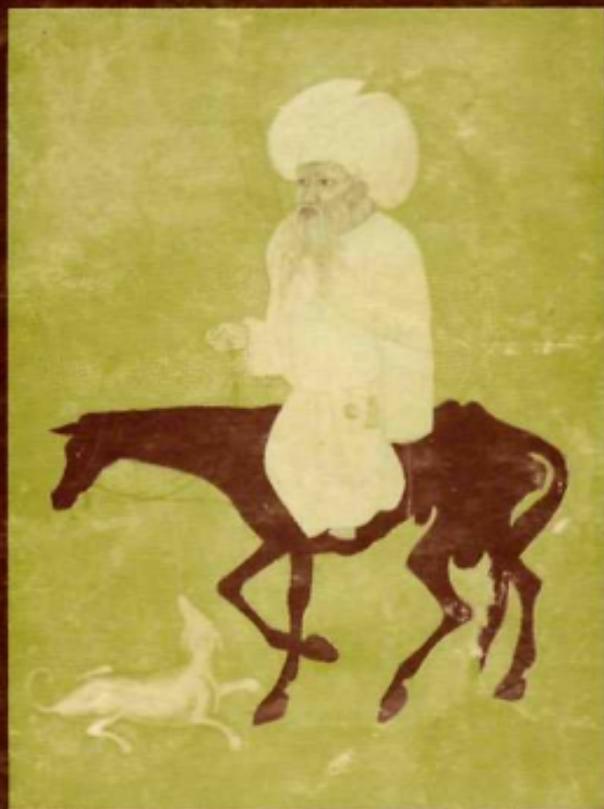


'Obeyd-e Zakani

*The Ethics of the Aristocrats
and
Other Satirical Works*



*translated and with an introduction by
Hasan Javadi*

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and
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Nezam al-Din 'Obeyd-e Zakani is one of the most remarkable poets, satirists and social critics of Iran, whose works have not received proper attention in the past. Often old fashioned scholars have dismissed him as a writer of bawdy stories and obscene verses, and it is only in the last few decades that he has been seriously noticed.

Of his life we know very little. He was born in Qazvin around the year 1300, and his family was originally from an Arab tribe called Zakanian, which after coming to Iran settled down near that city. It seems that the family lived in one of the villages near Qazvin, because a contemporary of 'Obeyd, the historian Hamd Allah Mostofi, refers to him with great respect as "the exalted master Nezam al-Din 'Obeyd Allah Zakani," and adds that he has "excellent poems and matchless works of prose." Mostofi adds that the poet was descended from Arabs of the Banu Khafaja tribe who had settled in Qazvin long before this time. Also according to the same source, the family members were notable in two areas: one theology and scholarship and the other high government service. Mostofi's *Tarikh-e Guzida*, which provides us with this information, was written around the year 1330. Since 'Obeyd was well known and respected at this date, his editor, 'Abbas Iqbal, deduces that he must have been born around the turn of the century.¹

Because of his title "the exalted master," some scholars believe that 'Obeyd held a high official position, but there is no evidence to support this assumption. In a poem written in 1366 or 1367, and addressed to his patron Shah Shoja', 'Obeyd states:

I have always been endeared by the kings;
From the time of youth until this day and age.²

As we shall see, this was a few years before his death. After running away from the father of the same king and several years of wandering in various cities, he had joined the court of Shah Shoja'. There is a story, however, in the *Tazkirat al-Shu'ara* (Biographies of the Poets) of Dawlat-

shah (written in 1487) that does not agree with 'Obeyd's statement about his life-long endearment by the kings. Dawlatshah writes:

"It has been related that he had composed a treatise on Rhetoric in the name of Shah Abu Ishaq that he desired to present to the king. But he was told that the king is busy with his jester (and had no time for him). 'Obeyd was astonished and wondered if the king's most intimate society could be accessible through jesting and ribaldry, and the jesters become his favourites and courtiers, whereas the men of accomplishment and learning be deprived of his favors, why should one trouble himself and bother his brain with the smoke of the lamp of the school? Without attaining an audience with the king he returned and wrote this wonderful quatrain:

In the arts and learning be not proficient like me,
Lest by the great you will be despised like me.
If you desire favors from the masters of our time
Beg shamelessly, play lute and be a libertine."

A friend criticized him, saying: 'In spite of your accomplishments and talents, to abandon learning and virtue in favor of ribaldry and lewd utterances does not seem logical.' 'Obeyd recited this poem for him:

Keep clear of learning, sir, if so you may,
Lest you should lose your pittance for the day.
Play buffoon and learn the fiddler's skill:
On great and small you may then work your will!"³

Though this might have been a very true picture of the age of 'Obeyd, it does not seem to be historically in tune with the other facts of his life. Of course the possibility of such an incident cannot be entirely ruled out. However, since we know that 'Obeyd came from Qazvin to the court of Shiraz during the reign of Shah Abu Ishaq, at a time when he was a well-known man, it is safe to assume that such a treatment would have not been accorded to him, even if he did not have any official position.

