MYSTICISM

Not long ago, as I was turning over the first few pages of Miss Underhill’s *Mysticism*, my eye fell on two quotations, one from a medieval German mystic, the other from an English author whose death had just been announced; and it struck me that I could recall exact Muslim parallels to both. Eckhart’s famous saying, ‘the word *sum* can be spoken by no creature, but by God only; for it becomes the creature to testify of itself *Non Sum*’, reminded me that three and a half centuries earlier, at Baghdad, Abu Nasr al-Sarrāj, commenting on a definition of mystical unity (*tawhīd*), had written ‘None saith ‘I’ except God, since real personality belongs to God alone’. The remark of Edward Carpenter, ‘this perception seems to be one in which all the senses unite into one sense’, caused me to look up some verses (580 foll.) in the *Ṭaʿwīya* of the Egyptian poet and saint, Ibn ‘l- Fāriq (ob. A.D. 1235), where he describes his mystical consciousness as an experience in which all the senses are unified and exercised simultaneously:

My eye conversed whilst my tongue gazed; my ear spoke and my hand listened;
And whilst my ear was an eye to behold everything visible, my eye was an ear listening to song.

This is a ‘coincidence’ that obviously has evidential value. Concerning the problems of mystical psychology and speculation the West can still learn something from Islam. How much it actually learned of these matters during the Middle Ages, when Muslim philosophy and science radiating from their centre in Spain spread light through Christian Europe, we have yet to discover in detail, but the amount was certainly considerable. It would indeed be strange if no influence from this source reached men like Thomas Aquinas, Eckhart, and Dante; for

*mysticism* was the common ground where medieval Christianity and Islam touched each other most nearly. The fact is founded on history, as we shall see. It explains why the ideas, methods, and systems produced by mystics—Roman Catholic and Muslim—of that period seem to bear the stamp of one and the same spiritual genius. But while the Catholic Church has kept her tradition unbroken, in Islam, after the thirteenth century, the main current runs in the channels of a new religious philosophy which, in the eyes of the orthodox, includes everything except religion.

The end of the second century of the Hijra (A.D. 719–816) is approaching when we meet, in Mesopotamia, with the name *Ṣaḥīf* by which the Muslim mystics soon afterwards became generally known; its derivation from *ṣaf*, the garment of coarse undyed wool worn by Christian ascetics, is one of many signs pointing the same way. Difficult questions of origin cannot be discussed here, but I may state the position as it appears to me. Let us take first the view that the basis of *Ṣūfism* is essentially *Islamic*. The claim of the *Ṣūfis* to have inherited their doctrine from the Prophet deserves respect. In the *Qurʾān*, perhaps almost the only genuine record of his personality that has come down to us, ascetic and mystical elements are mingled with those of a different kind. The former, of course, are emphasized by the *Ṣūfis* and given a deeper and more special significance than he himself attached to them, but this does not justify the assertion that *Ṣūfism* owes little to the *Qurʾān*. To Muslims, who have always venerated their Holy Scripture, learned it by heart in childhood, and studied it with intense concentration as the key to all human knowledge, such a notion would seem absurd. It is also historically untrue. Though Muḥammad left no system of dogmatic or mystical theology, the *Qurʾān* contains the raw materials of both. Being the outcome of feeling rather than reflection, the Prophet’s statements about God are *formally* inconsistent, and while Muslim scholastics
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have embodied in their creed the aspect of transcendence, the Šūfis, following his example, have combined the transcendent aspect with that of immanence, on which, though it is less prominent in the Qurʾān, they naturally lay greater stress. ‘Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth’ (xxiv. 35); ‘He is the first and the last and the outward and the inward’ (lvi. 3); ‘there is no god but He; everything is perishing except His Face’ (xxviii. 88); ‘I have breathed into him (man) of My spirit’ (xv. 29); ‘Verily, We have created man and We know what his soul suggests to him, for We are nearer unto him than the neck-artery’ (l. 15); ‘wheresoever ye turn, there is the Face of Allah’ (ii. 109); ‘he to whom Allah giveth not light hath no light at all’ (xxiv. 40). Surely the seeds of mysticism are there. And, for the early Šūfis, the Qurʾān is not only the Word of God; it is the primary means of drawing near to Him. By fervent prayer, by meditating profoundly on the text as a whole and in particular on the mysterious passages (xvii. 1; liii. 1-18) concerning the Night-journey and Ascension, they endeavoured to reproduce the Prophet’s mystical experience in themselves.

Consider now the circumstances of time and place. The political revolution which transferred the seat of government from Damascus to Baghdad had brought Islam into immediate contact and conflict with the ideas of an older civilization; and if eventually these ideas were vanquished, yet history shows that in such encounters the victory is seldom complete. We are dealing with a widespread movement in lands where Hellenism had long been at home; where theological controversies were daily being carried on between Muslims on one side and Christians, Manichaeans, and Zoroastrians on the other; where members of the subject races, recently converted to Islam and anxious to adapt the new religion to their needs, might—sometimes in good faith—claim the authority of the Prophet for doctrines and practices which they valued. It is right to regard the Šūfis as esoteric students of the Qurʾān, but not, I think, to see Šūfism the pure result of Qurʾānic study. After A.D. 1000 it began to absorb and assimilate Hellenistic philosophy, and the evidence so far collected suggests that its origin and early development were influenced by Christian asceticism and Hellenistic mysticism. We may well believe that the rāhib (Christian monk or hermit), a figure familiar to Muhammad himself, supplied his followers with a model for the life they led. The celebrated words put in his mouth, lā rabbāniyya fi ‘l- Islām, ‘no moniker in Islam’, are in fact a later protest against the Christian ideal and a proof of its influence. The Prophet is usually supposed to have condemned rabbāniyya, including celibacy, in the Qurʾān, but the exegesis of Sūra lvi. 27 that prevailed till the end of the third century A.H. makes him commend it as an institution divinely ordained: his censure falls only on those who had corrupted it.

