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A. J. ARBERRY, A GREAT STUDENT OF IQBĀL

— *S. A. Vāḥid*

Iqbāl was a Cambridge man. He was in Trinity College from 1905 to 1907. Cambridge produced three great orientalists of the present century—E. G. Browne, R.A. Nicholson, and A.J. Arberry who were all admirers of Iqbāl. Referring to Iqbāl's *Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, Professor Browne says, "The other shorter but fuller account of Mulla Sadra's doctrine is given by Shaykh Muḥammad Iqbal, formerly a pupil of Dr. McTaggart in this University of Cambridge, and now himself a notable and original thinker in India, in his excellent little book entitled *Development of Metaphysics in Persia.*"[1] Professor Browne was one of the first scholars to review favourably the English translation of *Asrār-i Khudī* by Nicholson. It is worth mentioning here that Professor Browne had a poor opinion about nearly all those poets of the sub-continent who wrote in Persian, even 'Urfī and Ṣā'ib.[2] Professor Nicholson translated *Asrār-i Khudī* into English. This translation attracted a good deal of attention. About the poem itself Professor Nicholson wrote in his Introduction to the translation:

> The artistic quality of the poem is remarkable when we consider that its language is not the author's own. I have done my best to preserve as much of this as a literal pure translation will allow. Many passages of the original are poetry of the kind that, once read, is not easily forgotten, *e.g.* the description of the Ideal Man as a deliverer for whom the world is waiting and the noble invocation which brings the book to an end.[3]

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[1] E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia* (4 Vols; Cambridge: The University Press, 1959), Vol. IV, 19.

[2] While talking to Sir Tej Bahādur Saprū on this subject, Professor Browne said that Iqbāl was a rare phenomenon.

[3] Nicholson (trans), *Secrets*, p. xxx.

Professor Nicholson also wrote a detailed note on *Payām-i Mashriq*, which was published in a German journal.

It was Professor A. J. Arberry who made it possible for the English-speaking world to appreciate Iqbāl by reading his great poems in English translations. He translated the quatrains contained in *Payām-i Mashriq*, and published these translations as *Tulip of Sinai*.[1] He translated the *ghazals* contained in *Zabūr-i 'Ajam* and published these as *Persian Psalms*. He also translated into English verse *Shikwa*, *Jawāb-i Shikwa*, and Iqbāl's *magnum opus*, *Jāvīd Nāma*. No scholar can equal Professor Arberry's achievement as a translator. In the masterly introductions to his translations, he surveys different aspects of Persian poetry and Iqbāl's poetic art. In his Preface to *Persian Psalms*, he says, "He [the reader] will find himself in a new world of thought and feeling, a world vibrant with hope and high endeavour, a world revealing the vision of a great thinker who saw in these sorely troubled times the dawn of a new age."[2] In his Introduction to the translation of *Jāvīd Nāmah*, he says,

> Both the *Asrār-i Khudī* and the *Rumūz-i Bekhudī* were composed in rhyming couplets, following a very long tradition in Persian didactic poetry going back a thousand years. The metre chosen by Iqbāl for these poems is the *ramal-i musaddas-i maqsur*, the same as that employed by the greatest of Persian mystics, Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207-1273), in the greatest didactic poem in Persian literature, the *Masnavi*. I have summarised the early history of this verse-form in the preface to my *Tales from the Masnavi*. (Allen & Unwin, 1961), which the reader may wish to consult. One noteworthy feature of the convention is that the poet lightens from time to time the weight of formal exposition by the introduction of illustrative anecdotes; to this tradition Iqbal also conformed. When, however, he came to compose the third of his trilogy, Iqbal varied the pattern strikingly; the *Javid-nama* is conceived as a narrative poem, or rather, a poetic drama, in which the didactic

[1] Arberry (trans.), *The Tulip of Sinai* (London: The Royal Indian Society, n.d.).

