

JELAL UD-DIN RUMI

A MOSLEM SAINT WITH A CHRISTIAN HEART¹

On any Sunday afternoon, gathered about the windows of a small house in a garden on Mt. Pagus overlooking the city of Smyrna, can be seen eager crowds of Moslems. The house is the Tekke, or Lodge Building of the Mevlevi Order, and the attraction for the crowd is the whirling religious dance of the dervishes. To the casual visitor the number of eager onlookers may have but little significance, but to the thoughtful student of religious affairs in the Near East the scene is full of suggestive interest. The orthodox system of Islam seems, these days, to be falling into disrepute. An Imam of one of the most beautiful mosques in Smyrna remarked recently to a visitor who complimented the beauty of the place of worship, "Yes, the mosque is all right. The only trouble is with the men who never come to pray." Of the twenty-one *medressehs*, or theological schools, existing in Smyrna before the war, not one is active today. When we mentioned this fact recently to a *hodja* in the main mosque of the city, and asked where the future religious leaders were to come from, he only shrugged his shoulders, and replied as if utterly indifferent, "Who knows?"

In contrast to this lack of interest in the official five prayers of Mohammed and the other outward forms of Islam is the apparently undiminished interest in the mystic side of the faith. Psychic phenomena as evidence of religion seem to be appealing to the modern Turkish mind as well as to some of his more educated brothers in the Western world. Recently a party of us attended in Smyrna a *zikr* of the Rufai Order, the famous Howling

¹[We would call the attention of our readers to a monograph on the same subject by Cl. Huart under the title *Les Saints des Derviches Tourneurs* (translated from the Persian with notes) Leroux, Paris, 1918.—Ed.]

Dervishes. It was a formal occasion, and representatives of many orders were present, Mevlevis in their long brown hats, Qadiris with their green turbans, Semanis in red, Marafis in black, and others. A hundred or more took part in the noisy service which lasted for two hours, and as many more spectators stood about in wondering curiosity. Every week the attendance at this *zîkr* shows the same interest.

A few days later we attended a gathering of Mevlevis in the Tekke already mentioned. My own interest in this *zîkr* was great, because among the dancers was a young boy who is an eager student in the International College, and who is a member of my curriculum Bible class. Though I came before the service began, crowds were already gathered at the door and about the windows. Personal friends made a way for me into the gallery, where I watched the strange service inaugurated by Jalal ud-Din Rumi 700 years ago. A young lad about fifteen, the brother of my student dervish, was officiating as Sheikh, having recently been raised to that office on the death of his father. Three times around the room the dervishes slowly marched, bowing solemnly before the Mihrab and before the tombs of the departed. Then, to the weird tune of reed pipe and drum, they began their whirling motion, arms outstretched, right palm up and left down, head bowed over right shoulder. The aged whirled slowly, but the younger ones, one surely not over twelve, at a dizzying speed. Several times they paused, and with right toe over the left, bowed to the Sheikh, then began their strange motion, said to be symbolic of the motion of the human soul about the soul of God.

That such services as this are kept up week after week with the eager interest on the part of outsiders, while *medressehs* die out and official prayers at the mosque languish, is suggestive of the possible fact that in this part of the Moslem world, vital Islam is to be

understood more in the mystical manifestations than in its formal orthodox rites.

If this is true it is more than ever worth while to seek for an understanding of those great figures in the past who have sought God through the love of the heart, and who have left to their still eager disciples today their interpretation of the only true Way to God, the great Reality. It was with this in mind that I visited the Mevlevis on a week day to make inquiry of my Sheikh friend regarding the founder of his order, Jelal ud-Din Rumi, said by Professor Ethé in the Encyclopedia Britannica to be "the greatest pantheistic writer of all ages." Quite naturally I found that my friend, having only recently come into the headship of his Order, was only beginning his studies in Persian and Arabic, and knew almost nothing about the founder of his Order. But I was surprised to find that the other dervishes also were unacquainted with even the main facts in the life of the one whom they call *Mevlana*, "Our Lord." Indeed, it turned out as it so often has in other attempts at investigation that information could be found in twenty minutes in one's own private English library that it took weeks to find by zealous inquiry from the initiated dervishes themselves.

Finally, however, in a tiny back room opening into a shop in the bazaars, the only light coming from a hole in the roof, I had the privilege of meeting a Mevlevi teacher of some learning, who gave me, in substance, the following account of the great Moslem mystic:

Mevlana Jelal ud-Din Rumi was born in 1207 in Balkh, in the Province of Khorasan, Persia. Jelal ud-Din's father, Baha ud-Din was a learned professor and so popular that the jealousy of the ruler was aroused to an extent necessitating Baha ud-Din's departure in 1212 from the city. Stopping for a time in Nishapur, they visited Sheikh Ferid ud-Din Attar, who took the young Jelal in his arms, caressed him, and prophesying that he

would become a great man, blessed him and presented him with a copy of one of his own books, *Asrar Nama* (The Book of Secrets.) From Nishapur the family travelled to Bagdad and to Mecca. Afterward, for four years, a residence was made in Malatia, and later in Laranda, the present Karaman. For seven years they remained here, until finally Ala ud-Din Kay-Kubad, the Seljuk Emperor, hearing of the fame of Baha ud-Din, invited him to Konia, where, in 1231, the father died leaving his son to inherit and add to his own pious and learned reputation.