Early Muslim asceticism, with its fearful visions of the wrath to come, its fasters and ‘weepers’, its austerities, devotions, and endless litanies, was a forcing-house for mysticism. Since ‘there is no god but Allah’, and to worship Him for the sake of being saved from Hell or rewarded with Paradise is to associate with Him a ‘god’, i.e. another object of hope or fear, the ascetic is impelled to trust in Him alone (tawakkul) and acquiesce entirely in His will (riḍā). But these words cannot be the last. Perfect detachment from ‘gods’ involves perfect attachment to God: in mystical language, union with God through love. This is the doctrine that inspires all religious and ethical Šūfism. The woman saint, Rābiʿa of Basra (ob. A.D. 801), in whom our authorities find its first conspicuous exponent, is said to have been a slave, and her parentage is unknown. In the following verses, whether they be hers or not, the mystic’s goal is depicted as ecstatic contemplation of the Beloved.

Two ways I love Thee: selflessly,
And next, as worthy is of Thee.
'Tis selfish love that I do naught
Save think on Thee with every thought.
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'Tis purest love when Thou dost raise
The veil to my adoring gaze.
Not mine the praise in that or this:
Thine is the praise in both, I wis.

The doctrine of a mystical union imparted by divine grace goes beyond anything in the Qur'ān, but is stated plainly in apocryphal traditions of the Prophet, e.g. ‘God said, “My servant draws nigh unto Me by works of supererogation, and I love him; and when I love him, I am his ear, so that he hears by Me, and his eye, so that he sees by Me, and his tongue, so that he speaks by Me, and his hand, so that he takes by Me.”’ Starting from a voluntary practice of devotion characterized by constant repetition (dhikr) of the name of Allah, the Sūfis worked out a psychological method, a via purgativa et illuminativa, leading, or rather predisposing, the soul to attain to the gnosia (ma'rifā), which is defined as ‘knowledge of the attributes of the divine Unity, peculiar to the saints who behold God with their hearts’.

The first Muslim to give an experimental analysis of the inner life was Hārith al-Muḥāsibī of Baṣra (659-857); his treatise entitled Rī'aya li-buqā' Allah, or ‘Method of religious observance’, extant in a unique manuscript at Oxford, shows delicacy and originality, though he draws largely on Jewish and Christian sources for the purpose of edification. ‘The Path’ (tariqā), as described by later writers, consists of acquired virtues (maqāmāt) and mystical states (ahwāl). The first stage is repentance or conversion; then comes a series of others, e.g. renunciation, poverty, patience, trust in God, each being a preparation for the next. Details vary, but the general features are the same. The disciple learns to place ‘the works of the heart’ above ‘the works of the members’, the intention above the act, and even when scrupulously observing the religious law, to regard its ordinances as expressions or symbols of a deeper truth. These principles, notwithstanding their antinomian tendency, have permeated Muslim legalism and underlie the ethics expounded by the great theologian Ghazālī (1058-1111) and illustrated by popular moralists like Sa'dī (1274-1320). While the Sūfis cannot be accused of loving themselves, it is true that they have sometimes loved God at the expense of their neighbours, especially those other than their own brethren. But in the end their conception of the divine Unity made it impossible for them to love God without loving His creatures too.

The foundations of a complete theory and practice of mystical religion were laid by the Sūfis of the third century A.D. Dhu ‘l-Nūn of Egypt introduced into Islam the idea of gnosia (ma'rifā)—a knowledge given in ecstasy, which differs altogether from intellectual and traditional knowledge (‘ilm). Being asked how he knew God, he replied, ‘I know Him through Himself’; and, like Dionysius, he declared that ‘God is the opposite of anything you can imagine’, and that ‘the more one knows God, the more one is lost in Him’. Henceforth we note the increasing use of symbolism and technical terms proper to a doctrine reserved for the elect; it was felt that these high mysteries must not be divulged to profane ears. The Persian Abū Yazīd (Bāyazīd) of Bistām, possibly under the influence of Indian monism, developed the doctrine of fanā (the passing away of the self); and its positive counterpart, haqā (the unitive life in God), was added soon afterwards. Although his endeavour to reach the pure Unity by a process of negation pushed to extreme lengths culminated, as he himself confessed, in disillusionment, Bāyazīd became the legendary hero of the later Persian Sūfis, who are never tired of quoting his ecstatic ejaculations (jaḥāniyyāt), such as Subḥāná, ‘Glory to me’, and the story of his ascension to the Throne of God, which is said to have taken place in a dream. Among the sayings attributed to him are the following, ‘Creatures are subject to “states”, but the gnostic has no “state”, because his vestiges are effaced and his essence is noughted by the essence of Another and his traces are lost in Another’s traces’. ‘Thirty years the transcendent God was my
mirror, now I am my own mirror—i.e. 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 transcendent God is His own mirror. I say that I am my own mirror, for ‘tis God that speaks with my tongue, and I have vanished.’ ‘I came forth from Bāyaẓid-ness as a snake from its skin. Then I looked. I saw that lover, beloved, and love are one, for in the world of Unity all can be one.’ While Bāyaẓid is admired by those who prefer mystical ‘intoxication’ to ‘sobriety’, their opponents follow the teaching of Junayd of Baghdād, whose theory of ‘union’ was applied and exhibited to the Muslim world with uncompromising realism by his pupil, the famous Ḥallāj. It is not surprising that when Ḥallāj was arrested and imprisoned on grave charges of heresy, Junayd prudently disavowed him. The doctrine set forth in his Kitāb u’s-Šuwarā’ would have shocked Muslims, even without the incisive formula, Ana u’s-Haqq, ‘I am God’, in which its author summed it up, but is so original, profound, and historically important that an attempt must be made to sketch its leading ideas and call attention to some problems connected with it. This has only recently become possible through the recovery and exhaustive study of the scattered Ḥallājian texts by Professor Massinon of the University of Paris.