[2] Arberry (trans.), *Persian Psalms*, p. viii.

is put into the mouths of *dramatis personae*. A further remarkable novelty is the interspersing of lyrics, in various metres and in the monorhyme characteristic of the Persian ghazal, the effect of which is a very great enhancement of the poetic tension of the whole."[1]

Thus it will be seen that all students of Iqbāl owe a special debt of gratitude to Cambridge for having provided two eminent scholars, Nicholson and Arberry, who introduced Iqbāl to the West by means of their translations. Of these two Professor Arberry is decidedly the more devoted, thorough and comprehensive as an Iqbāl scholar.

Professor Arberry was born on May 12, 1905 in a small house in the working class quarter of Pratton, Portsmouth. The fourth of five children in the family, his formal education began at the age of three when he joined the babies' class in a council school. When eleven years old he tried for a scholarship to Portsmouth Grammar School, but failed. Next year he succeded in getting one of the ten free places available. He completed Senior Cambridge at 16. He decided to be a Classics scholar and went to Pembroke College, Cambridge, at Michaelens in 1924 after securing a scholarship. At Cambridge he took a first in Part I of the Classical Tripos in 1925 and a first in Part II in 1927. It so happened that in 1927 Pembroke produced not less than 5 first men in Part II of the Classical Tripos, and so there was no chance for Arberry in the academic world. A friend advised him to apply for E. G. Browne Studentship founded out of the funds bequeathed by Professor E. G. Browne to the College for the encouragement of Oriental studies. Arberry applied for the Studentship and, after having won it, he worked very hard and, in 1929, took a first in both parts of the Oriental Language Tripos.[2]

In 1931 Arberry was elected the Junior Reseach Fellow by his College. In this connection he went to Egypt. In Cairo he met the lady whom he married in Cambridge in November 1932. About this time the Headship of the Classics Department of Cairo University fell vacant. Arberry applied for it and was appointed to

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[1] Arberry (trans.), *Jāvīd Nāma*, pp. 11-12.

[2] Most of the information is based on the material contained in Arberry's *Oriental Essays* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1960).

take charge of the post immediately. He continued in this post for two years. While in Cairo he witnessed Aḥmad Sharqī's masterpiece *Layla Majnūn* and was so taken up by it that he sought permission to translate it into English. While in Cairo, Arberry also edited two mystical texts.[1]

About this time the post of the Assistant Librarian of Indian Office, London, fell vacant. Arberry got the job and remained in this position for the next ten years.

On September 1, 1939, Arberry was transferred to the War Office, and attached to the Postal Censorship Department in Liverpool. In the summer of 1944, the Chair of Persian in London University fell vacant and Arberry was appointed to it. Thus at long last he returned to the academic world. In 1946, the Chair of Arabic also fell vacant and with it the headship of the Middle East Department, and Professor Arberry was appointed to it. In 1947, Professor C.A. Sotorey resigned from the Sir Thomas Adam's Chair, and it was offered to Arberry. Thus Arberry returned to Cambridge, and his old College reelected him a Fellow. Settled in Cambridge, Arberry started on his great work as an Orientalist, writing on Ṣūfīsm, Rūmī, and 'Umar Khayyam besides translating Iqbāl. In Cambridge he took special interest in the Muslim students, mostly from the Middle East and the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. It was as a result of his efforts that the authorities of Pambroke College allowed the Muslims residing in Cambridge to hold Friday prayers in one of its Halls. Whenever I happened to be in Cambridge on a Friday, I found Arberry taking special interest in preparing the Hall for prayers.

Besides his translations of Iqbāl's poems, his Oriental scholarship includes a translation of the Holy *Qur'ān*,[2] his well-known book *Revelation and Reason in Islām*,[3] and several books on Ṣūfīsm.[4] Towards the end of his life he was concentrating on Rūmī

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 238.

[2] Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (2 vols; London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1955).

[3] Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islām* (The Forward Lectures for 1956 Delivered in the University of Liverpool; London, 1957).

