THE MATHNAWI
OF
JALÁL UD-DÍN RÚMÍ

REYNOLD A. NICHOLSON

Edited From the Oldest Manuscripts Available.
With Critical Notes, Translation, and Commentary.

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Cambridge.

I
as the size of his cup’. The Mathnawī is the sun that shines on every soul and heart.

The present state of humanity is characterized by a deep crisis of spiritual impoverishment. The countless problems that surround us require urgent attention. And I know one thing for sure: we can overcome this impasse only by returning to Rumi’s eternal message about love and spiritual freedom. This message is for everyone and for every period, and it goes beyond national and linguistic boundaries. As Rumi has said so beautifully, ‘if only the good ones come to your door, where would the unfortunate ones go?’

I would like to remember here R. A. Nicholson who is a well-known orientalist, made a great literature work on Mathnawī to translate it into English and thank everyone who made the publication of this work possible. May the new work bring blessings and full of advantages.

Tahir Akyürek
Mayor of the Metropolitan Municipality of Konya, Turkey.
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INTRODUCTION

THERE are complete translations of the Mathnawi in Turkish\(^1\), Arabic\(^2\), and Hindustani\(^3\), but only the first two of the six Books of the poem have hitherto been made accessible in their entirety to European readers, though a number of extracts from Books III-IV are translated in E. H. Whinfield's useful abridgment. While it may seem surprising that a work so celebrated, and one which reflects (however dimly at times) so much of the highest as well as the lowest in the life and thought of the Mohammedan world in the later Middle Ages, should still remain imperfectly known to Western students, I think that this gap in our knowledge can at least be excused. Judged by modern standards, the Mathnawi is a very long poem: it contains almost as many verses as the Iliad and Odyssey together and about twice as many as the Divina Commedia; and these comparisons make it appear shorter than it actually is, since every verse of the Mathnawi has twenty-two syllables, whereas the hexameter may vary from thirteen to seventeen, and the terza rima, like the Spenserian, stanza, admits only ten or eleven in each verse, so that the Mathnawi with 25,700 verses is in reality a far more extensive work than the Faerie Queene with 33,500. On the other hand, it is easily surpassed in length by several Persian poems; and the fact that the Shahnama has been translated from beginning to end into English, French, and Italian answers the question asked by Georg Rosen—"Who would care to devote a considerable part of his lifetime to translating thirty or forty thousand Persian distichs of unequal poetical worth?" The size of the Mathnawi is not the chief or the worst obstacle by which its translator is confronted. He at once finds himself involved in the fundamental difficulty, from which there is no escape, that if his translation is faithful, it must be to a large extent unintelligible, and that if he tries to make it intelligible throughout he must often substitute for the exact rendering a free and copious paraphrase embodying matter which properly belongs to a commentary, though such a method cannot satisfy any one who wants to understand the text and know what sense or senses it is capable of bearing. Therefore a complete version of the Mathnawi means, for scientific purposes, a faithful translation supplemented by a full commentary; and considering the scarcity of competent Persian scholars in Europe, no one need wonder that the double task has not yet been accomplished, the most important European translations are enumerated in the following list, which shows incidentally that the greater part of the work already done stands to the credit of this country.


Being written in rhymed verse, this excellent version of about a third of Book I (vv. 1-1371 in my edition) does not preserve the literal form of the original, but as a rule the meaning is given correctly even where misunderstanding would have been pardonable, while the explanatory notes keep the reader in touch with the mystical background of the poem. The translator has left out a good deal—and in verse-translations of Oriental poetry this is a merit rather than a fault. His book, which was reprinted in 1913 with an introduction by his son, Dr F. Rosen, should help to quicken the growing interest of Germany in Persian literature.

2. The Mesnevi of Mevlânâ Jelâl-ud-din Muhammad er-Rûmj. Book the First, together with some account of the life and acts of the Author; of his ancestors, and of his descents, illustrated by a selection of characteristic anecdotes, as collected by their historian, Mevlânâ Shemsu'd-din Ahmed el-Effâlî el- Arifi. Translated and the poetry versified by James W. Redhouse. (London, 1881.)