According to Ḥallāj, God, who in essence is love, created Man after His image to the end that His creature, loving Him alone, may suffer a spiritual transformation, find the divine image in himself, and thus attain to union with the divine will and nature. It is evident that the union of which Ḥallāj speaks and which he personally experienced is not pantheistic, though it has often been so described by Muslim as well as European writers. The term ḥulūl, which he used to denote it, was associated in the minds of his co-religionists with the Christian doctrine of incarnation. He does not appear to have attached this meaning to it in his own case, yet there are other parallels of an extraordinary kind which mark him out as the nearest of all Muslim mystics to the spirit of Christ. For him, the saint in union with God is superior to the prophet charged with an external mission, and the model of the saintly life is not Muḥammad, but Jesus, the type of glorified humanity, the deified man whose personality, transfigured and essentialized, stands forth as the witness and representative of God, revealing from within himself al-Haqq, the Creator through whom he exists, the Creative Truth in whom he has all his being. Moreover, as Professor Massinon has observed, Ḥallāj conceives the mystical union as union with the Creative Word (Kūn, Bī!), which in the Qur’an is appropriated to the birth of Jesus and the Resurrection, a union obtained ‘by means of close and fervent adhesion of the understanding to the commandments of God’. And the result of this permanent acceptance of the divine fiat is the coming into the mystic’s soul of the divine Spirit, which proceeds ‘from the command of my Lord’ (Qur’an, xvii. 87) and thenceforth makes of each of the acts of that man ‘acts truly divine’. Nor did Ḥallāj fail to prove how well he had learned the lesson that holiness is made perfect by suffering and self-sacrifice. His execution took place at Baghdād in a.b. 932. When he was brought to be crucified and saw the cross and the nails, he turned to the people and uttered a prayer, ending with the words:

And these Thy servants who are gathered to slay me, in zeal for Thy religion and in desire to win Thy favour, forgive them, O Lord, and have mercy upon them; for verily if Thou hast revealed to them that which Thou hast revealed to me, they would not have done what they have done; and if Thou hast hidden from me that which Thou hast hidden from them, I should not have suffered this tribulation. Glory unto Thee in whatsoever Thou doest, and glory unto Thee in whatsoever Thou wiltest!

In Islam, where men are judged by their actions, mere heterodoxy cannot as a rule be effectively penalized, and however
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The truth of mysticism may clash with the law of religion, nothing very serious is likely to occur so long as the mystic continues to worship with his fellow Muslims. It is agreed that Ḥallāj was scrupulous in the performance of his religious duties, and he never scorned, though he certainly did not flatter, ‘the base degrees’ by which one must ascend to the real religion that consists in the humble and ardent devotion of a pure heart. This represents the attitude of many Ṣūfīs towards the Islamic law, and it seems to be the best way in which they can serve two masters. But Ḥallāj was too much in earnest to compromise with his conscience. Against the public authority of the Muslim Church and State he sets up the personal authority immediately derived from God with whom the saint is one. And he was no theorist like Junayd: he was suspected of dealings with the Carmathians, he had preached his faith to believers and infidels alike, and, above all, sought to win converts by working ‘evidentiary’ miracles. On these grounds he was justly condemned. His crime was not that, as later Ṣūfīs put it, ‘he divulged the mystery of the divine Lordship’, but that in obedience to an inward call he proclaimed and actively asserted a truth which involves religious, political, and social anarchy. Other mystics have seen that truth. Ḥallāj lived it and died for it. Hence the intimacy and tenderness, so rare in Ṣūfism, of the verses in which he prays for union with his Beloved or tries to utter his feeling of perfect harmony with Him.

Betwixt me and Thee there lingers an ‘it is I’ that torments me.
Ah, of Thy grace, take away this ‘I’ from between us!

I am He whom I love, and He whom I love is I,
We are two spirits dwelling in one body.
If thou seest me, thou seest Him,
And if thou seest Him, thou seest us both.

I may remark by the way that the second of these four lines could not have been written by a pantheist. The monistic expression of the same idea is found in Ḥallāj’s words, ‘We are the spirit of One though we dwell in two bodies’, and in the verse of Jalāluddin Rūmī,

Happy the moment when we are seated in the palace, thou and I,
With two forms and with two figures but with one soul, thou and I.

That Ḥallāj declared himself to have become, at certain moments and in a certain sense, the God whose transcendence he nevertheless affirms in the strongest terms possible, will astonish no one who has remarked how often the paradoxes of logic are the truths of mysticism. Although his original doctrine did not long survive him, it furnished a basis for the development of speculations, e.g. concerning the nature of the Perfect Man, which play a large part in the writings of Ibn ‘l-’Arabi and in Persian mystical poetry. But we do not find there any understanding of his character or of the tragic personal crisis which he has depicted in a widely echoed verse:

God cast him into the sea, with his arms tied behind his back,
And said to him, ‘Take care, take care, lest thou be wetted by the water’!

The century following the death of Ḥallāj, though otherwise comparatively barren, produced the first systematic and general works on Ṣūfī doctrine, such as the Kitāb ‘l-Luma’ by Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj and the Qātu ‘l-Quāb by Abū Ṭālib al-Makki, which preserve much valuable material drawn from sources that have been lost. Ṣūfism was now beginning to drift from its anchorage in Islam towards pantheism and antimonism, a tendency favoured by the growing influence of Greek philosophical ideas, especially that of ‘emanation’. This is illustrated in striking fashion by the life and sayings of the Persian mystic, Abū Sa‘īd (A.D. 947–1049). In some respects his teaching is admirable. ‘The true saint’, he said, ‘goes in and out amongst the people and eats and sleeps with them and buys and sells in
the market and marries and takes part in social intercourse and never forgets God for a single moment.' He saw all creatures 'through the eyes of the Creator', and set such store on charity and loving-kindness that he knew no better way of attaining to God than by bringing joy to the heart of a Muslim. What he says concerning the relation of the saint to the religious law may suggest a comparison with Hallâj; but the difference both in spirit and practice is immense. Whereas Hallâj would fight have kept the law and was faced with an insoluble conflict between loyalty to its ordinances and obedience to the higher authority which he felt within him, Abû Sa‘îd regards the law as a state of bondage, necessary for those who are still on the Way, but superfluous after they have reached the goal. In his view, union with God is not an occasional or intermittent experience, but the permanent result of extinction of the individual self and assumption of the divine nature. It is related that he forbade his disciples to perform the pilgrimage to the Ka‘ba, which he contemptuously described as 'a stone house'; and once, so it is said, on hearing the call of the muezzin he refused to interrupt the mystic dance of the dervishes, saying, 'This is our service of prayer'. Even if not literally true, these stories are typical. The famous Epistle of Qushayrî, written in A.D. 1045, contrasts the piety of the older school of Sufis, who had based their doctrine upon faithful observance of the Sunna, with the lawlessness and hypocrisy prevailing amongst the mystics of his own time. Thirty years later the author of the Kashfu ‘ī- Mahjûb declares that his contemporaries give the name of 'law' to their lusts and call senseless fancies 'divine knowledge', the motions of the heart and affections of the animal soul 'divine love', heresy 'poverty', scepticism 'purity', and disbelief in positive religion 'self-abandonment'. While the saints, with their innumerable followers and worshippers, menaced the Islam of history and tradition, the orthodox party, divided against itself, either clinging fanatically to the letter of the Qur‘ân or disputing over

