XIX.

HELLENISM AND MUHAMMADANISM.

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I BELIEVE I shall be doing good service to students of Moslem literature if I venture to call their attention to a recently published book, which at first sight may seem quite foreign to their special subject. Dr. Caird's recent Gifford Lectures on the "Evolution of Theology in the Greek Philosophers" throw a flood of light on the genesis and growth of those Hellenic ideas which have so profoundly modified Christian and some parts of Moslem theology. The scholastic and the mystical theology of Christendom and Islam ran in courses parallel to one another, and the influence of the Hellenic factor is equally operative in both. Each may be regarded as the offspring of a cross between Hebraic and Hellenic ideas. It has, of course, long been recognised that Moslem scholastic theology (*Al Kalām*) has been built up, like its Christian counterpart, from Aristotelian concepts, and, moreover, that the Christian schoolmen drew much of their knowledge of Aristotle from Arabic authorities. The great commentary of Averroes, for instance, is mentioned by Dante, who censures his doctrine of the Universal Soul, afterwards condemned by the Lateran Council of 1512. Long ago, Jourdain made a careful study of the translations of Aristotle used by the schoolmen, and showed how many of them had come through Arabic. Schmölders proved that Moslem scholasticism is Aristotle with a Neo-Platonic colouring. The so-called "Theology of Aristotle," for instance, is merely a summary of the *Enneads* of Plotinus, "the Shaikh of the Greeks." Renan, Dieterici, and others have left little more to be said on the subject of Moslem scholasticism.

The Sufi mystical theology or Gnosis has been built up out of Hellenic conceptions quite as much as the scholastic theology of the *Mutakallamīn*. This is expressly stated by Hajji Khalfa in his article on Sufism, by the author of the *Dabistān*, and others. Tholuck demonstrated the dependence of Sufi theology on Neo-Platonism about eighty years ago, and this view has been accepted by most of those who have studied the subject. I need only mention Professor E. G. Browne and Mr. Nicholson. The very clear accounts of Neo-Platonism given by Dr. Caird, and by Dr. Harnack in his "History of Dogma," seem to leave no room for further doubt as to the real genesis of Sufi theology.

The problem before Moslem divines was, how to frame a reasoned theology out of the unreasoned spontaneous religious 'experiences' of devout enthusiasts. The Sufi enthusiasts claimed intuitions of God, whereby they apprehended His presence within them, just as they perceived outward objects by the ordinary senses. They also claimed direct spiritual communion and even identification with God. These claims had to be reckoned with because they seemed to be vouched for to some extent by their visible fruits of devout conduct, and they also seemed to draw some support from texts like "God is nearer to you than your neck-vein," and from a few traditions. But the immanent God of the Sufis hardly squared with the supramundane Allah of the Koran, who dwells above the Empyrean and rules men with the "reins of hope and fear." Of course the Sufi enthusiasts held that "the spiritual man can be judged by none," but sober divines cannot admit this plea. They are compelled to "try the spirits," because, as Wesley said, "Satan has been known to mimic the work of grace."

The instrument whereby Moslem divines framed a rationale of the rough materials given by Sufi 'experiences' was the same as that used by Christian mystical theologians, viz. the theosophic gnosis of Plotinus. Ghazzālī and others familiarized Moslems with his doctrines, just as Origen, Augustine, and the pseudo-Dionysius conveyed them to Christendom.

