from Jami's *Lives of the Saints* the account of a similar performance which took place about seven hundred years ago.

"There was a certain dervish, a negro called Zangi Bashgirdi, who had attained to such a high degree of spirituality that the mystic dance could not be started until he came out and joined in it. One day, in the course of the *sama*, he was seized with ecstasy, and rising into the air seated himself on a lofty arch which overlooked the dancers. In descending he leaped on to Majduddin of Baghdad, and encircled with his legs the neck of the Sheykh, who nevertheless continued to spin round in the dance, though he was a very frail and slender man, whereas the negro was tall and heavy. When the dance was finished, Majduddin said, 'I did not know whether it was a negro or a sparrow on my neck.' On getting off the Sheykh's shoulders, the negro bit his cheek so severely that the scar remained visible ever after. Majduddin often used to say that on the Day of Judgment he would not boast of any-

thing except that he bore the mark of this negro's teeth on his face."

Grotesque and ignoble features--not to speak of grosser deformities--must appear in any faithful delineation of the ecstatic life of Islam. Nothing is gained by concealing their existence or by minimising their importance. If, as Jalaluddin Rumi says:

"Men incur the reproach of wine and drugs

That they may escape for a while from self-consciousness,
Since all know this life to be a snare,
Volitional memory and thought to be a hell,"

let us acknowledge that the transports of spiritual intoxication are not always sublime, and that human nature has a trick of avenging itself on those who would cast it off.

CHAPTER III

THE GNOSIS

THE Sufis distinguish three organs of spiritual communication: the heart (*qalb*), which knows God; the spirit (*ruh*), which loves Him; and the inmost ground of the soul (*sirr*), which contemplates Him. It would take us into deep waters if we were to embark upon a discussion of these terms and their relation to each other. A few words concerning the first of the three will suffice. The *qalb*, though connected in some mysterious way with the physical heart, is not a thing of flesh and blood. Unlike the English 'heart,' its nature is rather intellectual than emotional, but whereas the intellect cannot gain real knowledge of God, the *qalb* is capable of knowing the essences of all things, and when illumined by faith and knowledge reflects the whole content of the divine mind; hence the Prophet said, "My earth and My heaven contain Me not, but the heart of My faithful servant containeth Me." This revelation, however, is a comparatively rare experience.

Normally, the heart is 'veiled,' blackened by sin, tarnished by sensual impressions and images, pulled to and fro between reason and passion: a battlefield on which the armies of God and the Devil contend for victory. Through one gate, the heart receives immediate knowledge of God; through another, it lets in the illusions of sense. "Here a world and there a world," says Jalaluddin Rumi. "I am seated on the threshold." Therefore man is potentially lower than the brutes and higher than the angels.

"Angel and brute man's wondrous leaven compose;
To these inclining, less than these he grows,
But if he means the angel, more than those."

Less than the brutes, because they lack the knowledge that would enable them to rise; more than the angels, because they are not subject to passion and so cannot fall.

How shall a man know God? Not by the senses, for He is immaterial; nor by the intellect, for He is unthinkable. Logic never gets beyond the finite; philosophy sees double; book-learning fosters self-conceit and obscures the idea of the Truth with clouds of empty words. Jalaluddin Rumi, addressing the scholastic theologian, asks scornfully:

"Do you know a name without a thing answering to it?
Have you ever plucked a rose from R, O, S, E?
You name His name; go, seek the reality named by it!

Look for the moon in the sky, not in the water!
If you desire to rise above mere names and letters,
Make yourself free from self at one stroke.
Become pure from all attributes of self,
That you may see your own bright essence,
Yea, see in your own heart the knowledge of the
Prophet,
Without book, without tutor, without preceptor."

This knowledge comes by illumination, revelation, inspiration.