legal and ritual minutiae or analysing theological dogmas in the dry light of intellect, was fast losing touch with the inward spirit and life which makes religion a reality. Many earnest Muslims must have asked themselves how long such a state of things could last. Was there no means of preserving what was vital to the Faith without rending the community asunder? That question was decided by the intervention of one of the greatest men Islam has ever produced, Abû Ḥâmid Ghazâlî (A.D. 1058–1111), known to medieval Europe as Abuhamet and Algazel.

The story of Ghazâlî’s conversion to Ṣûfism, as told by himself, is a classic of its kind. Here it will be enough to recall that in his younger days he had been a sceptic, but that a mystical experience cured him of this malady and caused him to devote all his powers to searching after absolute truth. His study of philosophy and scholastic theology convinced him that no light was to be found there; nor did the Ta‘lims, with their doctrine of an infallible religious authority, come off any better when put to the test. Then he turned his attention to the mystic Way revealed in the writings of Ḥârith al-Muhâsibî and the old masters of the third century A.H., and as he read, the truth dawned upon him. ‘I saw plainly’, he says, ‘that what is most peculiar to them (the Ṣûfîs) cannot be learned from books, but can only be reached by immediate experience and ecstasy and inward transformation’, in other words, by leading the mystical life. He saw, too, that his own salvation was at stake; but his worldly prospects were brilliant, and it cost him a hard struggle to give them up. His health broke under the strain, and at last he surrendered himself entirely, taking refuge with God ‘as a man in sore affliction who has no resource left’. He was not yet forty when he quittd Baghdad with the resolve never to enter it again.

The truth, then, lay with the mystics; and it was Ghazâlî’s personal experience of this truth that inspired the great religious
revival which his example no less than his works—notably the Ibn al-Aswār—brought about in circles hitherto unfriendly to mysticism. Henceforward the Sufis are definitely within the fold of Islam; for, according to Ghazâlî and the majority of Muslims after him, the revelations bestowed on the saints supplement those of the prophets as the source and basis of all real knowledge. But at the same time he insists that saintliness is derived from prophecy and constantly appeals to the supreme authority of Muhammad, whose law must be obeyed both in letter and spirit. And though his doctrine of the soul as a substance in which God causes His essence and qualities to be reflected—a mirror illumined by the ‘divine spark’—might have led a bolder mystic into heretical speculations, he himself stood in no such danger. Perhaps what he thought in private went beyond what he taught in his books, though in the Miskkâlu ‘l-Amwâr he says, for instance, that ‘Allah is the Sun, and besides the Sun there is only the Sun’s light’; but in Islam the use of pantheistic language does not necessarily mean that the writer is a pantheist. While Ghazâlî sometimes pushed the doctrine of Unity to extreme lengths, he never forgets that God is the Creator whose absolute will brought the world into existence. Great as was his debt to Sufism, he repaid it in full. Yet most Sufis think, and with justice, that he belongs not so much to themselves as to the Catholic Church of Islam, in which his heartfelt piety, moral enthusiasm, firm hold on tradition, and—however they may distrust it—his critical and objective philosophical method, established them securely. To a large extent he succeeded in making orthodoxy mystical; it was impossible in the nature of things that equal success should attend his efforts to make mysticism orthodox. He drew into the movement a strong and fairly tolerant body of conservative opinion, which acted as a brake in the stormy times ahead; but its driving force now came from another quarter, and the ideas that swung it irresistibly forward and were to dominate it in the future had little in common with his. The homage paid to the Prophet by many of the new school cannot hide the fact that their spiritual home is not Mecca but Athens and Alexandria. With Ghazâlî an epoch in the history of Sufism passes away. Hitherto the mystics had, in the main, represented the idea of an intimate personal relation between God and the soul as opposed to that of a formal worship based on authority and tradition, and this they combined with a theology constructed partly from the Qur’ân and partly with materials which had come down to them from Aristotle and the Neoplatonists. In proportion as the binding power of Islam grew feebler, the foreign elements gained ground until the collapse of the caliphate left them in full possession of the field. The result is a pantheistic philosophy which after seven hundred years still maintains its sway over large sections of the Muslim world and, as interpreted by Jalâlu’ddin Rumi, Hâfiz and other Persian mystical poets, has charmed many who would find its original author, Ibn ‘l-‘Arabi (1165-1240), quite unreadable. Before returning to him, we may note another characteristic feature of the period. The twelfth century witnessed the beginnings of a vast organization of Muslim religious life, corresponding to the monastic orders in medieval Christendom. Formerly, though famous teachers had gathered round them groups of disciples, who sometimes lived together in a convent (khânâgâb), the schools thus formed were lacking in cohesion and sooner or later disappeared. These free associations of ‘seekers’ inspired by personal attachment to a shaykh were now supplanted by perpetual brotherhoods, each tracing its descent through a long line of saints from the Prophet to its own founder. The ritual varies in the different orders, which also diverge widely as regards their doctrine and their attitude towards the religious law. Celibacy is seldom demanded as a condition of membership; and through their lay members, belonging to all ranks of society but especially numerous amongst the poor, they have had a very great influence both for good and evil. Some European critics
identify theoretical pantheism with practical immorality, but
the mind of the East cannot be reduced to simple equations of
this sort. Şâfi`i pantheism, as applied to life, generally includes a
doctrine of divine personality and moral obligations. It must
be admitted, however, that on account of the absence in Islam
of a recognized doctrinal authority the mystics enjoy a freedom
which many of them have abused.