[4] E.g., *An Introduction to the History of Ṣūfīsm* (Longmans, Green and Co., [1943]; and *Ṣūfīsm: An Account of the Mystics of Islām* (George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1963).

and wanted to continue the work of his predecessor and teacher, Professor Nicholson, on that great mystic. Referring to Nicholson, Arberry once wrote:

> If years and health are given me to complete, as it is my fondest wish to do, the work on his favourite Rūmī which he did not live to finish, whatever good thing I accomplish will be by right his. Disciple never had a wiser, a profounder or more loving Master.[1]

The following incident will clearly show his devotion to Rūmī. Once Professor Annamarie Schimmel, Professor Arberry and the writer were having lunch in a hotel in Cambridge. Our talk turned to Rūmī. Arberry recited some verses from him and was so affected that tears began rolling down his eyes.

Arberry was fully conscious of the difficulties of translating a poet like Iqbāl. He candidly admits:

> Iqbal presents the translator with all the usual problems connected with translating poetry, and with further problems, still more difficult of solution, posed by his elusive style and idiosyncratic vocabulary. That this elusiveness was deliberate is proved by a remark he jotted down in a notebook dating from 1910, and published by his son Javid in 1961: 'Mathew Arnold is a very precise poet. I like, however, an element of obscurity and vagueness in poetry; since the vague and the obscure appear profound to the emotions.[2]

When he started translating Iqbāl, Arberry was lucky enough to have access to some of the mistakes that Iqbāl had pointed out in Nicholson's translation of *Asrār-i Khudī*. In fact, Arberry prepared a statement of all these mistakes and collected them in a pamphlet which was published by Shaikh Muḥammad Ashraf of Lahore. In the Preface to this pamphlet, Arberry says:

> The most arresting fact which emerged from the study of this new material was the extreme difficulty of reaching a correct interpretation of many passages in Iqbal's poetry. Professor Nicholson was at the height of his great powers when he made his translation of the *Asrār-i Khudī*, it was

[1] Arberry, *Oriental Essays*, p. 232.

[2] Arberry (trans.), *Jāvīd Nāma*, p. 13.

shortly after the completion of this task that he began work on the *Mathnawī* of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, a labour which occupied the rest of his life and crowned his splendid achievements in the field of oriental studies. All who put their hands to translating Iqbal may therefore well feel humbled when they consider how many times the inner sense of his poetry escaped Professor Nicholson's deep and careful scholarship. But they may well rejoice that fortune has preserved this unique example of Iqbal's exegesis of his own writings; by studying carefully the material which is assembled in these pages, the future worker in this field will find much to assist his undertaking.[1]

Before undertaking his work of translation, Arberry not only prepared himself well for the task but also availed himself of every possible help that he could get. There were before him not only the translations of Iqbāl's works by other scholars, but also examples of Iqbāl's work in this field. Naturally one would expect that, prepared as Arberry was for the great task, mistakes in his translation would be rare. And it must be admitted that mistakes are very few. In some cases, Arberry has failed to understand Iqbāl correctly. Apart from these few mistakes, his translations are on the whole superb. They reflect the passion and fire of the original in a remarkable degree as will be seen from the following specimens:

(*i*)

بگذر از خاور افسونیٔ افرنگ مشو
که نیرزد بجوے ایں همه دیرینه و نو
چون پر کاه که در رهگذر باد افتاد
رفت اسکندر و دارا و فباد و خسرو
زندگی انجمن آرا و نگهدار خود است
اے که در قافلهٔ بے همه شو با همه رو
تو فروزنده تر از مهر منیر آمدهٔ
آنچنان زی که بهر ذره رسانی پر تو!
آن نگینے که تو با اهرمنان باختهٔ
هم بجبریل امینے نتوان کرد گرد
از تنک جامئی ما میکده رسوا گردید
شیشه گیرد حکیمانه بیا شام و برد(۲)

[1] Arberry, "Notes on Iqbāl's *Asrār-i Khudī* (The Secrets of the Self) (Lahore: Sh. Muḥammad Ashraf, 1950), p. vi.

