

Desert
Voices

Professor T. L. Vaswani

1922

My Motherland Series Vol. 3.

DESERT VOICES

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

In the Sikh Sanctuary

India Arisen

India in Chains

Sri Krishna

The Saviour of Humanity

The Gospel of Freedom

The Spirit and Struggle of Islam

My Motherland

The Secret of Asia

Apostles of Freedom

Krishna's Flute

The Aryan Ideal

Creative Revolution

Message of the Birds

READY SHORTLY

Builders of To-Morrow

The Broken Cups

DESERT VOICES

By
Prof. T. L. ^{Lalaram} VASWANI

Re. 1

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June 18, 1922.

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

Sindh in the Vanguard of India's progress—that is the aspiration of Prof. Vaswani, the great Sindhi scholar and patriot. There is good reason why Sindh should have the lead for as Prof. Vaswani shows in these pages nowhere else throughout the length and breadth of India have Hinduism and Islam met and mingled with each other in that perfect unison and confraternity which shall make the 'white radiance' of renascent India. And there is another reason too, for was not Sindh 'the latest-left of all the knights,' about the last to come under the sapping influences of Western Civilisation?

Here in the following pages, the author reveals what a great treasure Sindh possesses in her traditions, culture, folklore and above all her literature. Shah Latif,

Bekas, and the other poets of desert Sindh would be an honour to any land. Surely it could be no desert which has produced such precious gems of poesy as are here set forth.

DESERT VOICES

THE MARTYRED MAN

*I woke this morn with a song in my heart
Like the breeze in yon tree ;
It said :—" The Dream will yet come true ;
For God's Dreams are Deeds ;
And India's Dream of Liberty is His."
" Where is the way to Victory ?" I asked ;
And my lute answered :—
" They who suffer win."*

*Walled and sentinelled to-day
Is the Great-Souled Gandhi ;
But when did walls and prison-bars
Sunder soul from soul ?
The Saint in suffering has, to-day,
His mystic throne in million hearts ;
And round the world the rumour runs :—
" Might battles with Right once more."*

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*Imprisoned,—they say ;
 I say ;—his soul goes marching on ;
 And even in the dark,
 His Faith, springing up as the light,
 Speeds from heart to heart ;
 And still his meek spirit leads
 The Struggle which has one only end ;—
 For Freedom cannot die.*

*Homage to him
 The Apostle of Unity and Love !
 I see his Vision pass
 Into the Nation's life.
 Over us the ancient skies ;
 Upon us still the blessings of heroes
 And the gods and rishis of old ;
 And still our Gandhi leads us on !*

*Comrades ! at this dark hour of our Destiny,
 I yet believe in his belief ;
 I yet have faith that something Beautiful
 Will be the final end of India's ills ;
 And every morning Sun
 I worship with a wounded heart
 Brings the healing message of the Martyred Man :—
 A suffering Nation still shall win.*

INTRODUCTION

Years ago I was crossing on camel-back a sandy little tract of my native-land which critics call the 'Desert' of Sind. The camel driver was a fine-looking, middle-aged, Mussalman. On our way to a little village, we met no human being for long stretches of space. The desert sand greeted us here, there, everywhere. In the evening we saw a fine sunset. What a thrill came upon me as I looked at the sunset! We saw a little stream; we halted and quenched our thirst. The night was upon us. Sounds! Voices! Who heard them? My comrade,—the faithful Mussalman,—thought some 'spirits' were there, haunting the desert! "Do you not hear? Listen! They are calling, calling us from the Land of Spirits!" That simple, illiterate Mussalman felt, for some brief blessed moments, that he was listening to a strange sweet music! Was it an illusion?

There is a music sounded by the great Poets of Sind which is *not* an illusion. It has, I feel sure, a world-value, a meaning, a message for modern life. The Sindhi language has no dramas; its strength is in lyrical poetry. As you listen to the songs of the great Sindhi poets you feel that waves of melody are coming, one by one, from the depths of the human heart. The language of these Songs is simple, emotional, rhythmical. Life's beauty peeps through the pages of these Poets. And the truth is sung, again and again, that Beauty blossoms into Tragedy. The Sindhi poets have a gaze that flows from the Fairest One; and to gaze at the Beautiful One is to bid farewell to happiness. Inscribed on living hearts are many of these Songs that sing of Beauty, Love, Sacrifice. In villages and small towns even to-day, wandering bards move from place to place and sing these songs to crowds of men and women who listen and listen and are moved to tears. The bards sing, also, many songs of minor poets and several others who wrote or sang without publishing their names.

Say to Him :—
 In Thy absence, all is Death ;
 Give Thou a pledge
 Of Thy swift return.”

Here is a passage from Rohal :—

One calls himself a Hindu !
 The other says he is a Mussalman !
 The Blind see not Darkness :
 Who, then, may reveal to them
 the Truth ?
 As I walked the Way of the
 Beloved
 I saw that there is but One-in-all
 And in Him is no shadow of Diffe-
 rence.

Of this Vision of the One-in-all, the One in whom the Hindu and the Mussalman may greet each the other, the poet Sami also speaks in rapturous strains. Thus in one place he sings :—“Many a fool was drowned in Difference.” But this is not the occasion to speak of him and some other poets. Of them I hope to say something in other volumes. In these pages I speak, very briefly, very imperfectly, of only two poets, both Muslims by birth,

both Universal in their vision, both worshipped as poet-saints by Hindu and Muslim communities in Sind. I entertain a hope that in other volumes I may speak more concerning these poets and some other poets of this beautiful, blameless 'Desert' called Sind. The greatest of our Poets,—Shah Latif was 'mediæval.' But we must not link up 'medievalism' with Protestant associations of a 'Dark age'. Our 'mediæval' Poet was rich in the wisdom of the heart. The other great poet of the 'Desert,' was modern; he died only a few years ago. But there was in him a wonderful detachment from 'modernism'. In the Songs of the great Poets of Sind,—'mediæval' or 'modern',—there is the music of a primitive, child-people. In these "Desert Voices" Poetry chants a child-song,—a song of a vision of Wonder and Beauty,—which is a piteous need of this restless, industrial, imperial age.

The largest poetic figure of Sind, as I have said, is Shah Latif. His Poems are the supreme expression of Sindhi literary work. They utter the message of a man

who is not simply a Poet but is also our National hero. To read his Poems is to love the soil and the people of Sind. Shah Latif is the greatest exponent of the Sindhi soul. He reaches our heart because his genius takes up into itself the essential, fundamental elements of the noble Sindhi nature. He utters the Universal in and through his loyalty to the National. In his ballads and lyrics of love and life he is moved by devotion to the land and people of Sind. There is little humour in his works. He is greatest just in those poems which have in them an element of tragedy. Tragedy purifies and uplifts man ; and it is impossible for a Sindhi audience to listen to Shah Latif's poems, unmoved. I have known, again and again, mixed crowds of Hindus and Muslims weeping profusely while listening to his songs. His wide vision, his rich imagination, his magic of phrase, his profound mysticism make him, as I endeavour to show, a poet with a world-value and a world-message. The other great poet of whom I speak is Bekas. I call him a "Prophet of the Beautiful."

Shelley died at 30. Bekas died much younger; and how many be found in the whole range of the world's poetry who at *his* age sang with such rapture of the Beautiful One? Literature, it has been said, is an expression of the will-to-live. The Desert Voices in Sindhi literature expressed the longing-for-Love. The longing is expressed in words, at once simple and beautiful, and lyric with the essential truth of Life. Sindh is being "modernised"; Sind is absorbing, to-day, some of the intellectual and political influences of the modern world. May the day never come when inebriated with the new wine of 'modernism' Sind may forget her simple creed, the deep essential truth of her life enshrined in her Literature! In the Songs of Sind is, I claim, a new note expressive of the soul of a child-people. It is a note which should enrich modern life.

It will be easy for the critic to tell me:— We live in an "age of reason" and what good can the Desert Voices do? "We live in an age of reason";—yes,—an age of machine-civilization; and just on that

account, I urge, we need the Songs of a primitive people if only to be reminded of the Mystery that is mightier than our machines and whose Eternal Life is, I believe, new-born every day in the Beauty and Wonder of the World. "Explain, explain,"—is the cry of the modern mind. "Commune with the Ideal and take from It in love the gift of Suffering"—is the voice of the Sindhi poets. Is the voice without a meaning to us in the Struggle of to-day? Sind is, I believe, a rich area for cultural discovery. The songs of the great poets of Sind are a gift not merely to my native-land also, I believe, to humanity,—if the world will but know them. And we who pride ourselves on being the children of a later and larger growth need them not less but more.

I may not hope in these pages to appeal to those of my countrymen who regard Songs as a "mental rattle" and who believe with an English critic that "a poet in our times is a semi-barbarian in a civilized community." I hope the number of persons who think thus is very small in India. A

rich inheritance of idealism has come to Indians from a great Past; and the great masses have, in spite of appalling poverty, a wonderful love for the Songs and Scriptures which remind them of the Mystery of Life. I have seen in villages,—and India is a Land of Villages,—Hindus and Muslims sitting together after the day's work to listen to Songs. And as they listen, some shed tears, some exclaim:—
“May I be a sacrifice to thee, Poet!
“The ‘politician’ may be the idol of the mobs in Europe. In India the power to shape the People's destiny is not with the ‘politician’ but the Patriot, the Poet, the Sage, the Sadhu, the Spiritual Teacher, the Singer of the Mystery that is Life. Such the law of India's history,—from century to century. It is my hope that the New Renaissance in India may be helped by a study of Indian Literature. This Literature is a running stream. Its current has sometimes been feeble, sometimes strong. It has not ceased to flow. And one of its crystal founts, I claim, is to be found in this classic soil of Sind.

