



SONGS OF KABIR

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Global Grey ebooks

SONGS OF KABIR

TRANSLATED
BY
RABINDRANATH TAGORE

INTRODUCTION BY EVELYN UNDERHILL

1915

Songs Of Kabir By Rabindranath Tagore.

This edition was created and published by Global Grey

©GlobalGrey 2018



globalgreeyebooks.com

CONTENTS

Introduction

Kabir's Poems

INTRODUCTION

THE poet Kabîr, a selection from whose songs is here for the first time offered to English readers, is one of the most interesting personalities in the history of Indian mysticism. Born in or near Benares, of Mohammedan parents, and probably about the year 1440, he became in early life a disciple of the celebrated Hindu ascetic Râmânanda. Râmânanda had brought to Northern India the religious revival which Râmânûja, the great twelfth-century reformer of Brâhmanism, had initiated in the South. This revival was in part a reaction against the increasing formalism of the orthodox cult, in part an assertion of the demands of the heart as against the intense intellectualism of the Vedânta philosophy, the exaggerated monism which that philosophy proclaimed. It took in Râmânûja's preaching the form of an ardent personal devotion to the God Vishnu, as representing the personal aspect of the Divine Nature: that mystical "religion of love" which everywhere makes its appearance at a certain level of spiritual culture, and which creeds and philosophies are powerless to kill.

Though such a devotion is indigenous in Hinduism, and finds expression in many passages of the Bhagavad Gîtâ, there was in its mediæval revival a large element of syncretism. Râmânanda, through whom its spirit is said to have reached Kabîr, appears to have been a man of wide religious culture, and full of missionary enthusiasm. Living at the moment in which the impassioned poetry and deep philosophy of the great Persian mystics, Attâr, Sâdî, Jalâlu'ddîn Rûmî, and Hâfiz, were exercising a powerful influence on the religious thought of India, he dreamed of reconciling this intense and personal Mohammedan mysticism with the traditional theology of Brâhmanism. Some have regarded both these great religious leaders as influenced also by Christian thought and life: but as this is a point upon which competent authorities hold widely divergent views, its discussion is not attempted here. We may safely assert, however, that in their teachings, two--perhaps three--apparently antagonistic streams of intense spiritual culture met, as Jewish and Hellenistic thought met in the early Christian Church: and it is one of the outstanding characteristics of Kabîr's genius that he was able in his poems to fuse them into one.

A great religious reformer, the founder of a sect to which nearly a million northern Hindus still belong, it is yet supremely as a mystical poet that Kabîr lives for us. His fate has been that of many revealers of Reality. A hater of religious exclusivism, and seeking above all things to initiate men into the liberty of the children of God, his followers have honoured his memory by re-erecting in a new place the barriers which he laboured to cast down. But his wonderful songs survive, the spontaneous expressions of his vision and his love; and it is by these, not by the didactic teachings associated with his name, that he makes his immortal appeal to the heart. In these poems a wide range of mystical emotion is brought into play: from the loftiest abstractions, the most otherworldly passion for the Infinite, to the most intimate and personal realization of God, expressed in homely metaphors and religious symbols drawn indifferently from Hindu and Mohammedan belief. It is impossible to say of their author that he was Brâhman or Sûfî, Vedântist or Vaishnavite. He is, as he says himself, "at once the child of Allah and of Râm." That Supreme Spirit Whom he knew and adored, and to Whose joyous friendship he sought to induct the souls of other men, transcended whilst He included all metaphysical categories, all credal definitions; yet each contributed something to the description of that Infinite and Simple Totality Who revealed Himself, according to their measure, to the faithful lovers of all creeds.

Kabîr's story is surrounded by contradictory legends, on none of which reliance can be placed. Some of these emanate from a Hindu, some from a Mohammedan source, and claim him by turns as a Sûfî and a Brâhman saint. His name, however, is practically a conclusive proof of Moslem ancestry: and the most probable tale is that which represents him as the actual or adopted child of a Mohammedan weaver of Benares, the city in which the chief events of his life took place.