Muhuyî`i’dîn Ibn `Arabî, the greatest speculative genius
among them, was born at Murcia in Spain and died in 1240 at
Damascus. His system of universal philosophy is embedded in an
enormous mass of writings, of which the most celebrated are the
Futuḥât al-Makkiyya (Meccan Revelations) and the Futuḥat
’il-Hikam (Bezels of Wisdom). Much of it is abstruse and
fantastic; yet no one who studies it can fail to be astonished by
the intellectual and imaginative power of the author, though
others, e.g. 'Abdu ‘l- Karîm Jilt (oh. circa a.d. 1410), have ex-
plained it more lucidly and concisely than he himself has done.
The following sketch comprises only a few points of outstanding
importance.

Ibn `Arabî is a thoroughgoing monist, and the name given
to his doctrine (unabdatu ‘l-vujûd, the unity of existence) justly
describes it. He holds that all things pre-exist as ideas in the
knowledge of God, whence they emanate and whither they
ultimately return. There is no creation ex nihilo; the world is
merely the outward aspect of that which in its inward aspect is
God. While every phenomenon reveals some attribute of
reality, Man is the microcosm in which all the divine attributes
are united, and in Man alone does God become fully conscious
of Himself. This doctrine, fusing together elements derived
from Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, Christianity, and other
sources, occupies the central place in Ibn `Arabî’s system.
It is essentially a Logos doctrine. Divinity is objectified and
made manifest in the true idea of Humanity, of which
Adam was the first incarnation. The Perfect Man (al-Insân
al-Kâmîl), as the image of God and the archetype of Nature, is
at once the mediator of divine grace and the cosmic principle
by which the world is animated and sustained. And, of course,
the perfect man par excellence is Muḥammad. Long before
Ibn `Arabî, the dogma of his pre-existence had established
itself in Islam. His spiritual essence, the first thing that God
created, was conceived as a celestial light (nûr Muḥammad),
which became incarnate in Adam and in the whole series of
prophets after him from generation to generation until its final
appearance in Muḥammad himself; according to the Shi ‘ites,
however, it passed from him to ‘Ali and the Imâms of his House,
while the Shi’as believe that it is immanent in the saints. Ibn
`Arabî identifies Muḥammad, in his real nature, with the
Ibâda ibn ‘Abî ‘Umayr (haqqatu ’l-qaṣîd), a phrase which is used
by Origen to describe the Logos, and with the ‘active intellect’ of
Aristotle. As such he is the agent in the creation of the world
(al-baqî al-makhthûk bihi), the vicegerent (khâlîfa) of God on
earth, and the pole (qutb) on whom its existence depends and for
whose sake it was created, the unique source and channel of all
divine revelations; for he was a prophet when Adam was clay.
This sounds like an echo of the doctrine of St. Paul and the
author of the Fourth Gospel concerning Christ; and in some
measure it may be so; at any rate Ibn `Arabî shows a peculiar
sympathy with Christianity and applies the word baṣîma (khoys)
both to Jesus and Muḥammad, though not exclusively to them.
A purely unitarian mysticism leads almost inevitably either to
pantheism or saint-worship or, as in Islam, to a combination of
the two. Apart from the bare divine nature, there remains as
an object of personal devotion only the prophet or saint in and
through whom God makes Himself known. The Islamic Logos
doctrine seems to have arisen from the need of satisfying deep
religious aspirations without impairing the divine unity. It sub-
stitutes for the Christian distinction of persons in God a distinct-
tion of aspects: the perfect man represents God in relation to the

world. Hence the mystical worship of Muḥammad is frequently expressed in terms which the prophet of Mecca would have deemed rank blasphemy, e.g. ‘were it not for the Light of our Lord Muḥammad, no mystery on earth would be revealed, no fountain would gush, no river flow’. The Sufis call him ‘the Beloved of God’, and he is the dispenser of every divine gift to those who love him and live in communion with his spirit.

For Ibn 'Arabi, however, the popular adoration of the Prophet and the saints is but one of the many forms of belief in which God reveals Himself. The true mystic, he says, will find Him in all religions.

My heart is capable of every form:
A cloister for the monk, a fane for idols,
A pasture for gazelles, the rotary's Ka'ba,
The tables of the Torah, the Koran.
Love is the faith I hold: wherever turn
His camels, still the one true Faith is mine.

The God of religion, as contrasted with the God of mysticism, is finite; hence it shows ignorance and injustice to praise one's own creed or blame that of another. Even infidels and idolaters are God's servants created in His image, and 'compassion towards His servants has the greater claim', though the law condemn them to die. From the fact that the soul is a mode of divine being, Ibn 'Arabī infers that human actions are self-determined. But his system excludes free-will in the ordinary sense. God himself acts according to the necessity of His nature, which requires that the infinite variety of His attributes should produce an infinite variety of effects in the objects wherein they are displayed. This involves the appearance of light and darkness, good and evil, and all the opposites on which the possibility of knowledge depends. Since evil, as such, does not exist, hell is only a temporary state and every sinner will ultimately be saved.

There is much in Ibn 'Arabi that reminds us of Spinoza, but it would be hazardous to suggest that the Spanish Jew was acquainted with the ideas of the Spanish Muslim, whose caballistic extravagances often disguise the fact that he is also a serious and original thinker. On the other hand, he certainly influenced some of the Christian medieval schoolmen, and, as Professor Asín Palacios has recently pointed out, many peculiar features in his descriptions of Hell, Paradise, and the Beatific Vision are reproduced by Dante with a closeness that can scarcely be fortuitous. "The infernal regions, the astronomical heavens, the circles of the mystic rose, the choirs of angels around the focus of divine light, the three circles symbolizing the Trinity—all are described by Dante exactly as Ibn 'Arabi described them'. Dante tells us how, as he mounted higher and higher in Paradise, his love was made stronger and his spiritual vision more intense by seeing Beatrice grow more and more beautiful. The same idea occurs in a poem of Ibn 'Arabi written about a century earlier (Tarjumānu 'l-Asbāwāy, No. LV): Meeting with Him (the Beloved) creates in me what I have never imagined...