MY NATIVE LAND

Where, the critics ask, where is the history of Sind? Where are the chronicles of the Past? Sind is *her own history*; as a form of literature, and as reflected in our life our history may be studied in ballads, the *kafis* and *gazals* of wandering singers, in the stories of peasants, in the traditions which have not all been lost.

There was a time, not so distant, when Hindus and Moslems dwelt together as comrades: They were neighbours, living in the same street and in mutual faith and confidence; the Hindu father often asked a Moslem to look after his family in his absence; Hindus in Sind served faithfully the Moslem rulers and Moslem servants often guarded the Hindu homes; Moslem marriages were attended by Hindus who received *kutcha seedha* (uncooked rice) and unbaked flour from their Moslem brethren

on the occasion of marriages ; the great Moslem festival of the Muharam was honoured by Hindus too ; they covered the *tabut* with their kerchiefs and gave syrup to Moslems to drink, and some even took the new-born babes to the *tabut* to be blessed ! Some of the saints were honoured alike by Hindus and Moslems, though under different names ; Lal Shahbaz and Raja Vir were and still are worshipped by both the Hindu and Mussalman ; and at their shrines both drank water from the same jars. In places remote from the influences of city-life you still will find Muslim peasants affectionately attached to Hindu Zemindars ; the Hindu Muslim unity is a fact in the villages, and has been sun-dered only in cities under alien influences. None can understand the Songs of Sind who will ignore or minimise the fundamen-tal comradeship of the Hindu and Mussal-man.

Poetry, folk-lore, fiction—Sindhi Literature has a store of these ; and young men can do much to collect the stories and songs and legends of the long ago from the

wandering bards and fakirs who sing them still. I have heard some of these uttered with emotion and charged with a wisdom and passion which come from the very heart of Reality.

The poems of Sayad Abdul Karim, of Shah Latif, Sami, Bachal, Bekas, Bedil and others have a beauty with something in it strange for our times. Then there are wondrous little Rajput songs expressive of certain aspects of the Sindhi life; Sind at one time was ruled by the Rajputs.

Literature is but one form of Art; Architecture is another. Sindhi artisans were famous for their skill. Think only of the tiles of Tatta—each brick with a peculiar ring: is there a more perfect work of its kind in the world? Music and dance are another form of Art, and here much could be done by a study of the *ragnis* and metrical structure of genuine Sindhi *kafis*. Religion, with its associate of rituals, is another form of Art. To be religious is to meditate on the Perfect, to serve the Good and worship the Beautiful; and there are abundant materials in Sind for the study

of religion and ritual and their degenerate forms, magic and superstition. Hinduism in its different forms, Vaishnavism, Shivaism, and *Dava-Panth* is here; Islam and Sufism are here; in Sind too, you have Buddhism and Jainism; there was a time when Buddhism was a great power in Sind, and Buddhist Stupas may, perhaps, still be discovered in some places in Sind. The Bo-tree under which Gautama attained to the Buddha-hood, resembled the tamarind tree in Sind; and in several places where you find tamarind trees and a hillock you also find the graves of *pirs*. Is it that some of these places had Bhuddist *stupas* and were *afterwards* converted into Muslim shrines?

A study of Sindhi customs should throw light on the civilization reflected in Sind poetry. We read in Greek books that Sindhis had a common mess; one thinks of ancient Sparta! We read frequently of the camels and asses of Sind; the ass is associated, to-day, in the popular mind with the *dhobi* washerman, yet Christ rode an ass on his entry into Jerusalem: and

both the ass and the camel give a clue to a particular type of civilization. Again, we read very little of caste in Sind, very little too of social friction between Hindus and Muslims in the day, when 'blessings' of English education were unknown. We read of the hospitality of Sindhis; we read of the agricultural pursuits of the great mass of the people; there was a time when Sind traded with other lands, trading vessels moved along the Indus even in the 17th century and Sind traders went to distant lands such as Arabia, Felix, and the Java Isles. In a remote period in human history, Sindhis entered upon a career of colonisation; Ptolemy describes a place in the Malay Archipelago called Sindoe, colonised by Sindhis. They took with them the torch of Sindhi culture and civilization into far-off land; and still in Java, scenes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata are brought upon the stage, year after year. Sind had trading relation with Kashmir; Sind exported costus to lands beyond India; and lycium or berberry—a cosmetic which the Romans liked and purchased as

something precious; she also sent to Europe silk and gems and indigo.

Sind traditions refer to ancient sites in ruins—to places like Bulri, Bhitshah, Uderolal, Sadarn-jothul, Brahamanabad and Munsw, and Virwah in Thar and Parker District where you may still see some remains of old Jain temples. Then, there are places more familiar to us to-day and every one of them has a history and a tradition which we need to know. There is the town of Jherruck; it has some Buddhist ruins which we have not yet studied. There is Laki; the range of hills has a tranquil beauty of nature; and the place has hot mineral springs not yet scientifically studied by any Sindhi. Hala has been famous for its pottery and weaving; young Sind knows little of them and has done less to help the cause of Sindhi swadeshism. Yet another town,—Rohri,—has a little hill called *Satbhen* which means *Seven-sisters*. It is a thrilling story of the Seven Virgins to whose memory the hill is sacred. They died heroically to maintain their chastity. In Mirpurkhas, another

little town, stands *Kahu-jodaru*, a brick-mound of the Buddhist days. In Karachi is Magho Pir, associated with a Muslim saint whose tomb an English writer has compared to a stone-canopy in the Westminster Abbey. Hyderabad is famous in our history ; (for its laws) and there are poems and stories which tell of its conquest by the British. Shikarpur was founded in 1617 by Daudpotas, the sons of Daud ; its rich soil attracted the attention of the East India Company, who negotiated for its purchase with the Muslim rulers ; they rightly refused to sell it to a trading company of foreigners ; even in the early forties, Shikarpur was famous for Sind carpets and silk and shields. And it was long famous for trade with Central Asia ; Shikarpur was at one time a gateway of the East. Sewan has a history connecting it with Alexander and Humayun. Patala in lower Sind has traditions which confirm Pliny's remark that it was an emporium of trade. Larkana has its associations not the least of them being that which connects it with Nadir Shah's terrible visit to the little town.

Tatta is famous in Rajput legends ; its people sent greetings to Humayun in the days of his flight ; its citadel and masjid were built by Shah Jehan and Aurangzeb, one of the mounds in Tatta is the work of Alexander ; and at one time it was a famous city in the East ; it had a population of over two and a half lacs ; it traded with Arabia, Africa, and China ; it sent out its *lougies* to Greece ; its mosaic inlaid work was the wonder of many countries. Sindhis are the children of a soil sanctified by the songs and strivings of centuries. The river Sindhu which has created and sustained Sind is remembered by all Hindus who offer daily worship with the old *mantras*. An ancient Greek writer refers to the dominion of Sind, as extending to Barn gaze across Kathiawar ; and we know that Sind had frequent intercourse with Cutch ; the Kutchee and the Sindhi are old comrades ; and Sind has had affinities with the Punjab, Gujarat and Rajputana, with Afghanistan, and Persia and Greece ; the *Sindhu* is praised in the pages of the Vedas ; and in the 6th century before Christ, Sind was so

rich that it could pay an annual tribute of £130,000 sterling to Darius, the Persian king. Sind, too, is the birth-place of Akbar. Abul-Fazal was a Sindhi; and Shah Latif—one of the world's great mystic poets—was a Sindhi. At once in songs and stories of love and in noble deeds of patriotism and heroism are our records and traditions rich—richer than most may know. Where else in the wide range of literature, will you have songs more moving than those which sing of the loves of *Sasui* and *Mumol*? Where else will you find a story more thrilling than that of King Tamachi and his love for the fisher-maid? Where a nobler example of hospitality than that shown to the fallen Humayun by Rana Wair Sail who greeted the Royal exile, kissed his stirrup and vacated for him the castle? Where a finer example of patriotism and bravery than that which was shown by Darya-Khan leading a Moslem army against the enemy, and dying in fight for his country? Not alone the men of Sind but also her women showed bravery in the not distant past. The Arab his-

torian tells of King Dahir's daughters standing by him in the fight with the invader, the one girl handing her father the arrows to shoot, the other giving him the betel-nut whenever he required it to refresh himself. And there is a place called *Khatko Maho* which commemorates the conduct of several Sindhi women dying with their husbands—the *Daudpotas*—rather than submit to the foreign invader ! Brave they were, these Daudpotas, these Sumras, these Sammas and Rajputs and Beluchis of Sind ; brave too their ancestors in the earlier ages ; one of them, the Chief of Alore, opposed Alexander, and yet another, who did not surrender to the World-Conqueror without a struggle, was Sambos, the ruler of Sewan. Hardly a year before the conquest, an English tourist spoke of the 'brawny-shouldered stout Sindhis.' To-day the situation is different ; to-day physical degeneration and hollow-cheeked poverty are in the land. But I must not close with a note of pessimism. The one great need of Sind is the building of new minds. And so it is, I plead with young

men, to recover the traditions of Sind. Not in a spirit of race-pride, but as one who believes that *race-consciousness* should bring with it a sense of *race-responsibility*, I ask youngmen to realise their privilege in being born in this Ancient land, to recover the old songs and stories of the lovers and heroes of the Past;—to recover the traditions and use them for the service of Sind ; for only as we grow in the knowledge of the past may we help in the Building of the future worthy of this country. For tradition is race-memory ; tradition is the voice of the people's past ; tradition is race-consciousness remembering itself and taking pride in its achievements and development. The dreams and hopes and ideals and memory of Sind have lived through the rise and fall of many kingdoms and many dynasties ; some of them have travelled to other parts of India, and we must feel their inspiration if Sind is to play her part in the coming re-construction of national life and in delivering modern civilisation from its sordid dreams.