"Look in your own heart," says the Sufi, "for the kingdom of God is within you." He who truly knows himself knows God, for the heart is a mirror in which every divine quality is reflected. But just as a steel mirror when coated with rust loses its power of reflexion, so the inward spiritual sense, which Sufis call the eye of the heart, is blind to the celestial glory until the dark obstruction of the phenomenal self, with all its sensual contaminations, has been wholly cleared away. The clearance, if it is to be done effectively, must be the work of God, though it demands a certain inward co-operation on the part of man. "Whosoever shall strive for Our sake, We will guide him into Our ways" ([Kor. 29.69](#)). Action is false and

vain, if it is thought to proceed from one's self, but the enlightened mystic regards God as the real agent in every act, and therefore takes no credit for his good works nor desires to be recompensed for them.

* * *

While ordinary knowledge is denoted by the term *'ilm*, the mystic knowledge peculiar to the Sufis is called *ma'rifat* or *'irfan*. As I have indicated in the foregoing paragraphs, *ma'rifat* is fundamentally different from *'irfan*, and a different word must be used to translate it. We need not look far for a suitable equivalent. The *ma'rifat* of the Sufis is the 'gnosis' of Hellenistic theosophy, *i.e.* direct knowledge of God based on revelation or apocalyptic vision. It is not the result of any mental process, but depends entirely on the will and favour of God, who bestows it as a gift from Himself upon those whom He has created with the capacity for receiving it. It is a light of divine grace that flashes into the heart and overwhelms every human faculty in its dazzling beams. "He who knows God is dumb."

The relation of gnosis to positive religion is discussed in a very remarkable treatise on speculative mysticism by Niffari, an unknown wandering dervish who died in Egypt in the latter half of the tenth century. His work, consisting of a series of revelations in which God addresses the writer and instructs him concerning the theory of gnosis, is couched in abstruse language and would scarcely be intelligible without the commentary which accompanies it; but its value as an original exposition of advanced

Sufism will sufficiently appear from the excerpts given in this chapter. {I am now engaged in preparing an edition of the Arabic text, together with an English translation and commentary. }

Those who seek God, says Niffari, are of three kinds: *firstly*, the worshippers to whom God makes Himself known by means of bounty, *i.e.* they worship Him in the hope of winning Paradise or some spiritual recompense such as dreams and miracles; *secondly*, the philosophers and scholastic theologians, to whom God makes Himself known by means of glory, *i.e.* they can never find the glorious God whom they seek, wherefore they assert that His essence is unknowable, saying, "We know that we know Him not, and that is our knowledge"; *thirdly*, the gnostics, to whom God makes Himself known by means of ecstasy, *i.e.* they are possessed

and controlled by a rapture that deprives them of the consciousness of individual existence.

Niffari bids the gnostic perform only such acts of worship as are in accordance with his vision of God, though in so doing he will necessarily disobey the religious law which was made for the vulgar. His inward feeling must decide how far the external forms of religion are good for him.

"God said to me, Ask Me and say, 'O Lord, how shall I cleave to Thee, so that when my day (of judgment)

comes, Thou wilt not punish me nor avert Thy face from me?' Then I will answer thee and say, 'Cleave in thy outward theory and practice to the Sunna (the rule of the Prophet), and cleave in thy inward feeling to the gnosis which I have given thee; and know that when I make Myself known to thee, I will not accept from thee anything of the Sunna but what My gnosis brings to thee, because thou art one of those to whom I speak: thou hearest Me and knowest that thou hearest Me, and thou seest that I am the source of all things.'"

The commentator observes that the Sunna, being general in scope, makes no distinction between individuals, *e.g.* seekers of Paradise and seekers of God, but that in reality it contains exactly what each person requires. The portion specially appropriate in every case is discerned either by means of gnosis, which God communicates to the heart, or by means of guidance imparted by a spiritual director.

"And He said to me, 'My exoteric revelation does not support My esoteric revelation.'"

This means that the gnostic need not be dismayed if his inner experience conflicts with the religious law. The contradiction is only apparent. Religion addresses itself

to the common herd of men who are veiled by their minds, by logic, tradition, and so on; whereas gnosis belongs to the elect, whose bodies and spirits are bathed in the eternal Light. Religion sees things from the aspect of plurality, but gnosis regards the all-embracing Unity. Hence the same act is good in religion, but evil in gnosis--a truth which is briefly stated thus:

"The good deeds of the pious are the ill deeds of the favourites of God."