The history of Iran in the fourteenth century consists of a succession of wars and disruptions resulting in the rise and fall of numerous regional dynasties. In 1256 Hulagu, a grandson of the great Mongol conqueror Chengiz Khan, had led his expedition to the West and destroyed the Isma'ili strongholds in the Alborz mountains, and two years later had brought to an end more than five hundred years of rule by the 'Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad. The Il-Khanid dynasty, which had been founded by Hulagu, lasted until 1335. Though its history is accompanied by much bloodshed and atrocities, some of its kings, such as Ghazan Khan (1295-1304) and his brother Uljaitu (1305-1316), became patrons of literature and culture. Their capitals, Tabriz and Sultanieh, were prosperous metropolises where envoys and merchants from the East and West met. 'Obeyd's early life

must have coincided with the reign of Abu Sa'id Bahadur Khan (1316-1335), upon whose death the Il-Khanid empire became a bone of contention between various Mongol princes. It was not until the rise of another bloodthirsty Tartar conqueror, Tamarlane, that their fighting came to an end (between 1360 and 1387), in addition to the rule of many other princes.

Of the dynasties that ruled over Iran and were more or less contemporary with 'Obeyd, the Houses of Inju and Muzaffar should be mentioned here, as the life and fortunes of our poet were related to them. Of these two dynasties an interesting account is given by Gertrude Bell in the introduction to her *Poems from the Divan of Hafez* (William Heinemann, 1928):

About the time of the birth of Hafez, that is to say in the beginning of the fourteenth century, a certain Mahmud Shah Inju was governing the province of Fars, of which Shiraz is a capital, in the name of Abu Sa'id....On the death of Mahmud Shah, Abu Sa'id appointed Sheikh Hussein ibn Chuban to the governorship of Fars, a lucrative and much-coveted post. Sheikh Hussein took the precaution of ordering the three sons of Mahmud Shah to be seized and imprisoned; but while they were passing through the streets of Shiraz in the hands of their captors, their mother who accompanied them, lifted her veil and made a touching appeal to the people, calling upon them to remember the benefits they had received from their late ruler. Her words took instant effect; the inhabitants rose, released her and her sons, and drove Sheikh Hussein into exile. He, however returned with an army supplied by Abu Sa'id, and induced Shiraz to submit to his rule. In 1335, a year or two after these events, Abu Sa'id died, and the power of the house of Hulagu crumbled away. There followed a long period of anarchy, which was brought to an end when Uwais, another descendant of Hulagu, seized the throne. He and his son Ahmad reigned in Baghdad until Ahmad was driven out by the invading army of Timur. But during the years of anarchy the authority of the Sultan of Baghdad had been considerably curtailed. On Abu Sa'id's death, Abu Ishaq, one of the three sons of Mahmud Shah Inju who had so narrowly escaped from the hands of Sheikh Hussein, took possession of Shiraz and Isfahan, finally ousting his old enemy, while Mohammad ibn Muzaffar, who had earned a name for valour in the service of Abu Sa'id, made himself master of Yezd. ⁴

Abu Ishaq had not steered his bark into quiet waters. In 1340 Shiraz was besieged and taken by a rival Atabeg, and the son of Mahmud Shah was obliged to content himself with Isfahan. But in the following year he returned, captured Shiraz by a stratagem, and again established himself ruler over all Fars. The remaining years of his reign are chiefly occupied with military expeditions against Yezd, where Mohammad ibn Muzaffar and his sons were building

up a formidable power. In 1352, determined to put an end to these attacks, Mohammad marched into Fars and laid siege to Shiraz. Abu Ishaq, whose life was one of perpetual dissipation, redoubled his orgies in the face of danger. Uncertain of the fidelity of the people of Shiraz, he put to death all the inhabitants of two quarters of the town, and contemplated insuring himself of a third quarter in a similar manner. But these measures did not lead to the desired results. The chief of the threatened quarter got wind of the king's design, and delivered up the keys of his gate to Shah Shuja', the son of Mohammad ibn Muzaffar, and Abu Ishaq was obliged to seek refuge a second time in Isfahan. Four years later, in 1357, he was given up to Mohammad, who sent him to Shiraz and, with a fine sense of dramatic fitness, had him beheaded before the ruins of Persepolis. ⁵

About the last forty years of the life of 'Obeyd coincided with the reigns of Abu Ishaq, Mubarez al-Din Mohammad (1313-1357) and his son Shah Shoja' (1357-1384). 'Obeyd often dedicated his non-satirical works to his contemporary kings or their ministers. Though the number of such works by 'Obeyd is small, a few of his poems shed some light on his life.