As Dr. Caird points out, the main principle of Greek philosophy from Anaxagoras onwards was Dualism, that is, the severance of the One from the Many, of God from the world. They reached a quasi-concept of the One by the 'negative way,' the ladder of dialectical abstraction, and, as Dr. Caird says, pulling the ladder up behind them reached a pure abstraction, void of all positive contents. Thus Plato described the Ideal Good as 'beyond existence,' and therefore as beyond thought. Plotinus begins with a dualism as pronounced as that of Plato. He sets his 'One,' the unknowable ultimate Being, in opposition to 'Not-being' (*To mē on*). But he then goes on to bridge the gulf between them. Through its inherent exuberant energy, the One radiates forth an image of itself into Reason (*Nous*) which comprehends both thought and real existence. Reason is thus the channel through which is conveyed to the visible world what little reality it has. By a second emanation Soul proceeds from Reason, and this Soul is in turn poured forth into particular souls of men, and in ever decreasing degrees of reality into the lower animal and plant souls. Man is thus midway down the descent, "created half to rise and half to fall." The spark of real being within him tends upwards to its divine source, while his affinity to unreal matter drags him down. The 'return' to the divine source is to be effected not by moral conduct alone nor by human understanding, for the 'One' transcends both. It can be attained only by retracing the downward course, whereby man has come into contact with unreal matter. Man must abstract or strip off the material and sensuous accretions which clog and veil his real essence. He must mortify all earthly affections and lusts and self-will, and then annul all exercise of his intellect and even all consciousness. In this state of ecstasy in complete passivity he may obtain exaltation above his individual self, and become united as to his noblest part with the 'One.' This doctrine has been made familiar by Augustine, e.g. his discourse with his mother at Ostia, and reappears in Eckart and even in the Apology of the Quaker Barclay, who found it in a Sufi romance translated by Ockley.

The parallel between the above system and Sufi theosophy is very close.¹ The Sufi God, 'The Truth' (*Al Haqq*), is the One of Plotinus. In the Sufi Universal Reason (*ʿAql ul Kull*) and Universal Soul (*Nafs ul Kull*) we have the other two hypostases of the Plotinian Trinity. Lāhijī says Muhammad was identified with Universal Reason, and thus the Logos doctrine tended to play the same part in Moslem theology that it has in Christendom. But the stern monotheism of the Koran prevented this. The Sufis, however, did adopt the Plotinian doctrine that it was through the channel of Universal Reason that the real being of the 'One' was conveyed to the contingent being of men and the world. And they pictured this process by the Plotinian metaphor of reflected rays. According to the *Gulshan i Rāz*, "Man is the reflected eye and God the light of the eye. In that eye God sees His own eye; He is at once the seer and thing seen." This seems to come near the Hegelian Monist doctrine that God realizes Himself in the universe. The Sufi doctrine that God is the 'One Real Agent' (*Fā'il i Haqiqī*), and that to believe in free-will is Magian dualism, supports this view. But theologians seldom let regard for consistency stand in the way of edification. Like Plotinus, the Sufis reverted to dualism directly monism became unedifying. The *Gulshan i Rāz* says, "Everything comes from the 'Truth,' yet if there be evil in anything, that evil comes from 'Other,'" i.e. from Not-being (*ʿAdm*).² Just so Augustine calls evil a negation, a departure from real being. But the Sufis could not quite ignore the unpleasant fact that disease and suffering and bad passions are something more than mere negative and negligible quantities. As Dante remarked, "Brute matter is essentially

¹ It has been asserted recently that Neo-Platonism never penetrated the east of the empire, but in point of fact Avicēna, Ghazzālī, Shāhristānī, and Jāmī were all natives of Khorāsān, and Al Farābī of Turkistān.

² Dugald Stewart says of Pope's lines—

"All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body Nature is and God the soul,"

that they do not maintain pantheism. The seeming pantheism or panpsychism is thus softened into a form of dualism.

an intractable *something* which does not respond to the design of the divine Artist." So the Sufis, like all mystics, got out of the difficulty by falling back on emotion. In practice they came to identify their abstract God, 'The Truth,' exalted (as Jāmī says) above all predicates, with the very personal Allah of the Koran, endued with the attributes of love and wrath (Jamāl and Jalāl). On such a God emotion could freely fasten. Jalāluddīn Rumi says a true lover prides himself on trusting his beloved in spite of her cruelty, and thus love puts the cavils of dry reason to silence. He regards suffering as having a beneficent purpose, and divine 'compulsion' as compatible with human freedom. This doctrine of love has, of course, its roots in Sufi 'experiences,' but it was developed by the theologians with the aid of the conceptions of the Phædrus and Symposium. "Beauty stands on the threshold of the mystical world," and beautiful earthly objects raise the thoughts to their divine Archetype, as Spenser tells in his "Hymn of Heavenly Beauty." Aristotle had said that God, Himself unmoved, moves men as an object of love, and it is precisely this love which the Sufis postulate as the force drawing men up to 'The Truth.'