It was while away from Konia studying in Aleppo and Syria that Jelal ud-Din began to study from one of his father's old pupils the mystic sciences. In 1244 when he returned to Konia he met Shemsi Tabriz, with whose spiritual perfection he fell in love, and with whom for fifteen months he constantly associated. This man was not a learned man, but he possessed a strange power of attracting the warm love of all who talked with him. After the death of Shemsi Tabriz, Jelal ud-Din began wearing the long hat and flowing coat of his friend, and so inaugurated the custom in dress followed by the Mevlevis of today.

Jelal ud-Din's most famous literary work is the *Masnavi*, a great poem, written in Persian, divided into six parts and containing two thousand six hundred and sixty-six couplets. Ten years were spent in composing this work. Today this book is the inspiration of the Mevlevis and their mystic order.

In 1273 Jelal ud-Din died and was buried beside the tomb of his father.

So much my Mevlevi friend told me he had been able to gather about the life of Jelal ud-Din, but only by reference to some eight or ten books. In his eyes the greatness of Jelal ud-Din evidently rested largely on the wonder-miracles, stories of which are current in considerable number.

The spiritual tendency of Jelal ud-Din is emphasized in a book called, "Anecdotes of Our Lord, Jelal ud-Din Rumi," which had been sent recently to the late Sheikh, and which, as yet unread by him, was loaned me by the present Sheikh.

According to this book, recognized by the Mevlevis themselves, Jelal ud-Din is called the Sultan of the Saints and the Last of the Perfect. In Damascus, Aleppo and elsewhere he studied under the greatest teachers of his time, and became proficient in Arabic, jurisprudence, logic, and "all other things." Yet all the time Jelal ud-Din's interest was in the divine truths that are hidden from human eyes. Shemsi Tabriz taught him that by whirling higher states of consciousness could be attained. For the common people this whirling was said to be forbidden, because it would increase the force of their temptations. Correspondingly ecstatic love would be increased in the case of true seekers after God. During the whirling all is forgotten save God. It is said that some of Jelal ud-Din's best sayings were uttered while in a trance state brought on by whirling.

Beautiful and loud singing was made to contribute also to the deepening of the emotional effect on the heart. Every movement in the whirling was felt to be symbolic of a spiritual reality. The whirling itself, for example, signifies unity. The whirlers are able to see the truth on all sides, and share in its beauties. To beat the feet and to leap also symbolize spiritual aspiration. To leap means to reach the highest universe out of the excess of ecstasy. To beat the feet is to kick aside the miserable wordly things in an attempt to soar to heights. To hold the hand open has several meanings. First, from joy of reaching God, and looking for perfection. Secondly, it means the victory over oneself which is the greatest *Jihad* (Holy War.) To bend during intervals means humility and respect. "To the living person," Jelal ud-Din says,

"whirling is rest of the soul." The full meaning of the whirling, he assures us, is only to be felt by those who have actually experienced the ecstasy of it.

There is a curious human touch in Jelal ud-Din's defense of his use of poetry. He says that in his own country it was considered disgraceful to speak in poetry, and that if he had remained there it would have been impossible. Even in Konia he tried his best not to use it, but in spite of all efforts he failed to restrain the expression of his feeling in this way. "There is a vast difference," he says, "between the poetry of the saints and that of the mere poets. For the saints lose themselves in union with God, while the poetry of the poets is full of unspiritual imaginings. Their object is to show their knowledge and hence their poetry is selfish. The saints, on the other hand, do not show themselves, but show God in their poetry. "After me," he goes on to say, "the Masnavi will take my place and lead you."

That Jelal ud-Din's spiritual experience was a deep, and, to him, tremendously real one, is evidenced by the extreme asceticism into which he was led. It is said that after he first met Shemsi Tabriz they lived for six months without feeling the need of eating or drinking. Though this doubtless refers to fasting in the Moslem sense of not eating or drinking by day, it is said that whenever the fast was broken it was by not over ten mouthfuls of a simple kind of food. He was proud of being poor, and happier when there was little food in the house. He would then say to his family, "Now the light of poverty is shining in your faces." No word regarding grief or pleasure at things in this world was heard to come from his mouth. In the whirling he would entirely lose himself in a feeling of unity with God, to such an extent that once in winter he was so carried away with emotion that he bowed his face to the ground in an ecstasy, and the tears that he shed froze his beard to the ground. In this state he remained, either unconscious or lost in meditation, until his disciples found him the next morning.

Yet even in the midst of this extreme ecstasy he seems to have been singularly open to the appeal of human need. He said on one occasion, "I hate to offend any heart." He treated kindly even those who interrupted him in the midst of his whirling. Once a drunkard tried so to interfere with him, and was forcibly ejected by a disciple. Jelal ud-Din turned to this disciple and said, "He drank the wine, but you have acted like a drunkard in his place."