[2] Iqbāl, *Zabūr-i 'Ajam*, pp. 184-185.

Arberry's translation:

Eschew the West, and do not be
Bewitched by Europe's wizardry;
Not worth a barley, in my view,
Is all her ancient and her new.

Mighty Darius, Iskandar,
Khusrau and Kaikobad — all are
A blade of grass upon the way
Swept by a passing wind, to-day.

Life is the Self to beautify,
To guard the Self right jealously;
Upon a caravan thou art —
Fare on with all, but go apart!

Radiant thou camest from the sky,
Far brighter than the sun on high;
So live, that every mote may be
Illumined by thy brilliancy.

Thou hast not spared thy precious ring
Idly to Ahriman to fling —
To pledge thee which it were not well
Even to trusty Gabriel.

The tavern is ashamed, because
So narrow is become our glass;
A beaker take, and prudently
Drink wine — and then be off with thee![1]

(*ii*) دم مرا صفت باد فرو دین کردند
گیاه را ز سر شکم چو یاسمین کردند
نمود لالهٔ صحرا نشین ز خونابم
چنانکه بادهٔ لعلے بساتگین کردند
بلند بال چنانم که بر سپهر بریں
هزار بار مرا نوریان کمین کردند

[1] Arberry (trans.), *Persian Psalms*, pp. 117-118.

فروغ آدم خاکی ز تازه کاری هاست
مه و ستاره کنند آنچه پیش ازیں کردند
در آ بسجده و یاری ز خسروان مطلب
که روز فقر نیاگان ما چنین کردند(۱)

Arberry's translation:

Soft my breath doth pass
Soft as April airs;
Jasmine-sweet the grass
Springeth from my tears.

Desert tulip glows
With the blood I shed
As in beaker shews
Wine all ruby-red.

Soareth so my flight
O'er the highest sphere
That the souls of light
Seek to trap me there.

Labours ever new
Make man's dust to glow;
Moon and star still do
As long time ago.

Come, O come to prayer;
Court no prince's door;
So our fathers were
When the world was poor.[2]

(*iii*) زمستان را سر آمد روزگاران
نواها زنده شد در شاخساران !
گلان را رنگ و نم بخشد هواها
که می آید ز طرف جوئباران
چراغ لاله اندر دشت و صحرا
شود روشن تر از باد بهاران

[1] Iqbāl, *Zabūr-i 'Ajam*, pp. 178-179.
[2] Arberry (trans.), *Persian Psalms*, pp. 114-115.

دمے آسودہ با درد و غم خویش
دمے نالان چو جوئے کوهساراں
ز بیم ایں کہ ذوقش کم نگردد
نگویم حال دل با راز داراں !(۱)

Arberry's translation:

The days are ended
Of winter long;
The branches quiver
With living song.

The breeze in beauty
Arrays the rose
As from the river
It gently blows.

The tulip's lantern
In desert bare
Is fanned to brightness
By the spring air.

A little eases
With grief and pain
Or like a hill-stream
Laments again.

Lest my heart's passion
May softer grow,
Not to the trusty
I'll tell my woe.[2]

(*iv*) Describing the beauty of Kashmir, Iqbāl says:

کوه هائے خنک سار او نگر
آتشین دست چنار او نگر !
در بهاراں لعل می ریزد زسنگ
خیزد از خاکش یکے طوفان رنگ !

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[1] Iqbāl, *Zabūr-i 'Ajam*, p. 53.
[2] Arberry (trans.), *Persian Psalms*, pp. 30-31.