This, then, in brief, is my vision of Sind ;

it is the vision I would fain have young-men carry with them in the work before them. It is the vision I have worshipped in the silence of my heart and the Beauty of my Native Land,—in the myriad light of Sind's stars, in the colours of her rainbow and her rose, in the cups of her budding flowers, in her birds' mellow notes, in the ashes of the many hopes and fears of the Sindhi peasant, in the life-impulse of this Ancient Land. They call us 'Sons of the Desert.' But we come from a long lineage, sons of the winds and roses, and the rocks and the trees, sons of the classic soil of Sind, will they re-arise and offer their Service for the help and healing of the Nation?

When the eminent Muslim leader, Maulana Mahomed Ali, was in Karachi on his way to England, he said in the course of a talk we had on 'Mission of Sind':—
"The old-world idealism of Sind will help Indian politics." Sind has been a congenial soil for the growth of spiritual religion, of *sufism*, of mysticism, of *bhakti*, of that spirit of fellowship between the Hindu and

the Moslem which is the hope of the coming days. The soul of Sind is expressed in her songs and stories; and they are charged through and through with the primitive man's faith in the Unseen, the ideal, the spiritual values of life. The measure in which Sind can spiritualise Indian politics will be the measure of her contributions to our national movement.

Often have I sat by the river bank, and humming the sorrow and faith of my heart to the Sindhu, 'Indus' I have gazed at the waters; they flow smoothly; but in them is locked up a mighty force. There you have a beautiful illustration of *santi sakti*, the power of the Spirit, *calm yet strong*. The message of the Sindhu is the message of *Santi sakti*; it is the message which asks us to spiritualise our politics. In Sindhi language we have not a word which may be regarded as an exact equivalent of the English word 'politics.' Politics in Europe has long meant the art of makeshifts, opportunism, expediency, diplomacy. The politician in Europe has not often cared to be a servant of the

moral ideal. 'My country right or wrong! Such has often been his dominant idea. It is the *interest* of his party he seeks to guard rather than the great *ideals*, his professions notwithstanding. Mr. Lloyd George is a Prince of Politicians—a master of makeshifts and diplomacy. How profuse he was in his promise to the Muslims when he needed their support in the war! How quietly he forgot his pledge, when the war was over! The Turkish settlement is an impeachment of the politics of Europe at the bar of Humanity. 'Such politics' will not heal the wounds of the Nations. Spiritualise your politics;—such is the message of the Sindhu. Educated intelligence devoid of moral principle, public life trampling upon the moral ideal,—there is the danger we must avoid if we would become servants of the Nation. I am glad the demand for rights is growing; it needs to be sustained and strengthened by a powerful agitation all over the country. But I wish we recognised and emphasised in all our agitation the *rights of Humanity*. The greatness of India some of us dream of,

and pray for, and strive after through good report and ill, is not the greatness of an aggressive nation ; it is the greatness of a servant of Humanity. India has a world-mission, has a message to give to the Nations ; and she cannot fulfil her destiny if her politics ignore the moral values of life and that Vision Human to which her poets and prophets, her seers and sages have borne witness through the ages.

There is a beautiful story of a man in quest of Life's secret. Left an orphan at an early age, he climbs his way up to a high position in life ; he studies much ; he becomes a great Engineer ; he make money. He finds that his knowledge and riches, avail him little ; his heart still hungers for something. He marries a mountain-girl. He soon finds that happiness is not in marriage either. He becomes a famous man, he finds the happiness he seeks is not in fame. World-weary, he retires to a quiet place : and he ascends a hill ; and in a moment of meditation there flashes upon his inner eye the truth that in the Power

of Spirit is the Secret of Life, the secret of Achievement. That Power is named *atma shakti* in the scriptures ; that Power is in each one of us ; that Power will lift the Land. That is the message of the Sindhu. Many in India are sick at heart, to-day, with long surmise and struggle. If we make up the inner power I feel sure India's beauty will, spring again in the hearts and homes of her people, as it daily does in India's flowers and birds.

Civilization is what we have heard of for a long time ; *Sindhuisation*—is what we urgently need. And by *Sindhuisation* I mean the influence of the *inner forces*, the *santi shakti* which is the age-long message of the Sindhu, for poor and empty at the core is the civilization whose dominant interests are *economic*, whose motive is *exploitation*, whose values are measured in mechanical terms, whose energies are spent in gathering silver and gold whose efforts are not directed to securing, the final fruitage of art and literature and religion. I plead for a new appreciation of *inner values*. I plead for a new realisation

of the Sindhi poet's vision :—“ Attain the
Life through Death ; and then in it grow in
the Beauty of the Beloved One.’

THE POET OF THE DESERT

In him many silent Centuries of Sindh find a voice. A poet, a sage, a prophet,—Shah Latif—remains the peerless poet, of the Desert. He may be compared to the Pacific Ocean,—the greatest and the deepest among the Seas. Shah Latif is the *greatest* of our Poets ; he is also the *deepest*. Singing to myself his songs in Europe years ago, singing to myself his lyrics in several places in and outside Sind, I said to myself again and again :—“ There is the Call, the Call of the Desert !” I count him among the great Leaders of my life ; I regard him as an artist with a world-message ; I am hoping to speak of him at some length in another volume : I can in this speak only a few words concerning the man and his song.

There is a saying of a Western writer :—
“ Let me make the songs of a people and

I care not who makes their Laws". *Emotion is a unifying force*; Songs are centres of Emotions; and the Songs of Shah Latif have been the great unifying force in the life of Sind. This poet has been the greatest "maker" of Sind. I called him, at a Hindu-Muslim meeting, our "uncrowned king"; and the enthusiasm with which the remark was received showed that I voiced the feeling of the people. An old Hindu met me some time ago and said:—"Three Books I read, I regard them sacred the *Gita*, the *Granth Sahib* and the *Rasalo*. The *Granth Sahib* is the Sikh Scripture. The *Rasalo* is the collection of the Songs of Shah Latif! To the great mass in Sind, indeed, the Songs of Shah Latif are sacred; they call his words "*kalam*,"—which means "inspired utterances." Shah Latif is a hierophant of a mighty inspiration. In the crowded, noisy, third class compartments of the Sind Railway's, passengers often feel miserable; sometimes the compartments are so overcrowded that it is difficult to get breeze. Then some one sounds a note of Shah Latif's song to the

tune of a simple musical instrument, *ektara* ; and the noise ceases; there is a hush of great silence and the misery of the journey is forgotten in the melody of the Poet's song. Camel-drivers, cart-drivers, grown-up men, little boys moving along dark paths by day or night tune to themselves some simple lay of Shah Latif. In the Poet's words they find consolation. Peasants working in the fields sing his Songs as the patient oxen drive the primitive plough and the primitive Persian wheel is at work. At mass-meetings, what an impression is created when a speaker quotes a Poem with the refrain : —“ Thus saith Shah Latif ” ! Muslims and Hindus shed tears at the recital of his Stories. Muslims and Hindus in their thousands offer worship at his tomb. Muslims and Hindus vie with one another to claim him as their Invisible King. He is the greatest force in the making of Hindu-Muslim unity in Sind.

Sind was conquered by the British in 1843. A new system of education followed the conquest. Most of the Hindus and

Muslims non-co-operated with the system. A small number surrendered itself to influences of the 'new' and knew little of the great Sindhi Poet. Upto this day, the Sindhi College student knows more of Goldsmith and Grey than of Shah Latif and Bekas. The collection of Shah Latif's poems was published—for the first time,—by a German scholar, Dr. Trumpp, in Germany: A few of the 'educated' read the Poet in the '*Rasalo*': a few selections were some time later, prescribed as a text-book for the Matriculation examination of the University. But the Poet was practically forgotten by the College and the younger generation. When I spoke, years ago, of the world-values of the Poet's Song, several of my countrymen thought I was a bit too enthusiastic. "Was he so great after all?"—asked several young men. Sindhis lacked faith in the inspiration of their own Land. I can but hope that with the awakening of a new spirit of self-respect, the rising generation in Sind will realise more and more what a great gift God has given them in

this Poet. If there be one Voice which has expressed more than any other the sweetness and strength of the lyric, mystic soul of Sind, it is Shah Latif.