By the method of allegorical interpretation, used by all Hellenizing theologians from Philo onwards, the text "To Him shall we return" was twisted into the meaning of the Neo-Platonic '*Epistrophē*' (*Ma'ād*). That is to say, it was conceived as a process analogous to logical abstraction (*Tajrīd*), the stripping off of all sensuous material accretions which veil man's real essence. As with Plotinus, this 'return' had three stages—the Law (*Shari'at*), the Path (*Tarīqat*), and the 'Truth' (*Haqīqat*). The first stage, which was within the capacity of all men, comprised moral conduct and the external righteousness of the law. The Path comprised asceticism and contemplation (*Murāqabat*), the two ideals of the monastic life, and could be accomplished by spiritual men only. The Prophet had said, "There is no monkery in Islam," and propitiation by sacrifices is no part of the official Moslem creed. The worship of the Mosque

is that of the Synagogue, not that of the Temple. The idea that perfection is to be gained through suffering and self-sacrifice seems almost universal, and is expressed by the Indian Jogis no less than by writers like Goethe, Carlyle, and Matthew Arnold. The Sufis perhaps got it from the Encratite sects in Syria, where the first Sufi convents were established. The Neo-Platonic doctrine of the need for stripping off all sensuous accretions supplied a logical rationale for Sufi ascetic practices. Contemplation is equivalent to the Greek *Theōria*, the concentration of thought on the divine spark in the soul. It is the '*Introrsum ascensio*' of Christian mystics. The final goal is the annihilation of all thought and consciousness (*Fanā*), corresponding to the Ecstasy of Plotinus. In this state the distinction of subject and real object becomes transparent and is transcended, and man is united as to his real essence with the divine Being who comprehends all. Lāhijī says it is actual unity (*Wahdat*) which is thus realized, not mere union of two entities (*Ittihād*). Ghazzālī says, "In that state man is effaced from self so that he is conscious neither of his body, nor of outward objects, nor of inward feelings. He is rapt above all these, journeying first to his Lord, then in his Lord." He says he attained it three times, while Plotinus is said to have attained it four times.

The saintly mystic Abū Sa'id bin Abī-l Khair once discussed Sufism with the philosopher Avicena, and when Avicena propounded the Neo-Platonic theology Abū Sa'id cut him short with the remark, "All that you *know* I *see*." In other words, "All the conclusions which you have wrought out by intellect are revealed to me directly by the inner light. I am in touch with the Deity, and feel His motions in my soul and see and commune with Him." Avicena may not improbably have replied that men who lack such inner light or intuitive reason can attain knowledge of the Deity only through ordinary senses and understanding. What they want is a rational account of the matter intelligible to all, and such a rationale was supplied by the Neo-Platonic reasoned gnosis.

This story is an apt illustration of the main thesis of this paper. By what he claimed to have 'seen' Abū Sa'id meant his 'experiences,' the 'experimental mysticism' which is merely an extreme form of the religious feelings of devout men in all countries. These were certainly not borrowed by the Sufis from Greek or any other sources. What Avicena claimed to know was the reasoned theology of Plotinus. Avicena was not a Sufi, but I think it clear that the Sufi divines borrowed the same theology to explain and justify Sufi 'experiences.' Dieterici's summary of the Ikhwānu-s Safā in his "Die Welt Seele" and Haarbrucker's translation of Shāhrastānī's "Book of Sects" prove that the main Neo-Platonic ideas and terminology were familiar to Moslem philosophers, and Palmer's "Oriental Mysticism," which is a summary of the Sufi "Maqsadu-l Aqsā," proves that this Neo-Platonic gnosis was carried into the domain of Sufism. The Neo-Platonic watchwords appear in Sufi poems from that of Hakīm Sanāi (sixth century A.H.) onwards. And in the Gulshan i Rāz (eighth century A.H.), translated by me, we find still further development of Neo-Platonic doctrine.

There is an ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy, emotion and reason, and naturally (as before remarked) pious Sufis did not like this intrusion of reason into their province. They thought this reasoned theology raised more difficulties than it solved, and tended rather to weaken than to fortify simple faith. That, however, is too large a question to be discussed in this paper.