For I behold a form whose beauty, as often as we meet, grows in splendour and majesty,

So that there is no escape from a love that increases in proportion to every increase in His loveliness according to a predestined scale.

It may be added that Ibn 'Arabi too had a Beatrice—Niẓām, the beautiful and accomplished daughter of Makhūn'ddin—and that owing to the scandal caused by the mystical odes which he composed in her honour he wrote a commentary on them in order to convince his critics that they were wrong. Similarly 'in the Convito' Dante declares his intention to interpret the esoteric meaning of fourteen love-songs which he had composed at an earlier date, and the subject of which had led to the erroneous belief that they dealt with sensual rather than intellectual love'. In short, the parallelism, both general and particular, reaches so far that only one conclusion is possible. Muslim religious legends, e.g. the Miṣrāj or Ascension of the
Prophet, together with popular and philosophical conceptions of the after-life—derived from Muslim traditionists and such writers as Fārābī, Avicenna, Ghazālī, and Ibnu 'l-'Arabī—must have passed into the common stock of literary culture that was accessible to the best minds in Europe in the thirteenth century. The Arab conquerors of Spain and Sicily repeated, though on a less imposing scale, the same process of impregnation to which they themselves had been subjected by the Hellenistic civilization of Persia and Syria. If in both cases direct evidence of transmission is frequently hard to obtain, the reason is that no written record can preserve the details of an intellectual communication carried on, over a long period of time, between two races living in daily intercourse with each other.

Let us turn to the East, where the golden age of Persian mysticism had already begun. It followed, 'as the night the day,' an epoch of indescribable carnage and devastation, during which the Mongol barbarians swept across Asia, leaving only terror, misery, and chaos behind them. In nations, as in individuals, intense and prolonged suffering demands an anodyne. No wonder that Persia, too exhausted to help herself, turned for comfort to those who offered her on the one hand an ideal representation of things more prized because they seemed to have vanished from the earth—order, security, justice, beneficence, the social virtues bound up with established custom and tradition and forming the basis of any organized national life; and on the other hand, the mystic's vision of everlasting peace and joy to be attained by the pure in heart who contemplate within themselves the spiritual world that alone is real and enduring. To draw this picture was the task of the Ṣūfī poets, and the manner in which they accomplished it has made Persian mystical poetry famous even in countries where the language is read by few.

The intellectual groundwork of the picture comes from Ibnu 'l-'Arabī. We shall see that under his influence Ṣūfīsm tends to become, not so much an affair of the heart and conscience, as a speculative philosophy out of touch with those intimate moral and religious feelings that inspired the earlier mystics. The typical saint is no longer one who has sought God with prayer and aspiration and found Him, after sore travail, in the transfiguration of dying to self through an inexplicable act of grace depending on nothing but the personal will of the Creator; he is rather the complete theosopher and hierophant from whom no mystery is hidden, the perfect man who identifies himself with God or the Logos.

I was on that day when the Names were not,
Nor any sign of existence endowed with name.
By me Names and Named were brought to view
On the day when there were not 'I' and 'we'.

Before considering the characteristics of this poetry, it may be well to state briefly the philosophical theory which underlies it. The Essence of God is all that really exists; His attributes are distinguished from Him in thought, but in reality are not other than He. The aggregate of divine attributes, which we call the universe, is the ever-changing kaleidoscope wherein He displays Himself, and is real only in so far as He is reflected in it. Phenomena per se are not-being; they acquire a contingent existence from the efflux of Absolute Being by which they are irradiated. The position and function of man in the scheme of things has been explained above. In him the spiritual and physical worlds meet, and he stands at the centre of the universe of which he is the soul. But on his phenomenal side he is 'black with the darkness of not-being'; his bodily affections hold him in bondage, so that he thinks he is separate from God. That illusion, though supported by sense and reason, contradicts the first principle of the Ṣūfī philosophy, which teaches that all existence and all action is the manifestation of divine energy. What this means only the mystics who have experienced it can realize, and of
course they cannot communicate it to others except symbolically. The erotic form of the poetry in which it is shadowed forth serves admirably to suggest to the imagination what the intellect is unable to apprehend. Moreover, the passion of love affords the most obvious analogy to the fits of ecstasy which Sufis have always associated with gnosis and saintship. In the early period recitation of the Qur’an was regularly employed to bring about the trance-state, and soon love-poems (in which at first there was no mystical intention) began to be used for the same purpose. Many odes of this kind were chanted, with or without the accompaniment of music, in order to stimulate enthusiasm and induce ecstasy; in some cases they were composed with that object. The aim of the writers is not only to convey transcendental truth, but also to create by their art a beautiful dream-world capable of suggesting the infinite and inexpressible, of attuning the soul to heavenly harmonies, and of preparing it for the highest mystical experience. The first of the following examples is taken from the Arabic Divān of Iblu ’l-Fārîd (see p. 210 supra), while the second is part of a Persian ode by Jalālud-dīn Rūmī:

With my Beloved I alone have been
When secrets tenderer than evening airs
Passed, and the Vision blest
Was granted to my prayers,
That crowned me, else obscure, with endless fame,
The while amazed between
His beauty and His majesty
I stood in silent ecstasy,
Revealing that which o’er my spirit went and came.
Lo, in His face commingled
Is every charm and grace;
The whole of Beauty singled
Into a perfect face
Beholding Him would cry,
“There is no god but He, and He is the Most High!”