Although works of devotion are not incompatible with gnosis, no one who connects them in the slightest degree with himself is a gnostic. This is the theme of the following allegory. Niffari seldom writes so lucidly as he does here, yet I fancy that few of my readers will find the explanations printed within square brackets altogether superfluous.

THE REVELATION OF THE SEA

"God bade me behold the Sea, and I saw the ships sinking and the planks floating; then the planks too were submerged."

[The Sea denotes the spiritual experiences through which the mystic passes in his journey to God. The point at issue is this: whether he should prefer the religious law or dis-

interested love. Here he is warned not to rely on his good works, which are no better than sinking ships and will never bring him safely to port. No; if he would attain to God, he must rely on God alone. If he does not rely entirely on God, but lets himself trust ever so little in anything else, he is still clinging to a plank. Though his trust in God is greater than before, it is not yet complete.]

"And He said to me, "Those who voyage are not saved."

[The voyager uses the ship as a means of crossing the sea: therefore he relies, not on the First Cause, but on secondary causes.]

"And He said to me, "Those who instead of voyaging cast themselves into the Sea take a risk."

[To abandon all secondary causes is like plunging in the sea. The mystic who makes this venture is in jeopardy, for two reasons: he may regard himself, not God, as initiating and carrying out the action of abandonment,--and one who renounces a thing through 'self' is in worse case than if he had not renounced it,--or he may abandon secondary causes (good works, hope of Paradise, etc.), not for God's sake, but from sheer indifference and lack of spiritual feeling.]

* * *

"And He said to me, "Those who voyage and take no risk shall perish."

[Notwithstanding the dangers referred to, he must make God his sole object or fail.]

"And He said to me, "In taking the risk there is a part of salvation."

[Only a part of salvation, because perfect selflessness has not yet been attained. The whole of salvation consists in the effacement of all secondary causes, all phenomena, through the rapture which results from vision of God. But this is gnosis, and the present revelation is addressed to mystics of a lower grade. The gnostic takes no risk, for he has nothing to lose.]

"And the wave came and lifted those beneath it and overran the shore."

[Those beneath the wave are they who voyage in ships and consequently suffer shipwreck. Their reliance on secondary causes casts them ashore, *i.e.* brings them back to the world of phenomena whereby they are veiled from God.]

"And He said to me, 'The surface of the Sea is a gleam that cannot be reached.'"

[Anyone who depends on external rites of worship to lead him to God is following a will-o'-the-wisp.]

* * *

"And its bottom is a darkness impenetrable."

[To discard positive religion, root and branch, is to wander in a pathless maze.]

"And between the two are fishes which are to be feared."

[He refers to the middle way between pure exotericism and pure esotericism. The 'fishes' are its perils and obstacles.]

"Do not voyage on the Sea, lest I cause thee to be veiled by the vehicle."

[The 'vehicle' signifies the 'ship,' *i.e.* reliance on something other than God.]

"And do not cast thyself into the Sea, lest I cause thee to be veiled by thy casting thyself."

[Whoever regards any act as his own act and attributes it to himself is far from God.]

"And He said to me, 'In the Sea are boundaries: which of them will bear thee on?'"

[The 'boundaries' are the various degrees of spiritual experience. The mystic ought not to rely on any of these, for they are all imperfect.]

"And He said to me, 'If thou givest thyself to the Sea and sinkest therein, thou wilt fall a prey to one of its beasts.'"

* * *

[If the mystic either relies on secondary causes or abandons them by his own act, he will go astray.]

"And He said to me, 'I deceive thee if I direct thee to aught save Myself.'"

[If the mystic's inward voice bids him turn to anything except God, it deceives him.]

"And He said to me, 'If thou perishest for the sake of other than Me, thou wilt belong to that for which thou hast perished.'"

"And He said to me, 'This world belongs to him whom I have turned away from it and from whom I have turned it away; and the next world belongs to him towards whom have brought it and whom I have brought towards Myself.'"

[He means to say that everlasting joy is the portion of those whose hearts are turned away from this world and who have no worldly possessions. They really enjoy this world, because it cannot separate them from God. Similarly, the true

owners of the next world are those who do not seek it, inasmuch as it is not the real object of their desire, but contemplate God alone.]