European critics have often complained that Eastern poetry,—Eastern love poetry,—has one great defect,—*monotony*! The criticism is unjust. It is, certainly, unjust with regard to Shah Latif. What a wide range of experience in the Songs of this Poet! Myriad minded in a real sense was Shah Latif. He did not study books. Some would have us believe that, like the great prophet of Islam, he could not even read and write! A beautiful story is told of the days of his boyhood. He is sent to a Muslim school. The teacher wants him to learn the alphabet. The first letter in the Sindhi alphabet is called *aliph*. That word 'aliph' also stands for Allah, God, the First Cause. The boy Latif learns the word '*aliph*' quite easily. Then the teacher asks him to repeat the second letter which is called '*bey*'. Latif does not pronounce '*bey*'; he only repeats '*aliph*!' The teacher asks him repeatedly to say '*bey*'; the teacher

scolds him, perhaps beats him; the boy Latif repeats only '*Aliph*'! The story is suggestive. To Latif, Allah was all-in-all, and the opening letter *Aliph* the alpha and omega of knowledge. Latif did not learn from books or school masters. His teachers were these three:—Travel, Nature and *Fakirs*, with love and longing in his heart he went about, absorbing into his mind influences of Nature and the worshippers of the Ideal he came in contact with in different places. Latif was a much-travelled man. He went up the mountains; he saw Rajputana; he visited Poorbunder; he came to Karachi; travel had its 'hardship' in those days, but also its romance. Travel enriched Shah Latif's, mind with impressions and experiences. Much of his poetry is a blend of the narrative and lyric; and the materials of the stories woven in his verse have been, in a large measure, taken by him from the folk songs of different places,—Rajputana, Gujrat, Kathiawar, the Punjab. The materials for his plots are largely borrowed; so Shakespeare borrowed materials for his dramas from several

sources. But as with Shakespeare so with Shah Latif, what passed through his hands was turned into gold.

Nature was the Poet's Teacher. And his poems are full of most moving descriptions of desert, mountain and seas, of lakes, woods and plains, of the sun, moon and stars, of the spring flowers and autumnal rains, of the clouds in tempest and peace, of sunrise and sunset of the camel, monkey and deer, of the nightingale, dove and swan. His descriptions of vegetable and animal life are amazing in the wide range they cover. He does not, like Browning, dissociate nature from humanity. He does not, like several Western poets, dissociate nature from God. To him nature is a moving symbol of the Spirit and reminds us, again and again, of the soul's quest of the Beauty that is God. This is how, in one place, he describes the "Rainfall":—

The Rain! the Rain! the Rain!
Showers fall as the spring-flowers,
Blessed be the day!
The poor, parched land

Will now put on the bloom.
The Rain has blessed the village ;
The earth is beautiful with grass ;
The woods and plants are rich
again ;
The garden glows again ;
The cattle will now be set free ;
The goats are bleating with joy ;
Blessed be the Day,—
My Love hath remembered me.

Shah Latif loves the earth and its wonders. Chaucer, too, is a lover of the earth ; but whereast Chaucer the earth is pleasant *and* opaque, to Shah Latif the earth is beautiful as a *symbol* of Something,—of Some One—Spiritual.

A Child of Nature, he read Her Scripture and received Her Sacrament every day. What time could one like him have for 'books' and 'schools'? Your 'civilized' man reads many books but seldom the one Book of Nature. Shah Latif was not 'civilized'. He heard nature's voices calling him every day:—"Come and abide in Me!" After he passed away, they looked for his 'books'! His *Rasalo* consists of the Poems.

he sang as the spirit in him moved; and the Poems were taken down by his disciples and afterwards brought together in a manuscript volume. He wrote no book himself. The books found in his house were (1) the Koran, and (2) Masnavi by Jelal-udin Rumi. He communed with Nature; he studied every day in the School of Love; he found no time to understand other books. In some of his poems, he has indicated how superior is the wisdom of the heart to the 'knowledge' of books. He says:—

Let there be in your heart
 The play of Aliph (Allah),
 And thou wilt know
 The vanity of book-learning.
 If thou wilt learn
 To look on Life with the pure eye
 Thou wilt know
 That the Name of Allah is enough.
 Why multiply these leaves (of
 books) ?

Turn over twenty if you will,
 The Central word is One.
 Read thou the One word
 Of Aliph the Allah

God crucified, again and again. How long will the Crucifixion continue? How long will India suffer for her faith in Freedom? How long? Methinks from the Mother's anguished years rises a voice which says:— Sons of the Desert! Be not afraid of Death in the service of Love. For *Tat twam asi: Thou are That!* Man is immortal. And Love is ever young.

THE MAN AND HIS MESSAGE

Shah Latif was born in 1687; he passed away in 1752. His grand father Shah Karim was a Sayad who was reputed to be a Saint. There are stories current still which speak of the saint's 'miracles'. The Poet's father was Shah Haib with whose name, also, are associated some poems.

The Poet was born in a village named Bhai Bhor in the Hyderabad District. This district has, in recent years, been the birth-place of the two great Sindhis, "Sadhu Navalrai and Sadhu Hiranand. With the Poet's life as it is told us to-day by Sindhi bards are associated many miracles. These I must not dwell upon. To me, indeed, the Poet's life, shorn of its occult and supernatural stories has a beauty of its own. The main incidents of his life are few but significant.

He is sent to a school; he learns easily the first letter of the Alphabet, *aliph*. But

when the teacher tells him to repeat the second letter "*Bey*", Latif says boldly:—
Aliph: In the Scripture of the Poet's life, there was but one letter,—Aliph, a symbol of Allah the Eternal. Such a soul could learn little in the schools. Is it not true that some of the great souls have owed little to school? Often the schools are prison-houses; and a great soul must follow the law of its own development unfettered by schools and systems.

“One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good”—

Than all the 'schooling' can.

Abdul Latif finds in Nature his unfailing Teacher, and even as a boy, he breaks into beautiful poems. He is out, one day, to a forest to play with his companions. Soon he forgets the play and himself and his friends: he hides himself underneath a tree. His friends miss him and return home. His father moves out in quest of the lost son and at last finds a cloth waving over a tree and covered with dust. He exclaims in verse:—

The winds are blowing ;

The clothes are covered with dust.

Abdul Latif hears his father's verse and immediately completes it with one of his own composition :—

The breath in me is still alive

• With the longing in my heart to
see

The Loved One.

He loves mountains and streams and hills and lakes and the desert-sands. At an early age he sees a beautiful Moghul girl. He falls in love with her. It is a case of love at first sight. He sings verses about her at the threshold of her house. He is turned out by her father! His love for her is irrepressible. A story which the simple Sindhi peasant sings has it that the Poet becomes a pigeon and cooes his love to the fair girl from the trellis of her balcony! It cannot be denied that a new soul is born into the Poet after the vision of *his* Beatrice. The father of the girl is obdurate. The Poet sits on a sand hill and looks from afar at the house of the fair-girl!

Then he goes on his travels. He comes in contact with different types of men. His love grows from more to more. And he sings Songs pouring upon them the passion of his heart. On his visit to Tatta, he hears some sounds. A man is singing again and again some words from a song of the Poet:—

Alone! alone!

Alone shall I wend

My way to my Love.

The Poet approaches the man and asks: —“Who are you”? “I am”, he says “a camel driver. I and my two rich comrades were moving on with the camels laden with merchandise. We passed by a little village. We heard some *fakirs* sing some songs. One of them went into my heart. Since that day I have left all,—camels and goods and comrades; I have only been singing the Song:—

Alone! Alone!

Alone shall I wend

My way to my Love.

The Song was of Latif's own composition! “May I complete the Song?” The Poet

asks. The camel-man was filled with joy. Then the Poet gave the other lines in the Song :—

In front of me I see
Mountains, thorns, desert-spaces,
Lord! help Thy servant
Whose only companion is :—
Sorrow for the Loved One!

The man listened to the Song and was so overcome with emotion that he fell down senseless! The Poet often said he had not seen another filled with such longing and love for the Lord as that poor camel-man.

The Moghul girl's father died and the Poet married her. He loved her profoundly; but he remained childless. "My children", he said, "are the *fakirs* with love-smit hearts." "The Seeker", he said on another occasion, "must remain single; else would he be as the bee caught in the honey-cup." The Poet believed in the value of *Brahmacharya*!

The last eight years of his life the Poet spent at Bhit in the very heart of the Desert. There he and his disciples built a mosque for prayers and some houses to

live in. Lovers of music and song came to him from different places; some stayed with him and served him. One of them played most charmingly on the harp. Another took special care of the Poet's two dogs. Two of his disciples—Atal and Chanchal,—were masters of music and had come from Delhi. In their company sat the Poet far into the night and sang those wondrous Songs which, after his death, his disciples brought together in a single volume now known as *Shah-jo-Rasalo*. The circumstances attending his passing away are moving. He is at Bhit. The spot is secluded and trees surround him. He lies down. He puts a sheet over himself. He asks his comrades to strike music and sing songs. Then quietly he passes away! What poetry in that death! His body lies in an impressive tomb to which there is a door with silver screens. And on the tomb is inscribed the following line which also gives, according to the *Abjad* system of calculation, the year of his death as 1751:

Gardeed mahw ishk wujoode Latif Meer.

Which, rendered into English, means :—

“Latif the Lord was absorbed in Love.”

An apt summing up of his life! It was a life absorbed in Love. And every year his death-day is celebrated at his Tomb with a three days' fair at which *fakirs* and *sufis* assemble and sing his Poems. A few of the things of this Muslim Poet, this Sufi *sanyasin* are still preserved,—his yellow-coloured clothes, his white cap, his shoes, his staff, and the coarse home-spun *khatta* on which he slept. No spot in Sind can be more sacred than this Bhit in the Desert where stands the shrine of the Saint. And I dream of a day when men will come from East and West on a pilgrimage to this Tomb as to the shrine of a world-sage and a world-poet.