While these lyrics, soaring beyond space and time, give free rein to an ecstasy that sees all things sub specie unitatis, another favourite form of Persian poetry, the love-romance, which had been brought to perfection by Niẓāmī (d. a. d. 1203), is particularly well adapted to describe the pains and longings of the soul on its way towards God. Hence we find many mystical versions of old tales such as the passion of Majnūn for Laylá and of Zalikhā (Potiphar’s wife) for Joseph. A third and very large class of poems comprises those of which the object is mainly or entirely didactic. In their earliest form they are little more than verified homilies, illustrated by brief parables and anecdotes, like the Ḩadīqatu ’l-Haqāqa (“The Garden of the Truth”) composed by Sānā’ī of Ghazna; or allegorical descriptions of the ascending stages of the mystic’s progress to unity. Both
types rapidly attained their highest development: the former in the *Mathnawi* of Jalāluddīn Rūmī, and the latter in the *Manṭiq al-Tāyir* of Farīduddīn ‘Arūḍār. ‘Bird-speech’, as the title of ‘Arūḍār’s poem may be rendered, is the story of the birds which set out under the leadership of the hoopoe to seek the Simurgh, their mysterious king. After traversing the seven valleys of Search, Love, Knowledge, Detachment, Unity, Bewilderment, and Self-nourthing, the survivors, thirty in number, are admitted to his presence and realize that ‘they themselves are the Simurgh, while the Simurgh is nothing but those thirty birds (*si murgh*).’

They besought the disclosure of this deep mystery and demanded the solution of ‘we-ness’ and ‘thou-ness’. Without speech came the answer from that Presence, saying, ‘This sun-like Presence is a mirror, Whosoever enters it sees himself therein; body and soul see therein the same body and soul’.

One may, perhaps, gather the poet’s meaning from a passage, interesting for its own sake, in which Jīlī finds fault with the Christians for restricting the divine self-manifestation to the person of Jesus. ‘God said, “I breathed my Spirit into Adam”; and here the name “Adam” signifies every human individual. The contemplation of those who behold God in man is the most perfect in the world. Something of this vision the Christians possess, and their doctrine about Jesus will lead them at last, when “the Thing shall be discovered as it really is”, to the knowledge that mankind are like mirrors set face to face, each of which contains what is in all; and so they will behold God in themselves and declare Him to be absolutely One.’

The ecstatic state knows no law, and therefore ‘the man of God is beyond infidelity and religion’. But, except by Śāīfī of the baser sort, this is not understood as sanctioning irreligious and immoral behaviour. The true saint keeps the law, not be-

cause he is obliged to do so, but through feeling himself one with God. The full circle of deification must comprehend both the inward and outward aspects of Deity—the One and the Many, the Truth and the Law. It is not enough to escape from all that is creaturely without entering into the eternal life of God the Creator as manifested in His works. To abide in God (*baqā*) after having passed away from selfhood (*fanā*) is the mark of the perfect man, who not only journeys to God, i.e. passes from plurality to unity, but in and with God, i.e. continuing in the unitive state, he returns with God to the phenomenal world from which he set out, and manifests unity in plurality. In this descent He makes the Law his outer garment

And the mystic Path his inner garment,

for he brings down and displays the truth to mankind while fulfilling all the duties of the religious law. Theory apart, the great Muslim saints, many of whom were directors of souls, generally knew better than to cast their higher knowledge before those who had not yet mastered the lower. Like St. Paul, they distinguished ‘between the milk which is necessary to one set of men and the strong meat which is allowed to others’. This doctrine of ‘the double truth’ enables them to harmonize the Qur’ānic conception of Allah with a pantheistic philosophy and build up a lofty ethical system of which the ultimate basis is the fact that evil is unreal.

The *Weltanschauung* of Persian Śī‘ism appears in popular form in the *Mathnawi-i Ma’navī* or ‘Spiritual Couplets’ of Maulānā Jalāluddīn Rūmī, founder of the Maulawī (Mevlevī) order of dervishes, who died at Qočniya (Iconium) in A.D. 1273. The *Mathnawi* has been called ‘the Qur’ān of Persia’, and its author professes, indeed, to expound the inmost sense of the prophetic revelation; but any one looking through the work at random can see that its doctrines, interwoven with apologetics, anecdotes, fables, legends, and traditions, range over the whole
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domain of medieval religious life and thought. Whereas in his odes he often writes from the standpoint of the mystic who sees nothing but God, the **Mathnawī** shows him as an eloquent and enthusiastic teacher explaining the way to God for the benefit of those who have entered upon it. The keynote is struck in the opening lines, where the reed-flute, 'the sacred musical instrument of the Mevlevī dervishes', represents the soul separated from God.  

Hark, how the Reed with shrill sad strain
Of lovers' parting doth complain.
'From the reed-bed since I was torn,
My song makes men and women mourn.
Love's pain and passion to impart,
I want a sympathizing heart.
He pines, the wretch who far must roam,
For his old happiness and home.'

The poem has been well defined as 'an attempt to purify the religious sentiment by love'. According to Jalāluddīn, the faith that calls itself 'rational' and cannot be satisfied without intellectual proofs is just as worthless as that which is rooted in conformity, custom, and respectability.

The best initiates know and need not prove;
From Satan logic, and from Adam love.

Rites and creeds count for little with God, who dwells neither in mosque nor church nor temple, but in the pure heart. The essential thing is a complete moral transformation, only to be wrought by ardent faith and humble prayer. Jalāluddīn is profoundly convinced of the goodness of God and the sinfulness of man; therefore, while denying the reality of evil in relation to its Creator, he affirms it in relation to the creatures. As regards God, it is good in so far as it makes manifest His perfection, just as the artist's power to depict the ugly as well as the beautiful affords evidence of his skill, not of his ugliness. But though the

**Mathnawī** illustrates copiously the view that all discord is

harmony not understood,
All partial evil universal good,

the Persian mystic preaches war to the death against the carnal self, which he describes as 'a Hell with seven gates' and as 'the mother of all idols'. The evil that men see in others is the reflection of their own.

You are that evil-doer, and you strike those blows at yourself; 'tis yourself you are cursing at that moment. You do not see clearly the evil in yourself, else you would hate yourself with all your soul.