In fifteenth-century Benares the syncretistic tendencies of Bhakti religion had reached full development. Sûfîs and Brâhmans appear to have met in disputation: the most spiritual members of both creeds frequenting the teachings of Râmânanda, whose reputation was then at its height. The boy Kabîr, in whom the religious passion was innate, saw in Râmânanda his destined teacher; but knew how slight were the chances that a Hindu guru

would accept a Mohammedan as disciple. He therefore hid upon the steps of the river Ganges, where Râmânanda was accustomed to bathe; with the result that the master, coming down to the water, trod upon his body unexpectedly, and exclaimed in his astonishment, "Ram! Ram!"--the name of the incarnation under which he worshipped God. Kabîr then declared that he had received the mantra of initiation from Râmânanda's lips, and was by it admitted to discipleship. In spite of the protests of orthodox Brâhmans and Mohammedans, both equally annoyed by this contempt of theological landmarks, he persisted in his claim; thus exhibiting in action that very principle of religious synthesis which Râmânanda had sought to establish in thought. Râmânanda appears to have accepted him, and though Mohammedan legends speak of the famous Sûfî Pîr, Takkî of Jhansî, as Kabîr's master in later life, the Hindu saint is the only human teacher to whom in his songs he acknowledges indebtedness.

The little that we know of Kabîr's life contradicts many current ideas concerning the Oriental mystic. Of the stages of discipline through which he passed, the manner in which his spiritual genius developed, we are completely ignorant. He seems to have remained for years the disciple of Râmânanda, joining in the theological and philosophical arguments which his master held with all the great Mullahs and Brâhmans of his day; and to this source we may perhaps trace his acquaintance with the terms of Hindu and Sûfî philosophy. He may or may not have submitted to the traditional education of the Hindu or the Sûfî contemplative: it is clear, at any rate, that he never adopted the life of the professional ascetic, or retired from the world in order to devote himself to bodily mortifications and the exclusive pursuit of the contemplative life. Side by side with his interior life of adoration, its artistic expression in music and words--for he was a skilled musician as well as a poet--he lived the sane and diligent life of the Oriental craftsman. All the legends agree on this point: that Kabîr was a weaver, a simple and unlettered man, who earned his living at the loom. Like Paul the tentmaker, Boehme the cobbler, Bunyan the tinker, Tersteegen the ribbon-maker, he knew how to combine vision and industry; the work of his hands helped rather than hindered the impassioned meditation of his heart. Hating mere bodily austerities, he was no ascetic, but a married man, the father of a family--a circumstance which Hindu legends of the monastic type vainly

attempt to conceal or explain--and it was from out of the heart of the common life that he sang his rapturous lyrics of divine love. Here his works corroborate the traditional story of his life. Again and again he extols the life of home, the value and reality of diurnal existence, with its opportunities for love and renunciation; pouring contempt--upon the professional sanctity of the Yogi, who "has a great beard and matted locks, and looks like a goat," and on all who think it necessary to flee a world pervaded by love, joy, and beauty--the proper theatre of man's quest--in order to find that One Reality Who has "spread His form of love throughout all the world."¹

It does not need much experience of ascetic literature to recognize the boldness and originality of this attitude in such a time and place.

From the point of view of orthodox sanctity, whether Hindu or Mohammedan, Kabîr was plainly a heretic; and his frank dislike of all institutional religion, all external observance--which was as thorough and as intense as that of the Quakers themselves--completed, so far as ecclesiastical opinion was concerned, his reputation as a dangerous man. The "simple union" with Divine Reality which he perpetually extolled, as alike the duty and the joy of every soul, was independent both of ritual and of bodily austerities; the God whom he proclaimed was "neither in Kaaba nor in Kailâsh." Those who sought Him needed not to go far; for He awaited discovery everywhere, more accessible to "the washerwoman and the carpenter" than to the self--righteous holy man.²

Therefore the whole apparatus of piety, Hindu and Moslem alike--the temple and mosque, idol and holy water, scriptures and priests--were denounced by this inconveniently clear-sighted poet as mere substitutes for reality; dead things intervening between the soul and its love--

The images are all lifeless, they cannot speak:

I know, for I have cried aloud to them.

The Purâna and the Koran are mere words:

lifting up the curtain, I have seen.³

¹ Cf. Poems Nos. XXI, XL, XLIII, LXVI, LXXVI.