Sir James Redhouse's translation of Book I is much less accurate than Rosen's. Its peculiarities cause us to speculate why this eminent Turkish scholar, who was not quite at home in Persian mysticism, should have embarked upon a task so formidable; or how, with the sagacity to perceive and the candour to confess his lack of skill in versifying, he allowed himself to be misled by the idea that any kind of verse is superior to prose as a medium for the translation of poetry. The excerpts from Aflâki's Manaqibu'l-'Ariffin, though legendary in character, supply valuable information concerning the poet and the circle of Sînî's in which he lived.

3. Masnavi-i Ma'navî, the Spiritual Couplets of Mavlânâ Jelâl-ud-din Muhammad Rûmj, translated and abridged by E.H. Whinfield. (London, 1887; 2nd ed, 1898.)

All students of the Mathnawi owe gratitude to Whinfield, who was the first to analyse its contents and illustrate their rich
quality by his prose translation of selected passages from the six Books, amounting to something like 3500 verses altogether. His wide and sympathetic knowledge of Oriental mysticism, already exhibited in the notes to his edition and translation of the Gulshan-i Rāz (1880), makes him an admirable guide through the mazes of the Mathnawi, and in general his work deserves the high esteem which it enjoys.

4. The Masnavi by Jalālū'd-dīn Rūmī, Book II translated for the first time from the Persian into prose, with a Commentary, by C. E. Wilson. (London, 1910.)

This is "a plain literal prose translation," based on sound principles and carefully executed. Comparing it with my own version of the Second Book, I found that as similar methods produce similar results the two versions often agreed almost word for word, and that where they differed, the point at issue was usually one for discussion rather than correction. My obligations to Professor Wilson are not confined to the turns of phrase which I have borrowed from him now and then: every translator, and particularly the translator of such a poem as the Mathnawi, must feel the advantage of being able to consult the work of a trustworthy predecessor who has gone step by step over the same ground.

The present translation, in which the numeration of the verses corresponds with that of the text of my edition, is intended primarily as an aid to students of Persian; it is therefore as exact and faithful as I can make it, but it does not attempt to convey the inner as distinguished from the outer meaning: that is to say, it gives the literal sense of the words translated without explaining either their metaphorical or their mystical sense. While these latter senses have sometimes been indicated by words in brackets, I have on the whole adhered to the principle that translation is one thing, interpretation another, and that correct interpretation depends on correct translation, just as the most fertile source of misinterpretation is inability or neglect to translate correctly. It follows that a translation thus limited in scope will contain a great number of passages which do not explain themselves and cannot be fully understood without a commentary. I should have preferred, as a matter of practical convenience, to include the commentary in the same volume as the translation, but on the other hand I saw grave objections to annotating part of the poem before the whole had been studied and translated. "The Mathnawi," it has been said, "is easier than easy to the ignorant, but harder than hard to the wise"; and I confess that for me there are still many difficulties, which may perhaps be removed by further study of the poem itself, of works historically connected with it, and of relevant Persian and Arabic literature. The Oriental commentaries, with all their shortcomings, give much help. Amongst those used in preparing this translation I have profited most by the Fatīhu 'l-ajbāt (Turkish) of Iṣmāʿīl Angiravi and the Sharḥ-i Mathnawi-yi Mawlānā-yi Rūmī (Persian) of Wali Muhammad Akbarābādī; I have also consulted the Mukāshfāt-i Radawī (Persian) of Muhammad Rūdā, the Sharḥ-i Mathnawi (Persian) of Muhammad ʿAbdu 'l-ʿAlī, who is better known by his title of Bahru 'l-ʿUlūm, al-Manḥāj al-qawī (Arabic) of Yūsuf b. Ahmad al-Mawlāwī, and for Book I the Sharḥ-i Mathnawi-yi Shafī (Turkish) of 'Abidin Pasha.