Here was a man who saw almost three centuries ago that Religion went beyond forms and rites, that Wisdom was Love, and that, to love was to be a Zero! They ask him one day if he was a Shiah or a Sunni. He says :—“Betwixt both.” They say to him:—“But betwixt both is nothing.” He answers :—“And I am nothing.” To

realise this "nothingness" is to have that *cosmic consciousness* and that *cosmic emotion* which mark out, to my mind, a soul with a world-message. On another occasion, the Poet says :—

"Fasts and Prayers !—well,
They have their value ;
But there be yet another Light
Whereby to see the Beloved."
It is the light of Love.

And with love-awakened eyes he kept up long hours in the night singing, singing, watching for the coming of the King in his dark Chamber! His disciples complain one night of mosquitoes ; " We are unable to sleep," they say. " And, *therefore*, are the mosquitoes your friends",—says the Poet! " They keep you awake that you may remember the Beloved."

Many of Shah Latif's Poems are the lyric cry of a lyric soul for the All-Love. In many songs, in many tunes and metres, the Poet sings of Love as the daily miracle of Life. Therefore his poems appeal to the common people. The poor have many troubles ; they are not 'educated'. But they

have the education which sympathy gives. I have known poor men share their scanty meals and help one another in life's struggles and sorrows with a sympathy which in several cases has passed into real sacrifice. I have known rich men lose their hearts in scrambles for silver and gold. When there is a Poet whose songs the common people gladly hear, there, I say, is a Singer of a high order: and I salute him as a Prophet. There is a sense in which what is human is divine. The response of the poor to a Poet's message is an answer of the God-heart to the call of the Poet's heart. In such response, God greets God. And sometimes as I have listened to Latif's poems sung at poor men's *melas* and watched their lips stirred by a great emotion and seen their eyes moved to tears and have, in spite of me, wept myself with a fevered heart,—I have felt that the Book which has such wondrous Poems,—the *Rasalo* of Shah Latif,—is Holy. Love makes holy the Scripture in which it records its Message. And can even a King have a greater tribute than

what the poor people pay to Shah Latif when they,—men and women and children,—Hindus and Muslims, forgetting their castes and creeds sob and weep when the Poet's *kafis* (poems) are sung." The poor people seem to say in such moments of spiritual uplift :—"We hearken to thy Voice, our Liege and Lord! Take thou our tears' tribute! Take thou our love's salute!" Shah Latif is the king of our hearts.

Women-soul is, I believe, the centre of Higher Civilization. And to read the *Rasalo* of Shah Latif is to know what a noble conception the Poet had of womanhood. The deeper interest of most of his poems lies in the sacred yearning of his women for their mates. Nothing seems too difficult for these women to face Fates separate them from their dear ones. But against the conspiracy of Fates struggle the Love and Loyalty of the women. The struggle, in most of the Poets' Stories ends in tragedy. And that Tragedy is the women's triumph over the Fates!

Take that story, for instance,—one of the

most popular of the Poet's stories set to music:—the story of *Sasui and Punuh*. Sasui is the name of the girl, the heroine of the Poem. The name is the Poet's adaptation of the Sanskrit word *shashi* which means the *moon*. This fair girl is the moon-faced one. Punuh is the son of a Baluch chief. He loves her; she loves him. Punuh's parents and relations look upon this love with disfavour. The girl is fair but belongs to a poor family,—the family of a *dhobi* (washerman). Punuh's relations manage to remove him as he is lying asleep on his cot. They take him back to his native place. Sasui wakes up in the morning to find that Punuh is gone! she weeps; she tears her clothes; she goes out in quest of her Love. With love-laments on her lips she crosses mounts and forests on the way. None can tell her where Punuh is. A shepherd sees her in a forest, is fascinated by her beauty and attempts to seize her by force. She prays to God for protection. The Earth opens to receive her! The shepherd feels repentant. He raises on the spot a tomb to her.

Punuh, too, is in search of her. After some days he crosses the place where stands her tomb. A voice comes to him from the tomb. The Earth opens. Unseen Powers take Punuh in and the separated ones are united in death,—for ever together, she and he!

The plot is simple. Its interest lies in the love-laments of Sasui. In the course of her wanderings through the Desert she feels very thirsty; she can get no water and she claims:—

Give me, my Love!

A Cup of thy love-thirst

That my thirst be quenched.

She casts off her clothes and ornaments as she goes in quest of Punuh. One is reminded of what Radha does when Krishna leaves her; the Poet Vidyapati puts in the mouth of Radha words similar to those which Shah Latif puts in the mouth of Sasui.—

Shatter my bangles of shell

Cast off my fine array,

And break my necklace of pearls.

When my dear one forsakes,

What is the use of jewellery ?
 Cast them all in the Jumna
 waves.

Sasui beseeches the mountain and the trees to tell her if her loved one passed that way. One is reminded of a similar sentiment in the ancient Hindu drama of *Nala and Damayanti*. Damayanti is in quest of Nala ; she sees a mountain on the way and says :—

I salute thee, Mount !
 In thy mercy hear me !
 Hast thou seen my Nala ?
 Ah ! only wilt thou not answer me?
 Comfort me now
 As though I were thine own child ;
 Oh tell me, mighty Mount !
 Shall I see him again ?
 Shall I hear again
 His voice, as honey sweet
 And as music beautiful ?

In another passage Damayanti seeing an Asoka tree exclaims, as does Sasui in the Sindhi Poet's Song :—

O happy tree !
 Hast thou seen my Love ?

Speak ! answer me !

Thou blessed tree !

And how superior is the Sindhi Poet's conception of Sasui to the conception: say, of Chaucer in the poem *Troilus and Cressida*. Cressida is beautiful and gentle,—but faithless. She turns aside from the great and noble knight Troilus ; she lives with the gross man, Diomed. Yet to Chaucer she is the very ideal of gracious womanhood ! How pure, how tender, how spiritual is the Sindhi Poet's Sasui. Shah Latif speaks of her as “ love-slain ”. And the great idea is sung again and again by the Sindhi poet that Salvation is through Sacrifice. It is an idea which I miss in Chaucer and, I am afraid, even in the famous French writer of to-day,—Anatole France. Neither seems to appreciate the place of Suffering in a world which is to develop moral and spiritual values. Shah Latif's poetry is charged through and through with the idea that suffering is love's sacrament. He says in one place:—

“ Never was it known that one met the Beloved in Happiness.” Again, in another

passage Sasui is represented as saying to herself:—

Die that thou mayest be Beautiful !
 Summon up thy courage now,
 And surrender the life-breath
 That thou mayest find the Friend.

Again :—

Them who die before death,
 No Death can mortal make ?
 They who awake to Life within
this life

They shall live for ever,

And this awakening to Life is through
 surrender of life to the Infinite Ideal. In
 a passage of great beauty, the Poet says :—

They who accept the Cross
 As their wedding bed
 To them is the vision of God
 In Death :

Again :

Love's pledge was ever this :—
 To suffer and be slain.

Is there a greater message than this for
 us in the growing Struggle of the Nation,
 to-day ? When will India be free ? I know
 not the day and the hour. One thing I

have felt again and again :—when Young men will walk with God in the 'Agitation' of these days and be ready to bow in obedience to the Call of Death, then, in truth, will this Nation be blessed again. And the Mother dying a million deaths in the voluntary sufferings of her sons and daughters will re-arise in the glory of New Freedom. When will Young India worship God with this *yagna* of sacrifice ?

A PROPHET OF THE BEAUTIFUL

There is in Sind a little town named Rohri. It has a little shrine sacred to the memory of a man named Bekas. And there every year is observed with affectionate reverence the anniversary of a Poet whom his disciples also worship as a saint. The great Poets of Sind are worshipped as Saints. In diverse ways they all have tuned the Secret that is Love. The poet Bekas lived at Rohri; he passed away at Rohri—in 1881. He was about 21 years of age when he left his physical body. His poems are his Children. How I love them! When I visited Rohri first and the people came bringing their gifts of love, I said to them: “One gift only I need,—the Songs of your poet, Bekas.” And at night they brought me singers commons, unknown men, but lovers of music and song. And as they sang to me the Songs of Bekas, tears came down my cheeks. And not until I had

paid my homage to the Poet at his tomb, did I leave the little town. Every night which I have spent at Rohri since, the affectionate people of the place have brought me some singers to sing the Poet's songs.

I visited a village a year ago. I slept at night in a Hindu temple. I woke up at about 4 in the morning. I saw the moon still shining. Adjoining the Temple was a little house. On the roof was an old man sleeping on a cot. He got up from his bed soon after I was up. He was offering worship to God. And in the course of his worship, this Hindu sang a song of this Muslim poet,—Bekas. The man had a fine voice. And in the silence of that night which I will not soon forget, every word of the Song came to me in clear, rich notes of the singer. It is difficult to translate the Song; yet more difficult it is to give an idea of its haunting melody by written words. The Songs of Bekas are to be heard, not read. His songs are Music. His Poetry must be chanted. Here is a very, very rough rendering of the Song I heard that night:—

Full well Thou knowest my plight
Be Thou with me then, Beloved !
Not even for a moment stand Thou
separate,

O! come! that we may now be
Reconciled!

Why this Separation, Love ?
Why this seeming Faithlessness ?

O look upon me with Mercy !
O! come! that we may now be
Reconciled!