² Poems I, II, XLI.

³ Poems XLII, LXV, LXVII.

This sort of thing cannot be tolerated by any organized church; and it is not surprising that Kabîr, having his head-quarters in Benares, the very centre of priestly influence, was subjected to considerable persecution. The well-known legend of the beautiful courtesan sent by Brâhmans to tempt his virtue, and converted, like the Magdalen, by her sudden encounter with the initiate of a higher love, preserves the memory of the fear and dislike with which he was regarded by the ecclesiastical powers. Once at least, after the performance of a supposed miracle of healing, he was brought before the Emperor Sikandar Lodi, and charged with claiming the possession of divine powers. But Sikandar Lodi, a ruler of considerable culture, was tolerant of the eccentricities of saintly persons belonging to his own faith. Kabîr, being of Mohammedan birth, was outside the authority of the Brâhmans, and technically classed with the Sûfîs, to whom great theological latitude was allowed. Therefore, though he was banished in the interests of peace from Benares, his life was spared. This seems to have happened in 1495, when he was nearly sixty years of age; it is the last event in his career of which we have definite knowledge. Thenceforth he appears to have moved about amongst various cities of northern India, the centre of a group of disciples; continuing in exile that life of apostle and poet of love to which, as he declares in one of his songs, he was destined "from the beginning of time." In 1518, an old man, broken in health, and with hands so feeble that he could no longer make the music which he loved, he died at Maghar near Gorakhpur.

A beautiful legend tells us that after his death his Mohammedan and Hindu disciples disputed the possession of his body; which the Mohammedans wished to bury, the Hindus to burn. As they argued together, Kabîr appeared before them, and told them to lift the shroud and look at that which lay beneath. They did so, and found in the place of the corpse a heap of flowers; half of which were buried by the Mohammedans at Maghar, and half carried by the Hindus to the holy city of Benares to be burned--fitting conclusion to a life which had made fragrant the most beautiful doctrines of two great creeds.

The poetry of mysticism might be defined on the one hand as a temperamental reaction to the vision of Reality: on the other, as a form of prophecy. As it is the special vocation of the mystical consciousness to mediate between two orders, going out in loving adoration towards God and coming home to tell the secrets of Eternity to other men; so the artistic self-expression of this consciousness has also a double character. It is love-poetry, but love-poetry which is often written with a missionary intention.

Kabîr's songs are of this kind: out-births at once of rapture and of charity. Written in the popular Hindi, not in the literary tongue, they were deliberately addressed--like the vernacular poetry of Jacopone da Todì and Richard Rolle--to the people rather than to the professionally religious class; and all must be struck by the constant employment in them of imagery drawn from the common life, the universal experience. It is by the simplest metaphors, by constant appeals to needs, passions, relations which all men understand--the bridegroom and bride, the guru and disciple, the pilgrim, the farmer, the migrant bird--that he drives home his intense conviction of the reality of the soul's intercourse with the Transcendent. There are in his universe no fences between the "natural" and "supernatural" worlds; everything is a part of the creative Play of God, and therefore--even in its humblest details--capable of revealing the Player's mind.

This willing acceptance of the here-and-now as a means of representing supernal realities is a trait common to the greatest mystics. For them, when they have achieved at last the true theopathic state, all aspects of the universe possess equal authority as sacramental declarations of the Presence of God; and their fearless employment of homely and physical symbols--often startling and even revolting to the unaccustomed taste--is in direct proportion to the exaltation of their spiritual life. The works of the great Sûfîs, and amongst the Christians of Jacopone da Todì, Ruysbroeck, Boehme, abound in illustrations of this law. Therefore we must not be surprised to find in Kabîr's songs--his desperate attempts to communicate his ecstasy and persuade other men to share it--a constant juxtaposition of concrete and metaphysical language; swift alternations between the most intensely anthropomorphic, the most subtly philosophical, ways of apprehending man's communion with the Divine. The need for this

alternation, and its entire naturalness for the mind which employs it, is rooted in his concept, or vision, of the Nature of God; and unless we make some attempt to grasp this, we shall not go far in our understanding of his poems.