As stated in the Introduction to the first volume, no finality is claimed for this edition. Where the text is uncertain, the translation can only be provisional; but even where we feel confidence in the text, cases occur in which every translator of the Mathnawi can but offer the rendering that seems to him possible or probable, and take comfort in the reflection that est quaedam prodire tenus si nonatur ultra. Some passages, I believe, will always remain mysterious, since the key to them has been lost: one knows that words uttered by a great spiritual teacher may be almost meaningless outside the group of his intimate friends and disciples, or may become so by lapse of time. The loose and rambling structure of the poem leads to other perplexities. When our author gives no sign whether he is speaking in his own person or by the voice of one of his innumerable puppets—celestial, infernal, human, or animal—who talk just like himself; when he mingles his comments with their discourse and glides imperceptibly from the narrative into the exposition; when he leaves us in doubt as to whom he is addressing or what he is describing—the translator is driven to conjecture, and on occasion must leap in the dark. Hence a translation of the Mathnawi, however careful it may be, is necessarily tentative in some respects and capable of being improved, though the process takes time. The corrections which I look forward to publishing at a later stage, when the commentary on this volume appears, are likely to be fewer, but also more important, than those contained in the long list of textual corrections (vol. I, pp. 21-28), three-fourths of which any reader could have made for himself. Although the question of literary form does not enter very largely into a version so literal as this, I have attempted to preserve the idiomatic flavour of the original—which can be more firmly caught and retained in a prose translation—and also its variety of style, ranging from a plain semi-colloquial manner of expression to a noble and elevated diction like that employed by the author in his mystical odes. On certain topics he is too outspoken for our taste and many pages are disfigured by anecdotes worthy of an Apuleius or Petronius but scarcely fit to be translated into the language of these writers. To omit them, however, would defeat the object I have in view, namely, to provide a complete version of the work which, notwithstanding
the author's passion for self-effacement, reveals the breadth and depth of his genius most adequately. It is important, for our comprehension of him, to know that he could tell ribald stories in the easy tone of a man of the world, and that the contrast often drawn between him and Sa'di takes no account of some marked features which the authors of the Mathnawi and the Gulistan possess in common.

This is a translation for students of the text, but I venture to hope that it may attract others neither acquainted with Persian nor specially concerned with Sufism. To those interested in the history of religion, morals, and culture, in fables and folklore, in divinity, philosophy, medicine, astrology and other branches of mediaeval learning, in Eastern poetry and life and manners and human nature, the Mathnawi should not be a sealed book, even if it cannot always be an open one.

The prose headings inserted at short intervals throughout the poem, transliterated words with the exception of proper names, and all direct quotations from the Qur'an except such as occur in the headings are printed in italics. A few foot-notes have been added, some of them for the benefit of the general reader.

REYNOLD A. NICHOLSON
CAMBRIDGE,
December 1925

Endnotes
1 In prose, by Ismā'īl Anqirāvī in his commentary entitled Fāṭḥu 'l-abyāt (Būāq, A.M. 1251 and Constantinople, A.H. 1289). A Turkish verse-translation by Sulaymān Nasīfī accompanies the Persian text in the Būāq edition of the Mathnawi (A.H. 1268). For Nasīfī (d. a.h. 1151) see E. J. W. Gibb, History of Ottoman Poetry, vol. IV, pp. 78-9, where an account is given of the circum stance which led him to compose his version of the Mathnawi. Gibb's description of it as "a literal and line for line rendering" seems to me to require much qualification.

2 In prose, by Yusuf b. Ahmad al-Mawlawī in his commentary entitled al- Manhāj al-qawī (Cairo, A.H. 1289).

3 I do not think that a complete prose translation in Hindustani has yet appeared, but there is one in verse, entitled Pirāhān-i Yusufī, by Muhammad Yusuf Ali Shah (Lucknow, 1889; Calcutta, 1897).

4 Some day I hope to try in a volume of selected passages whether a trans lator of the Mathnawi may not merit the praise which Jerome bestowed on Hilary: "quasi captives sensus in suam linguam victoris jure transposuit."