Behold me sorrow-smitten in Thy
quest!

The body burns with longing for
Thy Love!

With thine Eyes raining Beauty,
come !

O! come! that we may now be
Reconciled!

Helpless, what can I do ? Beloved !
Behold me dying daily for a vision
of Thy Beauty!

May I be a Sacrifice to Thee !
O! come! that we may now be
Reconciled.

The poet's name was Mahomed Mosim

In his poems, he adopted the name:—
Bekas,—a word which means literally
“ego-less”! A vision of the Beautiful
had burnt into his heart. What room is
there for a separate ‘self’ in the presence
of the Beloved? His father, too, was a
poet and a *fakir* and was named Bedil,—a
word of which a literal meaning is:—
“heart-less”! By this is not meant what
the word would imply in English—
“cruel”, The word means:—“One who
had lost his heart”: The Beloved,—such
this poet’s feeling—had snatched away his
heart: Like the *Sufis*, like several of the
world’s great poets, he drank: One
wished he had been a total abstainer. I
have not been able to understand Sir
Arthur Quiller-Couch’s recent statement
that a total abstainer, or a life-long abstai-
ner, is not properly qualified for high
literature! Bekas drank and Bekas loved
coloured dresses; but his heart was simple:
It was the heart of a child. He sought
beautiful nature spots for communion
with the Great Mystery. At night, he
kept no lights in the house. In darkness

he spent several hours singing of the Beautiful: A model of beauty and youth, a love of song and music, he was loved by the boys; and several of them on seeing him, would follow him. He was a fine singer and musician. In a sense, indeed, all art is music and the poems of Bekas *are* music. These great Sindhi poets seldom *write* poems. They *sang* them: and the words as they came from the Sind singers' lips were taken down by disciples. Poems were born as rhythm and melody were drawn out of the musical instrument. The poems of Bekas show sindhi language lyrical in a most moving music. Bekas is a *melodist*, and to listen to his poems is to go on absorbing what one can of the meaning of the music which is in his words.

And he died so young! I think of Shelly. He lived for 30 years. Keats, too, died young. Bekas was the youngest. He was about 21 when he passed away. I believe in the young. Great things come from the young. *Lack of experience is a qualification.* Often experience chills idea-

lism. The young are ardent idealists; and in Idealism is my hope of India's freedom. The leaders of the French Revolution, we are told, averaged 34 years of age; Bekas was a beardless youth of 21 when he passed away. He was not a scholar; there is little learning, in his poems; but there is something better,—the Flame of the Heart; Happily he escaped the influence of 'modernism'. His poems are a Voice and Vision of a Realm of Beauty which will endure and inspire generations unborn, long after the British Empire has gone the way of other Empires which the Pride of man built up and the Spirit of History wiser than they has swept away.

Bekas had the fatal gift of seeing beauty with *intensity*. One there was at Rohri—a beautiful Hindu boy named Kanaiya. It is a name dear to the Hindu heart. Krishna is named Kanaiya in the Scriptures.

This beautiful boy inspired Bekas with some of his noblest Hymns to God. To the window of the Poet's heart came Kanaiya; Bekas looked; Bekas trembled; Bekas

glimpsed the Beauty of the One in that transitory form: there is a little story told of the Poet in Rohri. He and Kanaiya were walking together. On the way Kanaiya left the Poet, saying he would soon return. Rooted to the spot stood Bekas, expecting Kanaiya every moment. The hours passed, one, by one Kanaiya did not return that day. But the Poet stood there still! And the anguish of that experience became a Vision of the Mystic who sees Love enthroned. He lost his Kanaiya that day; but he found himself!

In a book which is named "The Burning Glass" and which describes a romance of Paris before the Revolution, we have the following significant passage:—"What is the Beloved to the Lover? A Burning glass through which the rays of the Sun of Love do concentrate. Sometimes this heat breaketh into flame and consumeth that on which it falleth". And in the "Burning glass" of Bekas the 'heat' broke into "flame" and consumed it. The Poet died—of fever! The vision of Beauty consumed him. He passed away,—with a

Song on his lips ! It is a moving song. Its burden is :—

“ The Longing for the Homeland
Draws tears day and night”.

There are some very suggestive ideas in the Songs of this Prophet of the Beautiful. With him the ideas are not *abstractions*, they grow out of his *experiences* ; and his experiences are *ecstatic*. Forms of Beauty move him, throw him, throw him into excitement, inspire him,—and he bursts into Songs. Beauty with him is not *subjective* ; it is the Eternal Real putting on the veil to commune with Man. God is, with Bekas, the Supreme Artist. Bekas is Beauty-possessed. The way, therefore, to live the Longer Life, is to *love*. “Knowledge” and “creed” have only a subordinate place in the programme of the Soul. Not the intellect, not ritualism but the heart touches the Divine Centre of existence. In one of his poems, Bekas sings :—

Mind, Knowledge, Creeds
All are extinguished
In the Flame of Love.

In another place he says :

From all thy learned lore,
Stand thou far ;
Consider how in you may grow
The yearning for the Only Love,

Again:—

Forget thy books
Read the Verity Eternal.

With such a vision he could not be a sectarian in religion. The Hindu and the Musulman were to him children of the One Spirit. Hindu-Muslim unity was a fundamental truth with these Sindhi mystics. These Muslim mystics did not want that men should be 'converted' from one 'religion' to another; the God-Life flowed into all religions, and was not confined to 'creeds.' Bekas had a number of Hindu disciples ; and, according to a story, an orthodox priest of Islam urged that a Hindu disciple must be converted to Islam. Friday was fixed for the ceremony. Bekas was invited to be present. He went to the mosque with his Hindu and Muslim disciples. The prayers were over. The priest said the time was come to perform ceremonies and declare

the Hindu to be a Musulman! "By what Rule?" asked Bekas. The priest came out with quotations from the Koran. Then Bekas gave his own exposition of the same Quranic texts: he had something better than 'knowledge'; he had *illumination*: and he brought home to the *mullahas* that the Prophet of Islam was *not* in favour of such 'conversions.' So he sings in one of his hymns:—

By the grace of Him,—the Holy
One.

The Hindu and the Musulman
Are one in Eternal Verity.

Again:—

Islam and the Hindu Faith
Are but branches of the One Tree.

Things, incidents, individuals become with Bekas *symbols* of the One. They remind him of his Beloved. They quicken his longing. As spring comes and red roses gleam, he sighs a deep sigh, for *his* spring has not yet come! In one of his poems he says:—

Spring is come!
It is the season of Union;

But on me is poured the rain of
Separation !

It is the hour of dawn,
And I see spring-trees
In flower and fruit before my
eyes ;

But my only speech
Is the Speech of Separation !

The note of longing is sounded again and
again in his Poems. Here are a few lines
from his Lyrics :—

Why dost Thou quarrel with me
still ?

When wilt Thou be Reconciled,
Love ?

The heart is in a state of help-
lessness,

And Thou dost still forget it !

Alas ! Thou hast no hesitation
In slaying the weak.

Beloved ! this is the tragedy

That to see Thee is to be slain.

Master Magician !

Come in Thy mercy and meet me
now

And bless me with Thy Love !

Day and Night,
 Night and Day,
 The longing grows,
 The Sorrow multiplies,
 And I cry repeatedly :—
 Who will cure my heart's
 malady ?

In the wide, wide world
 Was there a malady
 So bitter-sweet
 As Love ?
 Night is come
 And brings with it Separation !
 Spring is come
 O Beautiful One !
 Bless me with the anguish of
 Love !

Bitter is the end of Love
 And Bekas wanders in *bazar* !
 Such carelessness,
 Such carelessness,
 To one who aches for Thee !
 —Is it fair, Thou First and Only
 Fair ?

This be my prayer
 At Thy door, every day,—

Come and dwell
 In the broken Temple of my heart!
 • From the beginning of his days
 Is Bekas the servant
 Of Thine Eyes, O Love!

The very stories of old become with Bekas symbols of the soul's search after God. There is a famous Sindhi story of a village girl seized forcibly by a Chief and taken to his castle. She is a captive in the Chieftain's hands. And every time he makes an offer of marriage to her, she says:—"No! My husband is in the village. To him must I faithful be." She is tempted with money and palace-luxuries; She spurns them aside saying:—"I am happy in my poverty." It is a moving story this, of the village girl pining away in the Chief's Castle, pining away with a longing in her heart for her Homeland. Bekas takes up this story and describes his own longing for *his* Homeland. In one of his Songs he refers to the Story and says:—

To night is to me
 As a lengthening year.

To night, I dreamt
That I was in my Homeland
again!

In song after song this note is sounded—
the note of *bhakti*, of longing for the Lord.
In one place he sings:—

O! friend-Magician!
Thou art attentive
To the Inexperienced!
And so thou makest them helpless
Then dost Thou hide Thyself!
Bekas the helpless,—
What can he do
When he lies wounded thus
With Love's parting shot?

That tranquility, that calm, that *santi*
which the Poets of the Upanishads prayed
for, is not in the Songs of Bekas. The vision
of *santi* has been beautifully expressed in
the famous lines of the English poet,
Vaughan:—

I saw Eternity the other night
Like a great ring of pure and end-
less light
All calm as it was bright.

The vision of Bekas is *not* that of a

“ great ring of pure and endless light,” but of a Flame! His vision is ecstatic. The Beautiful throws him into excitement. Gradually there grows upon him the great idea of the Upanishads:—*Tat Twamasi: That art Thou.* And there are songs in which he sings with the deep fervour of God as the deepest Self of Man. Here are some extracts.