Kabîr belongs to that small group of supreme mystics--amongst whom St. Augustine, Ruysbroeck, and the Sûfî poet Jalâlu'ddîn Rûmî are perhaps the chief--who have achieved that which we might call the synthetic vision of God. These have resolved the perpetual opposition between the personal and impersonal, the transcendent and immanent, static and dynamic aspects of the Divine Nature; between the Absolute of philosophy and the "sure true Friend" of devotional religion. They have done this, not by taking these apparently incompatible concepts one after the other; but by ascending to a height of spiritual intuition at which they are, as Ruysbroeck said, "melted and merged in the Unity," and perceived as the completing opposites of a perfect Whole. This proceeding entails for them--and both Kabîr and Ruysbroeck expressly acknowledge it--a universe of three orders: Becoming, Being, and that which is "More than Being," *i.e.*, God.⁴

God is here felt to be not the final abstraction, but the one actuality. He inspires, supports, indeed inhabits, both the durational, conditioned, finite world of Becoming and the unconditioned, non-successional, infinite world of Being; yet utterly transcends them both. He is the omnipresent Reality, the "All-pervading" within Whom "the worlds are being told like beads." In His personal aspect He is the "beloved Fakir," teaching and companioning each soul. Considered as Immanent Spirit, He is "the Mind within the mind." But all these are at best partial aspects of His nature, mutually corrective: as the Persons in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity--to which this theological diagram bears a striking resemblance--represent different and compensating experiences of the Divine Unity within which they are resumed. As Ruysbroeck discerned a plane of reality upon which "we can speak no more of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but only of One Being, the

⁴ Nos. VII and XLIX.

very substance of the Divine Persons"; so Kabîr says that "beyond both the limited and the limitless is He, the Pure Being."⁵

Brahma, then, is the Ineffable Fact compared with which "the distinction of the Conditioned from the Unconditioned is but a word": at once the utterly transcendent One of Absolutist philosophy, and the personal Lover of the individual soul--"common to all and special to each," as one Christian mystic has it. The need felt by Kabîr for both these ways of describing Reality is a proof of the richness and balance of his spiritual experience; which neither cosmic nor anthropomorphic symbols, taken alone, could express. More absolute than the Absolute, more personal than the human mind, Brahma therefore exceeds whilst He includes all the concepts of philosophy, all the passionate intuitions of the heart. He is the Great Affirmation, the font of energy, the source of life and love, the unique satisfaction of desire. His creative word is the *Om* or "Everlasting Yea." The negative philosophy which strips from the Divine Nature all Its attributes and defining Him only by that which He is not--reduces Him to an "Emptiness," is abhorrent to this most vital of poets.--Brahma, he says, "may never be found in abstractions." He is the One Love who Pervades the world., discerned in His fullness only by the eyes of love; and those who know Him thus share, though they may never tell, the joyous and ineffable secret of the universe.⁶

Now Kabîr, achieving this synthesis between the personal and cosmic aspects of the Divine Nature, eludes the three great dangers which threaten mystical religion.

First, he escapes the excessive emotionalism, the tendency to an exclusively anthropomorphic devotion, which results from an unrestricted cult of Divine Personality, especially under an incarnational form; seen in India in the exaggerations of Krishna worship, in Europe in the sentimental extravagances of certain Christian saints.

Next, he is protected from the soul-destroying conclusions of pure monism, inevitable if its logical implications are pressed home: that is, the identity of substance between God and the soul, with its corollary of the total

⁵ No. VII.

⁶ Nos. VII, XXVI, LXXVI, XC.

absorption of that soul in the Being of God as the goal of the spiritual life. For the thorough-going monist the soul, in so far as it is real, is substantially identical with God; and the true object of existence is the making patent of this latent identity, the realization which finds expression in the Vedântist formula "That art thou." But Kabîr says that Brahma and the creature are "ever distinct, yet ever united"; that the wise man knows the spiritual as well as the material world to "be no more than His footstool."⁷

The soul's union with Him is a love union, a mutual inhabitation; that essentially dualistic relation which all mystical religion expresses, not a self-mergence which leaves no place for personality. This eternal distinction, the mysterious union-in-separateness of God and the soul, is a necessary doctrine of all sane mysticism; for no scheme which fails to find a place for it can represent more than a fragment of that soul's intercourse with the spiritual world. Its affirmation was one of the distinguishing features of the Vaishnavite reformation preached by Râmânuja; the principle of which had descended through Râmânanda to Kabîr.