For beggars he ever had a ready ear. Even his coat and shirt he would give away. In order to be able to do this the more readily it is said that he wore these garments habitually open in front. The coat thus given away would often be sold for a considerable sum to a rich man who would wear it in the hope of so gaining merit both in this world and the next.

Such a reputation for sanctity made it easy for people to believe that he had mysterious powers of vision, that hidden things were known to him. If his servant was in financial distress he perceived the trouble as if by telepathy, and relieved it. Once he is said to have run into a house and shouted to the occupants to get out. Immediately afterward the roof of the house fell in. When such reports of his powers were spread abroad it is no wonder that the people crowded him as he passed through the streets, and begged him to answer their questions about life, and that even the little children would leave their games to go and kiss his hands as he passed by.

But perhaps the real spirit of the man can be seen better than in any other way through quotations from his writings. His pantheistic philosophy, with its possibilities for both good and evil, is well expressed in the following poem on "The True Mystic."

The man of God is drunken without wine.
The man of God is full without meat.
The man of God is distraught and bewildered.
The man of God has no food or sleep.
The man of God is a king neath dervish-cloak.
The man of God is a treasure in a ruin.
The man of God is not of air and earth.

The man of God is not of fire and water.
 The man of God is a boundless sea.
 The man of God rains pearls without a cloud.
 The man of God hath hundred moons and skies.
 The man of God hath hundred suns.
 The man of God is made wise by the Truth.
 The man of God is not learned from book.
 The man of God is beyond infidelity and religion.
 To the man of God right and wrong are alike.
 The man of God has ridden away from Not-being.
 The man of God is gloriously attended.
 The man of God is concealed, Shamsi Din.
 The man of God do thou seek and find!

His independence from orthodox religion either Christian or Moslem and his assurance of the reality of his own mystic experience are shown in this translation:

Lo, for I to myself am unknown, now in God's name what must I do?
 I adore not the Cross nor the Crescent, I am not a Giaour nor a Jew.
 East nor West, land nor sea is my home. I have kin nor with angel
 nor gnome,
 I am wrought not of fire nor of foam, I am shaped not of dust nor of
 dew.
 I was born not in China afar, not in Sagsin and not in Bulgar;
 Not in India, where five rivers are, nor in 'Iraq nor Khorasan I grew.
 Not in this world nor that world I dwell, not in Paradise, neither in
 Hell;
 Not from Eden and Rizwan I fell, not from Adam my lineage I drew.
 In a place beyond uttermost place, in a tract without shadow of trace,
 Soul and body transcending, I live in the soul of My Loved One anew!

A Moslem in outward practice, he succeeded in finding a spiritual meaning in Mohammed's required rites, as for example:

Beats there a heart within that breast of thine,
 Then compass reverently its sacred shrine;
 For the essential Kaaba is the heart,
 And no proud pile of perishable art.

When God ordained the pilgrim rite, that sign
 Was meant to lead thy thoughts to things divine;
 A thousand times he treads that round in vain
 Who gives one human heart a needless pain.

Leave wealth behind; bring God thy heart, Whose light
 Will guide thy footsteps through the gloomiest night.
 God spurns the riches of a thousand coffers,
 And says, The saint is he his heart who offers;

Nor gold nor silver seek I, but above
 All gifts of the heart, and buy it with My love;
 Yea! one sad contrite heart which men despise

More than My throne and fixed decree I prize;
 The meanest heart that ever man has spurned
 Is a clear glass where God may be discerned.

The following poem shows that in him the influence of Jesus was felt as in few, if any, Moslem thinkers:

Spring may come, but on granite will grow no green thing;
 It was barren in winter, 'tis barren in spring;
 And granite man's heart is, till grace intervene,
 And, crushing it, clothe the long barren with green.
 When the fresh breath of Jesus shall touch the heart's core,
 It will live, it will breathe, it will blossom once more.

Seeing in the story of the triumphal entry a symbolic story of the contest between spirituality and sensuality he writes:

You deserted Jesus, a mere ass to feed,
 In a crowd of asses you would take the lead;
 Those who follow Jesus, win to wisdom's ranks;
 Those who fatten asses get a kick for thanks.
 Pity keep for Jesus, pity not the ass,
 Let not fleshly impulse intellect surpass.
 If an ass could somewhat catch of Jesus' mind,
 Classed among the sages he himself would find;
 Though because of Jesus you may suffer woe,
 Still from Him comes healing; never let Him go.

Jelal ud-Din apparently knew well the Christian doctrine of Christ, but he himself repudiated it.

"The Son of God!" Nay, leave the word unsaid.
 Say, "God is one, the pure, the single Truth."

Nowhere, however, is the idealism of Jelal ud-Din expressed better than in his final charge to his disciples, as given by Claude Field in his "Mystics and Saints of Islam:" "I bid you fear God openly and in secret, guard against excess in eating and drinking and speech; keep aloof from evil companionship; be diligent in fasts and self-renunciation, and bear wrongs patiently. The best man is he who helps his fellow-men, and the best speech is a brief one which leads to knowledge. Praise be to God alone."

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