Know the meaning of mystic
union

Thou art That.

Why these beads and prayers?

Thou art That.

He whom thou wouldst see

Is in thine own heart

The King thou art in quest of

Is in thine own heart.

This is the great Awakening which comes to the Poet. Then he exclaims:—

The Beloved is come to my
Country

O Comrades!

Give me your greetings to-day!

With this, there comes to him the vision of the One in all. Of this Vision sings

Bekas in a beautiful song of which the burden is:—

Lo! here, Lo! there
 I only remember
 Thy Picture,
 Thy Picture
 Love!

How comes this Awakening? "He awakes," the Poet says, "whom the Beloved awakes—none else, none else," So the Upanishads tell us that Deliverance comes to him whom God *chooses*. Nothing may be achieved without the grace of God. But that Choice is not capricious, that grace is not a whim. There are *Laws* in the Spiritual Kingdom. And the one supreme Law, Bekas tells us,—as the Upanishads, also, tell us,—is the *Law of Sacrifice*. Deliverance through Death, Salvation through Sacrifice, Emancipation through sorrow and self-renunciation,—that is the Song Bekas sings again and again. Out of suffering and sacrifice was his own soul made. In suffering and sacrifice must each soul find the Beloved. This is what the Poet means when he says of the Liberated

THE SONG OF THE MARTYRS

Lovers and martyrs are the inspiration of history. The great Poet of the Desert has sung of men and women who loved and lost and in self-loss found new depths of Reality. Most of the Songs of the Poet, as I have indicated in an earlier section, represent woman as being in quest of man. And the woman-soul is what we need, to-day, to heal the Nations. We also need the hero-soul. Civilization needs *heroic* virtues. Islam has developed these virtues in a conspicuous measure; and the lives of its Prophet and Martyrs are full of stories which must quicken the heroic impulses of Young India. Who will not be moved, for instance, by the story of Jaffer? On the battle-field his hands are cut off: he is pierced by 90 wounds; he receives them "eyes front"; he does not run away; he falls a martyr on the battlefield of Ohod.

The Prophet himself carries the news to Jaffer's widow. He takes on his knees the young son of Jaffer, then says :—" His two hands are cut off, but God has given him in exchange two wings of emerald with which he now flies among the angels in Paradise." The hero-spirit is a part of the passion of Islam.

One of the world's Great Heroes is Hussein. The crown of creation, with Nietzsche is not the *saint* but the *hero*! But the heroic may be fused with the saintly. Hussein was a hero-saint; and his story has been sung by a number of poets. Shah Latif sings it in his own inimitable way. The circumstances under which he sings it are worth noting. It is Muharrum, the first month of the Muslim year. Shah Latif wants to make a pilgrimage to Karbala,—the place where stands the tomb of Hussein, the Muslim martyr. The Poet has proceeded a little when he retraces his steps back to his place. Why? A thought comes to him that he is about to pass away! He puts on black clothes in memory of the martyrs; he sings the Poem in

honor of Hussein on his way back to his place,—the *Bhit* ; on reaching it he shut himself in a room, spends several days in prayer, then comes out, has his bath, throws a sheet over his body, tells his disciples to strike music and before the music has died he passes away !

The Song of the Martyrs is, then, the very last song of Shah Latif. May I call it the Poet's swan-song ? As the crowds hear it sung even in these days, they sob, they cry, they weep. Hussein's tragedy, doubtless, affected the Poet deeply. The tragedy is dramatised every year in Persia and Turkey and moves vast multitudes. Urdu poets have sung of Hussein in touching terms ; one of them well expressed the Muslim sentiment :—" He gave his head but not his hand in the hand of Yezid. Verily Hussein is the foundation of Islam." Shah Latif sang :—

Seeing Hussein in agony
 The Angels wept,
 The Earth shivered,
 The Heavens rained tears.

About six centuries after Christ, this

grandson of the Prophet died a Martyr on the field of Karbala. His enemy struck off his head and trampled upon his body and killed his 72 faithful supporters. The tragedy happened on 9th October the 10th day of Muharrum. The anniversary of the Event is celebrated throughout the Muslim world.

Hussein was the second son of Fatimah, daughter of the Prophet. His father was Ali, a cousin of the Prophet. Ali is revered as a warrior-saint of Islam. He is often called the *Wali Allah*, the "Friend of God." He fought for his Faith. His heart was full of love for the poor. At Medina he gave away all his wealth in alms. "Blessed are those," he said, "who have renounced this world and who aspire to the life to come." He was struck mortal by an enemy, but he exclaimed:—"This, too, is kindness done by the Lord of Ka'aba". Ali was fearless and he had love in heart. So when his son Hasan was poisoned and when he (Hasan) was asked by his brother Hussein to give the name of the man suspected of poisoning him, he ans-

wered with singular generosity :—“ This world is as a long night. Leave the man alone. He and I shall meet one day in open daylight in the presence of the Most High.” And, as we shall see, the other son Hussein, too, died on the Karbala Field as a hero-saint showing courage and breathing out with his last breath a kind feeling for his cruel persecutors. Even the father of Yezid said :—“ Hussein is straight and upright and sincere and the Prophet’s blood runs in his veins.” Hussein was proceeding to Kufa. He sent in advance a messenger to announce his coming. The Governor of the place,—an enemy of Hussein,—ordered the messenger to curse Hussein and Ali. The man stood up before the assembly and *blessed* both Hussein and Ali! And thousands upon thousands to-day visit the Tomb at Karbala to bless the name of the great Martyr of Islam and ask for his blessings. Surrounded by silver screens is the Tomb; and kings and princes deem it a proud privilege to kiss it. The Pilgrims may be found at the Tomb from morn to midnight. Many

come there travelling all the way from Persia,—*on foot*. Journey on foot is regarded a merit. And from different parts of the world the Muslims assemble there,—drawn to Karbala by a common Faith and a common devotion to the Man martyred for the Faith fourteen centuries ago. We read in the Christian Scriptures :—“As dying and behold we live”. This is true of Hussein. As dying,—and behold he lives! The Story of the Martyrdom may be briefly told. Yezid becomes the Khalifa in 60 A. H. He is not elected; he is not regarded fit to be a Khalifa; Mecca and Medina refuse to recognise him. The Arab tribes, known as the Kufis, send a message to Hussein to set out for Kufa. Once he appears, they say, the whole country will claim him as the Khalifa; is he not the Prophet’s grandson and a man of courage and humility and faith? The Sindhi Poet refers to the message of Kufis in the following lines :—

The Kufis sent a word
 In Allah’s Name :—
 “ We are thy subjects

You are our Khalif ;
Come here but once
And you will have the Throne ”.

Hussein sets out for Kufi. His family and relatives scent danger for him. They say they must accompany him. His little girl is ill: she is left behind. He sets out with his wife, sister, children, nephews, cousins and a little band of devoted followers. Altogether he has with him 72 persons,—according to a popular version. On the way he meets a poet who gives Hussein an idea of the situation in significant words :—“ *The heart of the City is with thee; but its sword is against thee.* ” The Governor of the city has used methods of terrorism; the Arabs who promised to help Hussein are now frightened and stand aloof from him. He reaches Karbala after a tedious journey. Karbala is situated on the bank of the Euphrates. It is about 25 miles above Kufi and about 50 miles away from Bagdad. Hussein pitches his camp at Karbala. He makes it clear that he has no evil designs. He is prepared to go to Damascus and speak to Yezid per-

sonally. He is ready to return to Mecca. He is willing to go to any place to fight against the enemies of Islam. None of these three conditions satisfies Obeidallah, the Governor of the city. He wants Hussein's *unconditional* surrender, he cuts off Hussein's access to the River to force surrender. Hussein asks his family, relatives, friends and followers to return. None is ready to leave him in the lurch. His little son is laid up with fever, but not a drop of water is available to slake the boy's parched lips. Hussein spends the night in prayers. He has a vision at night of the Prophet who says to him:—"Thou shalt soon be with me in Paradise." Hussein prepares himself for the struggle of the next day; he has no hate in his heart; love and prayer are the weapons with which he would fight and glorify God. One of his sayings that night is most moving:—"Let not thy love of the Rose be lost through the tyranny of the thorns. Forget not the Beloved even when the swords are struck. Kiss the arrow which pierces thy body. Have love in thy heart even when

the sword is cutting thy throat. Let not even a sigh be breathed when thy veins are being cut. Whatever thy state, remember the Love of God." Next day he washes and anoints himself with musk. Then he mounts his horse (or camel?) Before him is set the Holy Book and he recites the texts:—"O God! thou art my confidence in every trouble, only hope in every adversity." "My reward is with God alone and I am commanded that I should be of those who are Muslims, in truth," (the men, i.e., who would surrender all to Allah's will). According to a tradition Hussein misses much his dear departed brother, Hasan; and there is a touching reference to this in the Song of the Martyrs composed by the Sindhi Poet:—

O for Hasan at this hour!
 Were he in the Fight
 He would stand by his brother
 And die for him
 As the moth for the flame;
 O for Hasan at this hour!
 Who then would dare
 To attack the Person

Of Hussein the Hero ?