Last, the warmly human and direct apprehension of God as the supreme Object of love, the soul's comrade, teacher, and bridegroom, which is so passionately and frequently expressed in Kabîr's poems, balances and controls those abstract tendencies which are inherent in the metaphysical side of his vision of Reality: and prevents it from degenerating into that sterile worship of intellectual formulæ which became the curse of the Vedântist school. For the mere intellectualist, as for the mere pietist, he has little approbation.⁸

Love is throughout his "absolute sole Lord": the unique source of the more abundant life which he enjoys, and the common factor which unites the finite and infinite worlds. All is soaked in love: that love which he described in almost Johannine language as the "Form of God." The whole of creation is the Play of the Eternal Lover; the living, changing, growing expression of Brahma's love and joy. As these twin passions preside over the generation of human life, so "beyond the mists of pleasure and pain" Kabîr finds them governing the creative acts of God. His manifestation is love; His activity is

⁷ Nos. VII and IX.

⁸ Cf. especially Nos. LIX, LXVII, LXXV, XC, XCI.

joy. Creation springs from one glad act of affirmation: the Everlasting Yea, perpetually uttered within the depths of the Divine Nature.⁹

In accordance with this concept of the universe as a Love-Game which eternally goes forward, a progressive manifestation of Brahma--one of the many notions which he adopted from the common stock of Hindu religious ideas, and illuminated by his poetic genius--movement, rhythm, perpetual change, forms an integral part of Kabîr's vision of Reality. Though the Eternal and Absolute is ever present to his consciousness, yet his concept of the Divine Nature is essentially dynamic. It is by the symbols of motion that he most often tries to convey it to us: as in his constant reference to dancing, or the strangely modern picture of that Eternal Swing of the Universe which is "held by the cords of love."¹⁰

It is a marked characteristic of mystical literature that the great contemplatives, in their effort to convey to us the nature of their communion with the supersensuous, are inevitably driven to employ some form of sensuous imagery: coarse and inaccurate as they know such imagery to be, even at the best. Our normal human consciousness is so completely committed to dependence on the senses, that the fruits of intuition itself are instinctively referred to them. In that intuition it seems to the mystics that all the dim cravings and partial apprehensions of sense find perfect fulfilment. Hence their constant declaration that they see the uncreated light, they *hear* the celestial melody, they *taste* the sweetness of the Lord, they know an ineffable fragrance, they feel the very contact of love. "Him verily seeing and fully feeling, Him spiritually hearing and Him delectably smelling and sweetly swallowing," as Julian of Norwich has it. In those amongst them who develop psycho-sensorial automatisms, these parallels between sense and spirit may present themselves to consciousness in the form of hallucinations: as the light seen by Suso, the music heard by Rolle, the celestial perfumes which filled St. Catherine of Siena's cell, the physical wounds felt by St. Francis and St. Teresa. These are excessive dramatizations of the symbolism under which the mystic tends instinctively to represent his spiritual intuition to the surface consciousness. Here, in the

⁹ Nos. XVII, XXVI, LXXVI, LXXXII.

¹⁰ No. XVI.

special sense-perception which he feels to be most expressive of Reality, his peculiar idiosyncrasies come out.