5 Frequently too the terseness of the original demands expansion in order to bring out even the literal sense. The brackets in this version mark off what belongs to a strict rendering of the original text from what has been added for the purpose of explanation. I have not, however, been so pedantic as always to indicate the insertion of certain auxiliary parts of speech which an English translator would naturally use, though they are omitted in the Persian text.

6 It may be said that this aim is inconsistent with the translator's duty to write his own language idiomatically. That is true, and no compromise will unite the contraries, but I have done my best to combine them.

POSTSCRIPT

IT would not be fitting that this volume, the first to appear in the "E. J. W. Gibb Memorial" Series since the death of Professor E. G. Browne, should leave my hands without giving some expression to the great sorrow felt by the Trustees at the loss of the Scholar who presided over the foundation of the Trust, took the chief part in organising and administering it, and for more than twenty years so fully enjoyed the confidence and affection of his surviving colleagues. Amongst the works published by the Trustees or now in course of publication there are few that were not inspired, suggested, supervised, or in some way influenced by him; and his colleagues can never forget how much they have owed to his energy, enthusiasm, and experience—energy sustained by patience, enthusiasm controlled by judgement, experience as ready to acknowledge any mistake of his own as to excuse it in others. The Trustees hope eventually to include in the Series yet another book from his pen, the Catalogue, which he has left almost complete, of his fine collection of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish manuscripts.

R.A.N.
3658. Instead of this verse read O base man, how would the star be needed to demonstrate the (existence of) sunlight?

3659. Read I was a man, but it is revealed to me.

3665. Read behold how for thereon.

3671. Read obliterated in the light of the knowledge of our (Divine)

King.

3673. Read When dawn comes.

3693. Read Slumber is dead, (unlawful) food is dead; they are fri ends (to each other).

3713. Read the fire of your avarice.

3714. Read What are water and vinegar? Deal out bread.

3730. Read that from the reflexion of that vision (of thine) a flame.

3743. Read and the particular reason is (like) the rind.

3757. Read O thou who art (like) the goodliness of a wide expanse after (the-oppressive confinement of) evil fate.

3759. Read thou art scattering light

3768. After amazed read the bird of hope and desire begins to fly and omit on (the wings of) the idea.

3772. Read Until the scent from the Unseen shall come to your nose, say, will you see anything except your nose?

3773. Heading. After the Heading add the following verse: Then that devoted friend, who had been newly converted to Islam, in his enthusiasm and delight said to 'All.

3773. Omit He said.

3774. Read O (dear) soul, the seven planets, (each) in turn, do a (particular) service for a time to every embryo.

3797. Read recollection of Him for His wind.

3802. Read Since a motive (other than God) entered (my heart) in the (holy) war, I deemed it right to sheathe the sword.

3813: Read at the time of litigation.

3814. Read the law does not assign to them the weight of a straw.

3816. Read dies exceedingly bitter.

3821. Read heedlessness for perplexity.

3836. Read inasmuch as sin has become like obedience.

3844. Heading. After the Faithful add 'All.

3860. Read that God has cancelled.

3865. Omit everlasting.

3871. Read Advantages, then, are.

3889. Read Who indeed would have.

3891. Read Anyone on whom that decree might come (fall).

3893. Heading. Read the accursed Iblís.

3893. Read The eye of for One day.

3901. Read from those who are sincere.

3909. Read And if Thou utter abuse of the moon and sun.

3910. Read the sky and the empyrean.

3920. Read what is the blind man.

3924. Heading. Omit the Prince of the Faithful.

3925. Read I see the enemy.

3937. Read separation (plurality) for revolution.

3944. Read, narcissus-pot.

3957. Read (Only) the evil mind which judges by its own ignorance and cupidity will think that of him (impute that motive to him).

3972. Read If ye utter this on your tongues anrfwill be left.

3988. Read so many threats and such.

3996. Read such a well-nourished rose.