لکه هائے ابر در کوه . و دمن
پنبه پران از کمان پنبه زن !
کوه و دریا و غروب آفتاب !
من خدا را دیدم آنجا بے حجاب!(۱)

Arberry's translation:

Behold her mountains turbaned in white,
behold the firey hands of her chenars;
in springtime rubies leap down from the rocks,
a flood of colour rises from her soil,
stippled clouds cover mountain and valley
like cotton-flocks strewn from a carder's bow.
Mountain and river, and the setting of the sun:
there I behold God without a veil.[2]

(۷) یا رب درون سینه دل با خبر بده
در باده نشه را نگرم آن نظر بده
این بنده را که با نفس دیگران نزیست
یک آه خانه زاد مثال سحر بده
سیلم، مرا بجوئے تنک مایهٔ مپیچ !
جولانگهے بوادی و کوه و کمر بده
خاکم به نور نغمهٔ داؤد بر فروز
هر ذرهٔ مرا پر و بال شرر بده(۳)

Arberry's Translation:

I pray thee, Lord, to me impart
Within my breast a conscious heart:
Give me the vision to divine
The rapture pulsing through the wine.
It never pleased me, to receive
Another's breath, that I might live:
Give me a breath as light as morn,
A sigh that in the home was born.
I am a torrent: do not set
Me dribbling in a rivulet,
But give my waters space to spill

[1] Iqbāl, *Jāvīd Nāma*, p. 187.
[2] Arberry (trans.), *Jāvīd Nāma*, p. 118.
[3] Iqbāl, *Zabūr-i 'Ajam*, pp. 4-5.

O'er valley broad and spreading hill.
Illuminate my lifeless clay
With anthems David used to play;
Let all my atoms swiftly spring
Upborne upon an ember's wing.[1]

A study of the texts and their translations given above will show that this great scholar has succeeded in a remarkable degree in retaining the beauty and grandeur of the original. While one may find instances in which he failed to interpret Iqbāl correctly, on the whole every student of Iqbāl will find in these translations wealth of scholarship and art.

After reading Arberry's translations of Iqbāl, one is reminded of great masterpieces in the English language in this field: Nicholson's translations of *Diwān-i Shamsi Tabrīz* and Getrude Bell's translations of Ḥāfiz. There is no doubt that all these translations have enriched the English language. In the words of E.G. Browne, it can be said of all these translations "I can recall but few English verse-renderings of Eastern poets which seems to me so adequate and so beautiful as these."[2]

Arberry has himself remarked, "It has been said that the ideal at which the translator should aim is to produce a version as near as possible to what his original would have written, had he been composing in the translator's language and not his own."[3] It can be safely said that Arberry has succeeded in a remarkable degree in achieving the ideal he set before himself. This he could do bacause he also loved Islāmic culture. His work on Islāmic culture helped him in realising the subtleties and intricacies of a culture whose values, ideas and symbols form the basic framework of the context of Iqbāl's poetry. Arberry considered Iqbāl as a true representative of that culture. He used to say that Rūmī saved the world from chaos seven hundred years ago and it is only the study of Rūmī that can save Europe today. As he regarded Iqbāl as a true disciple of Rūmī, he felt that the study of Iqbāl would help the Europeans today. Referring to his stay in Egypt, he remarked, "Though politics sometimes clouded the serenity of the academic sky, politics was

[1] Arberry, (trans.), *Persian Psalms*, p. xi.
[2] Arberry, *Oriental Essays*, p. 179
[3] Arberry (trans.), *Jāvīd Nāma*, p. 14.

never my business; and I look back on my years in Egypt, which took me also to Palestine, Lebanon and Syria, as among the happiest of my life."[1] Though he never visited Pakistan, he always took great interest in the intellectual development of the country. He considered Pakistan as a representative of Islāmic culture and his ardent wish was that this country should always remain so. In a message to *Bazm-i Iqbāl* in 1950, he wrote:

> Iqbāl's doctrine of the indestructible significance of the individual contains a message of hope and inspiration in these days when the rights and duties of individual man are so gravely threatened by materialistic conceptions of an all-powerful state. His doctrine of the place of the individual in society, with his interpretation of the term society to mean the whole community of right-believing men and women, is no less important as a corrective to vialist tendencies in contemporary thought. His message is of universal appeal and application.[2]