The poet devotes much space to a masterly description of the passions and vices, treating the topic with a realism which is sometimes embarrassing to his translators. Answering the necessitarian argument, he insists that our actions, though the effect of divine agency, are freely willed by us, so that we have no right to make God responsible for them. If sinners are conscious of acting under compulsion, why do they yield to it so readily and why do they afterwards feel ashamed and guilty? Yet this cannot be the final solution. Perfect freedom is impossible without perfect love and consists in union of the human will with the divine.

The word 'compulsion' makes me impatient for Love's sake;
'Tis only he who loves not that is fettered by 'compulsion'.
'This is communion with God, not 'compulsion';
The shining of the moon, not a cloud;
Or if it be 'compulsion', it is not ordinary compulsion,
It is not the compulsion of self-will inciting us to sin.

The moral purpose by which the **Mathnawī** is inspired asserts itself even in philosophical passages describing the emanation of the One Being through every grade of existence. This process is epitomized in the evolution of the soul which, as the
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form of universal reason, descends to the material world,
passes through the mineral, vegetive, and animal kingdoms,
attains to rationality in man, suffers probation, undergoes re-
tribution, ascends to the sphere of the angels, and continuing
its spiritual development till it is reunited with the infinite
One, of which it is the mirror, realizes that all its experience of
separation was 'such stuff as dreams are made on'.

First he appeared in the realm innimate;
Thence came into the world of plants and lived
The plant-life many a year, nor called to mind
What he had been; then took the onward way
To animal existence, and once more
Remembers naught of that life vegetive,
Save when he feels himself moved with desire
Towards it in the season of sweet flowers,
As babes that seek the breast and know not why,
Again the wise Creator whom thou knowest
Uplifted him from animality
To Man's estate; and so from realm to realm
Advancing, he became intelligent,
Cunning and keen of wit, as he is now.
No memory of his past abides with him,
And from his present soul he shall be changed.

Though he is fallen asleep, God will not leave him
In this forgetfulness. Awakened, he
Will laugh to think what troublous dreams he had,
And wonder how his happy state of being
He could forget and not perceive that all
Those pains and sorrows were the effect of sleep
And gulle and vain illusion. So this world
Seems lasting, though 'tis but the sleeper's dream;
Who, when the appointed Day shall dawn, escapes
From dark imaginings that haunted him,
And turns with laughter on his phantom griefs
When he beholds his everlasting home.

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Be sure, the Day of Judgement will draw out
What good or ill soever thou hast done
In this life, and interpret all thy dream.
O tyrant who didst tear the innocent,
Thou from this heavy slumber shalt arise
A wolf, thy wicked passions one by one
Made howling wolves to rend thee limb from limb.

Space forbids further quotation from this great and many-
sided poem which expresses the spirit of Persian mysticism with
a power and insight that have never been equalled, though on
account of its discursiveness, prolixity, and frequent obscurity
few would care to read it through. The author has glimpses of
the modern world and breathes a larger air than Ghazâli, whose
religious attitude is that of an enlightened medieval theologian.
It is the nature of mystics to soar, just as it is the business of
legalists to imitate the old woman who clipped the wings and
cut the talons of the king's falcon that fell into her hands. In
Islam, however, such penalties are hard to enforce, and Şûfism
followed its logical line of development within the Muslim
community. This freedom was, on the whole, advantageous to
both parties; it secured fair play in the inevitable conflict be-
tween them, it fostered mutual tolerance, and the diseases which
some Roman Catholic writers attribute to it were at least no
worse than the remedies formerly applied by ecclesiastical
authority in Europe. As we have seen, the Şûfis themselves,
conscious of the dangers inherent in their doctrine, gradually
organized a system of discipline under the direction of adepts
who claimed and received unquestioning obedience. These were
members of the hierarchy of visible and invisible saints, with the
Qâdî (Axis) at their head, by whom according to Şûfi belief
the spiritual government of the world is carried on. Their re-
sponsibility was the greater because practically every Şûfi has
been trained by a šâikh and regards the self-instructed as alien
to the brotherhood. But quis custodiet ipso custodes? I do not
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speak of the saintly virtues; but what can the laws of conventional morality or anything else in the world matter to men who cultivate ecstasy by autohynotic methods and feel themselves inspired to such an extent that their individuality is lost in God? Instead of judging them by ordinary standards, which is futile, let us rather reflect that sincere devotion to the Ideal—or as they would say, the Real—covers a multitude of sins, and acknowledge that in the course of their quest they reached, if not the goal, at any rate a purer religion and a higher morality than Islam could offer them.

R. A. Nicholson.

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

Among the Muslim peoples it is commonly held that in the golden age of the caliphate there flourished world-wide systems of philosophy which were Arabian and Islamic, and that the Muslim academies were the forerunners and patterns of the European universities. This view, involving as it does the claim that Islam is the parent that begat and nourished European civilization, is not confined to mere propagandist literature, but is to be found, with or without qualification, in most of the serious contributions which modern Muslim scholars have made to the study of the development and history of Islamic institutions in the Middle Ages. In western literature, too, from time to time one reads of 'Arabian philosophy'. Some occidental writers profess to regard 'Arabian' philosophy as a hotchpotch of the opinions of the ancients into which heterogeneous matter of all kinds has been thrown and left to seethe. They maintain that there is no such thing as 'Arabian' philosophy: that the Arabic-speaking peoples merely took over the Greek philosophy which was current among the Syrian Christians and the cultured pagan community of Harran and added thereto a few ingredients borrowed from Persia and India.

Now it is true that the whole framework, scope, and material of Arabic philosophy is to be traced to the civilization of the empires which the Arabs conquered, and that Greek philosophy predominates in their system. Whatever has been said in more recent times there was no misapprehension of the truth among earlier Muslim scholars. Al-Jahiz (d. A.D. 865) of Basra, an able and versatile writer whose influence in Muslim Spain was destined to be of great importance, makes a generous recognition of the debt which his co-religionists owe to the intellectual achievements of the Greeks: 'Did we not possess the books of the ancients in which their wonderful wisdom is immortalized?