The gnostic describes the element of reality in positive religion, but his gnosis is not

derived from religion or from any sort of human knowledge: it is properly concerned with the divine attributes, and God Himself reveals the knowledge of these to His saints who contemplate Him. Dhu 'l-Nun of Egypt, whose mystical speculations mark him out as the father of Moslem theosophy, said that gnostics are not themselves, and do not subsist through themselves, but so far as they subsist, they subsist through God.

"They move as God causes them to move, and their words are the words of God which roll upon their tongues, and their sight is the sight of God which has entered their eyes."

The gnostic contemplates the attributes of God, not His essence, for even in gnosis a small trace of duality remains: this disappears only in *fana al-fana*, the total passing-away in the undifferentiated Godhead. The cardinal attribute of God is unity, and the divine unity is the first and last principle of gnosis. {According to some mystics, the gnosis of unity constitutes a higher stage which is called 'the Truth' (*haqiqat*). See above, [p. 29](#).}

Both Moslem and Sufi declare that God is One, but the statement bears a different meaning in each instance. The Moslem means that God is unique in His essence, qualities, and acts; that He is absolutely unlike all other beings. The Sufi means

that God is the One Real Being which underlies all phenomena. This principle is carried to its extreme consequences, as we shall see. If nothing except God exists, then the whole universe, including man, is essentially one with God, whether it is regarded as an emanation which proceeds from Him, without impairing His unity, like sunbeams from the sun, or whether it is conceived as a mirror in which the divine attributes are reflected. But surely a God who is all in all can have no reason for thus revealing Himself: why should the One pass over into the Many? The Sufis answer--a philosopher would say that they evade the difficulty--by quoting the famous Tradition: "I was a hidden treasure and I desired to be known; therefore I created the creation in order that I might be known." In other words, God is the

eternal Beauty, and it lies in the nature of beauty to desire love. The mystic poets have described the self-manifestation of the One with a profusion of splendid imagery. Jami says, for example:

"From all eternity the Beloved unveiled His beauty in
the solitude
of the unseen;

He held up the mirror to His own face, He displayed
His loveliness
to Himself.

He was both the spectator and the spectacle; no eye
but His had
surveyed the Universe.

All was One, there was no duality, no pretence of
'mine' or 'thine.'

The vast orb of Heaven, with its myriad incomings and
outgoings,
was concealed in a single point.

The Creation lay cradled in the sleep of non-
existence, like a child
ere it has breathed.

The eye of the Beloved, seeing what was not, regarded
nonentity as
existent.

Although He beheld His attributes and qualities as a
perfect whole
in His own essence,

Yet He desired that they should be displayed to Him
in another mirror,

And that each one of His eternal attributes should
become manifest
accordingly in a diverse form,

Therefore He created the verdant fields of Time and
Space and the
life-giving garden of the world,

That every branch and leaf and fruit might show forth
His various
perfections,

The cypress gave a hint of His comely stature, the
rose gave tidings
of His beauteous countenance.
Wherever Beauty peeped out, Love appeared beside it;
wherever Beauty
shone in a rosy cheek, Love lit his torch from that
flame.
Wherever Beauty dwelt in dark tresses, Love came and
found a heart
entangled in their coils.
Beauty and Love are as body and soul; Beauty is the
mine and Love
the precious stone.
They have always been together from the very first;
never have they
travelled but in each other's company."

In another work Jami sets forth the relation of God to the world more philosophically, as follows:

"The unique Substance, viewed as absolute and void of all phenomena, all limitations and all multiplicity, is the Real (*al-Haqq*). On the other hand, viewed in His aspect of multiplicity and

plurality, under which He displays Himself when clothed with phenomena, He is the whole created universe. Therefore the universe is the outward visible expression of the Real, and the Real is the inner unseen reality of the universe. The universe before it was evolved to outward view was identical with the Real; and the Real after this evolution is identical with the universe."

Phenomena, as such, are not-being and only derive a contingent existence from the qualities of Absolute Being by which they are irradiated. The sensible world resembles the fiery circle made by a single spark whirling round rapidly.