Now Kabîr, as we might expect in one whose reactions to the spiritual order were so wide and various, uses by turn all the symbols of sense. He tells us that he has "seen without sight" the effulgence of Brahma, tasted the divine nectar, felt the ecstatic contact of Reality, smelt the fragrance of the heavenly flowers. But he was essentially a poet and musician: rhythm and harmony were to him the garments of beauty and truth. Hence in his lyrics he shows himself to be, like Richard Rolle, above all things a musical mystic. Creation, he says again and again, is full of music: it is music. At the heart of the Universe "white music is blossoming": love weaves the melody, whilst renunciation beats the time. It can be heard in the home as well as in the heavens; discerned by the ears of common men as well as by the trained senses of the ascetic. Moreover, the body of every man is a lyre on which Brahma, "the source of all music," plays. Everywhere Kabîr discerns the "Unstruck Music of the Infinite"--that celestial melody which the angel played to St. Francis, that ghostly symphony which filled the soul of Rolle with ecstatic joy.¹¹

The one figure which he adopts from the Hindu Pantheon and constantly uses, is that of Krishna the Divine Flute Player.¹²

He sees the supernal music, too, in its visual embodiment, as rhythmical movement: that mysterious dance of the universe before the face of Brahma, which is at once an act of worship and an expression of the infinite rapture of the Immanent God.'

Yet in this wide and rapturous vision of the universe Kabîr never loses touch with diurnal existence, never forgets the common life. His feet are firmly planted upon earth; his lofty and passionate apprehensions are perpetually controlled by the activity of a sane and vigorous intellect, by the alert commonsense so often found in persons of real mystical genius. The constant insistence on simplicity and directness, the hatred of all abstractions and philosophizings, the ruthless criticism of external religion:

¹¹ Nos. XVII, XVIII, XXXIX, XLI, LIV, LXXVI, LXXXIII, LXXXIX, XCVII.

¹² Nos. L, LIII, LXVIII.

many of these a particularly beautiful and intimate feeling for Nature is shown.¹⁴

In the collection of songs here translated there will be found examples which illustrate nearly every aspect of Kabîr's thought, and all the fluctuations of the mystic's emotion: the ecstasy, the despair, the still beatitude, the eager self-devotion, the flashes of wide illumination, the moments of intimate love. His wide and deep vision of the universe, the "Eternal Sport" of creation (LXXXII), the worlds being "told like beads" within the Being of God (XIV, XVI, XVII, LXXVI), is here seen balanced by his lovely and delicate sense of intimate communion with the Divine Friend, Lover, Teacher of the soul (X, XI, XXIII, XXXV, LI, LXXXV, LXXXVI, LXXXVIII, XCII, XCIII; above all, the beautiful poem XXXIV). As these apparently paradoxical views of Reality are resolved in Brâhma, so all other opposites are reconciled in Him: bondage and liberty, love and renunciation, pleasure and pain (XVII, XXV, XL, LXXIX). Union with Him is the one thing that matters to the soul, its destiny and its need (LI, I, II, LIV, LXX, LXXIV, XCIII, XCVI); and this union, this discovery of God, is the simplest and most natural of all things, if we would but grasp it (XLI, XLVI, LVI, LXXII, LXXVI, LXXVIII, XCVII). The union, however, is brought about by love, not by knowledge or ceremonial observances (XXXVIII, LIV, LV, LIX, XCI); and the apprehension which that union confers is ineffable--"neither This nor That," as Ruysbroeck has it (IX, XLVI, LXXVI). Real worship and communion is in Spirit and in Truth (XL, XLI, LVI, LXIII, LXV, LXX), therefore idolatry is an insult to the Divine Lover (XLII, LXIX) and the devices of professional sanctity are useless apart from charity and purity of soul (LIV, LXV, LXVI). Since all things, and especially the heart of man, are God-inhabited, God-possessed (XXVI, LVI, LXXVI, LXXXIX, XCVII), He may best be found in the here-and-now: in the normal, human, bodily existence, the "mud" of material life (III, IV, VI, XXI, XXXIX, XL, XLIII, XLVIII, LXXII). "We can reach the goal without crossing the road" (LXXVI)--not the cloister but the home is the proper theatre of man's efforts: and if he cannot find God there, he need not hope for success by going farther afield. "In the home is reality." There love and detachment, bondage and freedom, joy and pain play by turns upon the soul; and it is

¹⁴ Nos. XV, XXIII, LXVII, LXXXVII, XCVII.

KABIR'S POEMS

I

I. 13. mo ko kahân dhûnro bande

O SERVANT, where dost thou seek Me?

Lo! I am beside thee.

I am neither in temple nor in mosque: I am neither in Kaaba nor in Kailash:
Neither am I in rites and ceremonies, nor in Yoga and renunciation.