It must be admitted that early in his career his writings showed a feeling of nostalgia for the glory that had departed or was departing from England, but in course of time he outgrew this feeling. His studies of Rūmī and Iqbāl brought home to him a feeling of brotherhood in mankind. Meanwhile, his studies of the *Qur'ān* and Ṣūfīsm brought to him new light and a broadening of sympathies. After years of studies he wrote about the language of the *Qur'ān*: "Briefly, the rhetoric and rhythm of the Arabic of the Koran are so characteristic, so powerful, so highly emotive, that every version whatsoever is bound in the nature of things to be but a poor copy of the glittering splendour of the original."[3]

In a language of great warmth and depth, Professor Arberry writes in his Preface to *The Koran Interpreted:*

> "During the long months, the dark and light months, of labouring at this interpretation, eclectic where the ancient commentators differ in their understanding of a word or a phrase, unannotated because notes in plenty are to be found in other versions, and the radiant beauty of the

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[1] Arberry, *Oriental Essays*, p. 237.

[2] From the records of *Bazm-i Iqbāl*, Karachi.

[3] Arberry, *Koran Interpreted*, p. 24.

> original is not clouded by such vexing interpolations — all through this welcome task I have been reliving those Ramadan nights of long ago, when I would sit on the varandah of my Gezira house and listen entranced to the old, white-bearded Shaykh who chanted the Koran for the pious delectation of my neighbour .... It was then that I, the infidel, learnt to understand and react to the thrilling rhythm of the Koran, only to be apprehended when listened to at such a time and in such a place. In humble thankfulness I dedicate this all too inperfect essay in imitation to the memory of those magical Egyptian nights.[1]

I have known very few Christian scholars refer to the *Qur'ān* with such feelings of devotion and admiration. Every word written by the Professor radiates his sincerity and echoes with his faith. This shows how with age and studies he had come to appreciate the spirit of Islām and Islāmic Culture.

Throughout his career, Professor Arberry worked hard to make Oriental studies more popular in Great Britain, and in Scarbrough Report he saw signs of his hopes being realised after all. The Scarbrough Commission, consisting of fifteen men of distinction, was appointed on December 15, 1944 by the then Foreign Secretary, Sir Anthony Eden. Its Report has been with all justification called the Charter of Modern Orientalism. The report suggested means for affecting advances in the humanities comparable in scale with advance already achieved in science. But in subsequent years the action taken on the recommendations of the Scarbrough Report was not very encouraging, and this made Arberry write: "I look forward to the time which I shall certainly not witness myself when it will be considered as normal for an undergraduate to study the history of Arab, or Persian or Indian or Chinese or Japanese civilisation as to investigate the ancient and modern civilisations of Europe." There are no signs of Professor Arberry's hopes being realised in the near future. But it must be acknowledged that he did his best to achieve the aims of the Report at least in Cambridge.

Professor Arberry produced books of great learning based on original research in great numbers. It can be truly said of him that

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

productivity was at full spate throughout his career. Owing to the pressure under which he worked his health broke down frequently and he needed holidays often which he utilised to collect fresh material for new books. In all he has left us over forty books.

Once when Professor Arberry and the writer were having lunch with the Master of Pambroke College in the College dinning hall, the Master asked Arberry, "Arberry, do you read all the books you write?" This remark provided an index to the dimension of his literary output.

Arberry died on October 22, 1969. In him we lost a great friend of Oriental learning, a devoted scholar and worker on Iqbāl. While it is true that "Nicholson was the first man in the West to recognise the greatnes of Iqbāl,"[1] it was Arberry who really made Iqbāl accessible to Western readers. In Iqbāl he discovered Rūmī's teachings presented in the light of modern thought, and this served to intensify his admiration for Iqbāl.

[1] Arberry, *Oriental Essays*, p. 215.