The first arrow is shot from the enemy's side. Hussein fights heroically,—against odds. One by one, his sons and brothers and nephews and cousins are struck and fall on the battlefield. Hussein feels very thirsty. He goes to the river for water. As he stoops to drink, an arrow strikes him in the mouth. Covered with blood, he raises his hands and heart to God ; he prays. His little nephew goes up to kiss him ; the enemy cuts off the head of the pretty boy and Hussein exclaims :—“Thy reward, dear child ! is with thy Ancestors in the Realm of Bliss.” Some one comes to Hussein and says to him :—“You are just at hell.” “No,” he says : “I go to Allah the Compassionate.” Hussein falls after a heroic fight. According to a Muslim tradition, Hussein has 33 wounds and 33 bruises on his body when he falls. I am unable to understand why the Sindhi Poet referring to the passing away of Hussein says :—

The Martyred Man

Was wounded with 900 wounds !

Is this a mistake in the *Rasalo*? Or does the Poet refer to some other Muslim tradition? Hussein falls; his head is cut off; the garments are removed from the body. An old man on seeing the mangled body exclaims:—"The Prophet's grandson! By Allah! I have seen these very lips kissed by the blessed mouth of Muhammad"!!

In his defeat and death, did Hussein proclaim his Victory. The tragedy of Karbala became an eye-opener to the Muslims as the Story travelled over the Empire. More than once, according to my reading of Muslim history, has Islam passed through such a tragedy. And thinking, to-day, of the conflict of the Muslim world with Western imperialisms and of the sufferings of thousands of my Muslim and Hindu brethren on account of the Khilafat, I have said to myself, again and again:—The tragedy of Islam is being re-enacted. A Muslim disciple of the Poet of the Desert has a beautiful verse in this connection. Just at the moment the Sindhi poet sang of Hussein's death, this Muslim disciple

said:—“*Chalo Yaro Musulmano!* “Advance! Comrades of the Muslim faith!” And at this hour, I,—a Hindu lover of the Prophet, —I fain would say to my Muslim friends : —*Chalo! Yaro Musulmano!* This is no time to be depressed. ’Tis time to advance! Non-violent non-co-operation has not failed us. We have failed it. ’Tis time to be true to the faith we have sworn. *Chalo Yaro Musulmano!*

Years ago, when I was a boy, I saw with what intensity of feeling the Passion of Hussein was celebrated in some parts of Sind. And Hindus showed every sympathy to Muslims. Hindus prepared *sherbat* (sweet water) and offered it to the Muslims to drink. Hindus attended the celebration and even offered kerchiefs at the *tabuts* in honor of Hussein. I saw Hindu men and women weeping as they beheld their Muslim brethren beating their breasts, covering their heads with dust and crying with tears in their eyes :—“ *Yah Hussein! Yah Hussein!* (Alas! for Hussein) Who would not weep at the recital of the Story of Hussein and his comrades at Karbala

The 'modern' spirit has affected, in no small measure, the original freshness of the Sind Muslims' faith and the natural feeling of Hindu-Muslim comradeship in the Province. But we have only to read the Sindhi Poet's Song of the Martyrs to be relinked in sympathy and love with Muslim friends. The Song is charged with a vivid vision and in the mouth of a real singer it soon rises to a high emotional temperature. Then it is that the *truth* of the Poem grows upon us. Shah Latif is essentially an *artist*, and the true artist is *disinterested*. He gives us picture after picture in his songs. He does not expound this dogma or that. But there are *truths of life* which are not *dogmas*. And some of these I seem to read between the lines in Shah Latif's Song of the Martyrs. Let me refer in brief to three of these truths. They have, I believe, a great value for us at this hour of India's struggle.

The first is:—Courage. I have often thought that courage is the *foundation* of all virtue, of all higher life. Hussein is represented to us in the Poet's song as a

hero of a high order. And the virtue of Courage is extolled in a number of verses and is always regarded as having a *moral*, a spiritual quality. Here are a few extracts :—

He who would be brave
 Must learn to stand alone.
 Let them stand in the Field
 Who would feel ashamed
 Of the least retreat.
 Hussein the Hero
 Now stands alone,
 Companionless—
 His Helper is the Lord.
 Hussein the Hero
 Hath glorified
 His father and forefathers all
 By his heroic deeds
 Hussein the Hero
 Is lamented in his death
 By three chief classes of life :—
 By men and women in the homes,
 By beasts in Forests
 By Angels in the Heavens.
 The very birds bewail
 The loss of the loved one.

Allah giveth Victory to him ;
 Welcome Death ;
 I must weep
 If thou beat retreat.
 Cowards beg favours and submit ;
 They forget that life is short.
 Behold him besmeared with blood !
 His teeth look like the pomegran-
 ate grains ;
 The full moon upon him shines ;
 His mother blesses him on the
 Field.

Blessed is Hussein the Hero
 Whose body is broken in Frag-
 ments

Upon the Field.

Comrade !

If thou wilt have Victory

Fling all fear from thy heart,

Lift up thy weapon,

Fight as though thy Fight were
 Embrace,

Nor bear a shield before thee.

Fall upon the sharpest sword

That thou mayst wax in strength.

Another truth referred to by the Poet

in his song is that of *kismet*. According to a tradition evidently known to the Poet, Hussein had a vision on his way to Karbala. In that vision he saw a horseman who said to him:—"Men travel in the night and their *kismet* travels in the night to meet them!" It is a profound truth of life. Yet I know how much the Muslim view of *kismet* has been misinterpreted by Western critics. *Kismet* has been construed to mean *fatalism* and to inspire *fanaticism*. Thus Vincent Smith in his "An English History of India" practically summed up the essence of Indian history in two generalisations:—The Hindus are caste-ridden; the Muslims are fanatics! Both the generalisations are false to the essential meaning and spirit of Indian history. The Muslim view of *Kismet*, as I understand it, represents a vital truth of life:—sovereignty of the Will of God. How are we to meet His Will? In a spirit of *discipline*. Islam is wedded to this idea of *discipline*. The true Muslim says:—This is the Will of God: I must submit to it; I must obey His Order; the result is in His

Hands. The Sindhi Poet refers to this idea of the sovereignty of God's Will in several passages. Here are a few extracts from the Song:—

Hussein enters the Fight ;
 Its issue ? He knows
 Who does what to Him is pleasing.
 Hussein pitched his tents
 In the Karbala Field ;
 He fell, according to His Will.
 You bewail the Imamas ;
 You lament the Martyrs ;
 What happened to them
 Was what God himself produced !

And so we come to the third great truth, —the *sacrament of suffering*. Shah Latif is at his best when he sounds this note. It is, to my mind, the deepest note of life. Referring to Hussein's agony at Karbala, the Poet of the Desert says :—

The agony of the Martyr
 Brings with it the Bridal Day.
 Think not of Yazid :
 That tragedy was Love !
 Death rained in mercy that Day
 Upon Ali's sons.

And to read the Muslim Records is to know that Hussein himself accepted the agony at Karbala in this beautiful spirit. His sister comes to him weeping but he consoles her saying :—“ Whoever saw in a flowering garden a Rose without its Thorn ?” His sister cannot reconcile herself to *kismet*. Then he says to her :—“ Rejoice in sufferings ; they work out an Eternal End.” Some idea of what this “ Eternal End ” may be is indicated when Hussein says in the very agony of death :—“ I thirst : I die : I offer myself a sacrifice for my People.” Again :—“ I would offer my soul not once or twice but a thousand times for the salvation of the People.” His last prayer is :—“ I pray Thee in the Day of Judgment forgive, O Merciful Lord ! forgive the sins of the Prophet’s people.” One recalls the prayer of Jesus on the Cross :—“ Father : forgive them ; for they know not what they do.”

History would be robbed of its rich meaning if, in and through the sufferings of these Great Souls,—the super-men of the earth-plane,—the Guardians of Huma-

nity were not working out an 'eternal end.' Progress, as I have more than once urged, is a *series of sacrifices*. And the Path to Freedom is paved with Sufferings. The supreme Law of life is Sacrifice. So Shah Latif says :—

The tragedy of Karbala
Was all an Appearance ;
The Master's Will is the all-in-all ;
By suffering He tests His own.

Again :—

Only the Wise may know
The meaning of the Tragedy.

Again :—

In the Field of Karbala
Entered the Brave ;
The Earth trembled,
The skies shook ;
It was not a Battle ;
It was the Rain of His Love !

And the Mystery of His Love is indicated by the Poet in the following lines charged with profound thought :—

He slays His loved ones ; [ones.
He sends sufferings to His dear
Here is a Hidden Mystery.

Tuning to myself these words of the Sindhi Poet, I have asked myself, again and again, in these days of *our* trial:—Is there not in the sufferings of Mahatma Gandhi and his comrades in Indian jails a “Hidden Mystery”? Can we for a moment believe that these are needless sufferings, after all? Can it be that the dream in our aching eyes is a delusion? Can a Nation’s faith in Freedom be a lie? There are tears in mine eyes as I think of the painful, struggling years of India’s life. And as I murmur to myself the Mother’s Name, I recall the Poet’s words:—“Here is a Hidden Mystery”! I believe profoundly that India’s sufferings cannot go for nothing. They send greetings to a New Dawn which I feel, is somehow breaking. Therefore in my troubled heart is a tremendous Faith. Therefore I say to youngmen in whom abides my Hope:—Comrades! In this hour of trial believe in Allah the Just; believe in India the Ancient. And even if you be called to bear your Cross on the Tree of Agony, sing of Her,—your mother,—with the passion for Sacrifice.

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