If thou art a true seeker, thou shalt at once see Me: thou shalt meet Me in a
moment of time.

Kabîr says, "O Sadhu! God is the breath of all breath."

II

I. 16. Santan jât na pûcho nirguniyân

It is needless to ask of a saint the caste to which he belongs;
For the priest, the warrior, the tradesman, and all the thirty-six castes, alike
are seeking for God.

It is but folly to ask what the caste of a saint may be;

The barber has sought God, the washerwoman, and the carpenter--

Even Raidas was a seeker after God.

The Rishi Swapacha was a tanner by caste.

Hindus and Moslems alike have achieved that End, where remains no mark
of distinction.

III

I. 57. sâdho bhâi, jîval hî karo âs'â

O FRIEND! hope for Him whilst you live, know whilst you live, understand
whilst you live: for in life deliverance abides.

If your bonds be not broken whilst living, what hope of deliverance in death?

It is but an empty dream, that the soul shall have union with Him because it has passed from the body:

If He is found now, He is found then,

If not, we do but go to dwell in the City of Death.

If you have union now, you shall have it hereafter.

Bathe in the truth, know the true Guru, have faith in the true Name!

Kabîr says: "It is the Spirit of the quest which helps; I am the slave of this Spirit of the quest."

IV

I. 58. bâgo nâ jâ re nâ jâ

Do not go to the garden of flowers!

O Friend! go not there;

In your body is the garden of flowers.

Take your seat on the thousand petals of the lotus, and there gaze on the Infinite Beauty.

V

I. 63. avadhû, mâyâ tajî na jây

TELL me, Brother, how can I renounce Maya?

When I gave up the tying of ribbons, still I tied my garment about me:

When I gave up tying my garment, still I covered my body in its folds.

So, when I give up passion, I see that anger remains;

And when I renounce anger, greed is with me still;

And when greed is vanquished, pride and vainglory remain;

When the mind is detached and casts Maya away, still it clings to the letter.

Kabîr says, "Listen to me, dear Sadhu! the true path is rarely found."

VI

I. 83. candâ jhalkai yahi ghat mâhîn

THE moon shines in my body, but my blind eyes cannot see it:

The moon is within me, and so is the sun.

The unstruck drum of Eternity is sounded within me; but my deaf ears cannot hear it.

So long as man clamours for the *I* and the *Mine*, his works are as naught:

When all love of the *I* and the *Mine* is dead, then the work of the Lord is done.

For work has no other aim than the getting of knowledge:

When that comes, then work is put away.

The flower blooms for the fruit: when the fruit comes, the flower withers.

The musk is in the deer, but it seeks it not within itself: it wanders in quest of grass.

VII

I. 85. Sâdho, Brahm alakh lakhâyâ

WHEN He Himself reveals Himself, Brahma brings into manifestation That which can never be seen.

As the seed is in the plant, as the shade is in the tree, as the void is in the sky, as infinite forms are in the void--

So from beyond the Infinite, the Infinite comes; and from the Infinite the finite extends.

The creature is in Brahma, and Brahma is in the creature: they are ever distinct, yet ever united.

He Himself is the tree, the seed, and the germ.

He Himself is the flower, the fruit, and the shade.

He Himself is the sun, the light, and the lighted.

He Himself is Brahma, creature, and Maya.

He Himself is the manifold form, the infinite space;

He is the breath, the word, and the meaning.

He Himself is the limit and the limitless: and beyond both the limited and the limitless is He, the Pure Being.

He is the Immanent Mind in Brahma and in the creature.

The Supreme Soul is seen within the soul,
 The Point is seen within the Supreme Soul,
 And within the Point, the reflection is seen again.
 Kabîr is blest because he has this supreme vision!

VIII

I. 101. is ghat antar bâg bagîce

WITHIN this earthen vessel are bowers and groves, and within it is the Creator:

Within this vessel are the seven oceans and the unnumbered stars.

The touchstone and the jewel-appraiser are within;

And within this vessel the Eternal soundeth, and the spring wells up.

Kabîr says: "Listen tome, my Friend! My beloved Lord is within."

IX

I. 104. aisâ lo nahîñ taisâ lo

O HOW may I ever express that secret word?

O how can I say He is not like this, and He is like that?

If I say that He is within me, the universe is ashamed:

If I say that He is without me, it is falsehood.

He makes the inner and the outer worlds to be indivisibly one;

The conscious and the unconscious, both are His footstools.

He is neither manifest nor hidden, He is neither revealed nor unrevealed:

There are no words to tell that which He is.

X

I. 121. tohi mori lagan lagâye re phakîr wâ

To Thee Thou hast drawn my love, O Fakir!

I was sleeping in my own chamber, and Thou didst awaken me; striking me with Thy voice, O Fakir!

I was drowning in the deeps of the ocean of this world, and Thou didst save me: upholding me with Thine arm, O Fakir!

Only one word and no second--and Thou hast made me tear off all my bonds, O Fakir!

Kabîr says, "Thou hast united Thy heart to my heart, O Fakir!"

XI

I. 131. nis' din khelat rahî sakhiyân sang

I PLAYED day and night with my comrades, and now I am greatly afraid.

So high is my Lord's palace, my heart trembles to mount its stairs: yet I must not be shy, if I would enjoy His love.

My heart must cleave to my Lover; I must withdraw my veil, and meet Him with all my body:

Mine eyes must perform the ceremony of the lamps of love.

Kabîr says: "Listen to me, friend: he understands who loves. If you feel not love's longing for your Beloved One, it is vain to adorn your body, vain to put unguent on your eyelids."

XII

II. 24. hamsâ, kaho purâtan vât

TELL me, O Swan, your ancient tale.

From what land do you come, O Swan? to what shore will you fly?

Where would you take your rest, O Swan, and what do you seek?

Even this morning, O Swan, awake, arise, follow me!

There is a land where no doubt nor sorrow have rule: where the terror of

Death is no more.

There the woods of spring are a-bloom, and the fragrant scent "He is I" is borne on the wind:

There the bee of the heart is deeply immersed, and desires no other joy.

XIII

Il. 37. angadhiyâ devâ

O LORD Increate, who will serve Thee?

Every votary offers his worship to the God of his own creation: each day he receives service--

None seek Him, the Perfect: Brahma, the Indivisible Lord.

They believe in ten Avatars; but no Avatar can be the Infinite Spirit, for he suffers the results of his deeds:

The Supreme One must be other than this.

The Yogi, the Sanyasi, the Ascetics, are disputing one with another:

Kabîr says, "O brother! he who has seen that radiance of love, he is saved."

XIV

Il. 56. dariyâ kî lahar dariyâo hai jî

THE river and its waves are one

surf: where is the difference between the river and its waves?

When the wave rises, it is the water; and when it falls, it is the same water again. Tell me, Sir, where is the distinction?

Because it has been named as wave, shall it no longer be considered as water?

Within the Supreme Brahma, the worlds are being told like beads:

Look upon that rosary with the eyes of wisdom.

XV

Il. 57. jâṅh khelat vasant riturâj

WHERE Spring, the lord of the seasons, reigneth, there the Unstruck Music sounds of itself,
 There the streams of light flow in all directions;
 Few are the men who can cross to that shore!
 There, where millions of Krishnas stand with hands folded,
 Where millions of Vishnus bow their heads,
 Where millions of Brahmâs are reading the Vedas,
 Where millions of Shivas are lost in contemplation,
 Where millions of Indras dwell in the sky,
 Where the demi-gods and the munis are unnumbered,
 Where millions of Saraswatis, Goddess of Music, play on the vina-
 There is my Lord self-revealed: and the scent of sandal and flowers dwells in those deeps.

XVI

Il. 59. jâṅh, cet acet khambh dôû

BETWEEN the poles of the conscious and the unconscious, there has the mind made a swing:
 Thereon hang all beings and all worlds, and that swing never ceases its sway.
 Millions of beings are there: the sun and the moon in their courses are there:
 Millions of ages pass, and the swing goes on.
 All swing! the sky and the earth and the air and the water; and the Lord Himself taking form:
 And the sight of this has made Kabîr a servant.

XVII

Il. 61. grah candra tapan jot varat hai