One of his earliest works, entitled *Nawader al-Mathal* (Chosen Proverbs), which is a collection of wise sayings and proverbs in Arabic, is dedicated to Khajeh 'Ala al-Din Mohammad. He was a native of Farimad in Khorasan and a protégé of the well-known minister and historian Rashid al-Din Fazl Allah. 'Ala al-Din became the minister of Abu Sa'id for only six months in 1321 and then assumed another post in Khorasan, where he was killed in 1336. Since apparently 'Obeyd never went to Khorasan, the book must have been dedicated in the year 1321. This could account for the fact that, according to Hamd Allah Mostofi, 'Obeyd was known as an author and scholar in 1330. Another minister to whom 'Obeyd dedicated a number of his poems is Rukn al-Din 'Amid al-Mulk, Abu Ishaq's minister in 1346. 'Obeyd in one poem addressed to this minister says: "It is now twelve years since my fortunate star brought me to your palace." In another poem he puts the date of his coming from his native Qazvin to Shiraz ten years earlier, so this must have been in the years 1334-46.

Chronologically the first king to whom 'Obeyd dedicated any of his works is Abu Ishaq, who was also the patron and friend of the great poet Hafez (1326-1389). Apart from a number of panegyrics addressed to Abu Ishaq, 'Obeyd had dedicated his *'Ushshaq-Nama* (The Book of Lovers) to him in 1350. The work is evidently written in emulation of a *mathnavi* by 'Iraqi (1211-1289) with the same name. It is a love story in some 750 couplets in the form of *mathnavi* interspersed with occasional *ghazals*. Whereas the poem of 'Iraqi celebrates mystical love, that of 'Obeyd treats a very human and passionate love.

Abu Ishaq, because of his taste for poetry and learning as well as his generosity, had attracted a brilliant circle of poets and scholars, and 'Obeyd

in several of his poems celebrates the reign of Abu Ishaq and describes Shiraz as the center of culture and learning. In two poems he refers to a famous palace whose construction began by the order of Abu Ishaq in 1353 in Shiraz. The Arab traveller Ibn Batuta, who visited Shiraz between the years 1340 and 1350, related that during the construction of this palace the inhabitants of the city vied with each other to participate in the construction work; men of all ranks came out to do the work, putting on their best clothes and digging the foundations with silver spades.⁶ Before the palace, which was supposed to vie with the renowned Taq-e Kesra in Ctesiphon, could be completed, Abu Ishaq's life came to a sudden and tragic end. 'Obeyd in another poem, after describing the magnificent court of his patron, writes:

But look what a game the world did play with him,
And how calamity took the reins of his happiness.
The sea of misfortune surged suddenly forth,
Engulfing his kingdom, his treasure and his son.
Or perhaps the tears and pain, the fire of sighs
That palace had caused, enkindled the great house...
That garden of pleasure whose fragrance and hue
Inspired the sacred gardens of heaven now is such
That the nightingale no longer graces its perch,
For the black-hearted crow has there made his nest.
The palace from whose prosperity Fortune itself sought a share,
Became a nest for the owl and a breeding place for dogs.
'Obeyd, of the works of time and the transience of the world
A thousand hints can be gleaned.⁷

The reign of Mubarez al-Din Mohammad did not last very long after the death of his rival Abu Ishaq. Mohammad was such a pitiless and harsh man that his own son Shah Shoja' blinded him in 1358 and imprisoned him in Qa'la-ye Sifid in Fars, and a few years later he died in Bam. Mubarez al-Din has been described as "brave and devout, but at the same time cruel, bloodthirsty, and treacherous."⁸ It has been reported that Shah Shoja' once asked him if he had killed a thousand men with his own hands. Mubarez al-Din thought for a while and said: "Just over eight hundred, to be exact."⁹ On another occasion, two prisoners were brought to Mubarez al-Din while he was saying his prayers. Between two prayers, he took his sword, cut off their heads, and returned to his devotions undisturbed.¹⁰ This particular incident very much resembles a passage in 'Obeyd's *Mush u Gorba* (The Mouse and the Cat) where the cat kills and eats a mouse and then goes to the mosque and devoutly performs his prayers. 'Obeyd was not alone in writing against Mubarez al-Din Mohammad's religious hypocrisy. The wits of Shiraz nicknamed him "*Muhtasib*" (Chief of Police) when he closed the taverns and forbade wine drinking. Hafez refers to those days of repressive restrictions in one of his *ghazals*:

Though wine gives delight and the wind distills the perfume of the
rose,

Drink not wine to the strains of the harp, for the constable [muhtasib]
is alert.

Hide the goblet in the sleeve of the patch-work cloak,
For the time, like the eye of the decanter, pours forth blood.
Wash the wine-stain from your dervish-cloak with tears,
For it is the season of piety and the time of abstinence.¹¹

Looking with nostalgia to the by-gone years, Hafez in another poem
hopes that at least asceticism will not be synonymous with hypocrisy:

They have closed the doors of the wine-taverns; O God, suffer not
That they should open the doors of the house of deceit and hypocrisy!
If they have closed them for the sake of the heart of the self-righteous
zealot,
Be of good heart, for they will reopen them for God's sake!¹²

'Obeyd more than Hafez could not tolerate the rule of Mubarez al-Din and in 1357 fled Shiraz and went to the court of Sultan Uwais Ilkani (b. 1337, d. 1374). In a beautiful *ghazal* 'Obeyd describes his plight and says that though his "heart bleeds" for leaving his beloved city, being "in danger" leaves him no other choice.¹³ Apparently because of his liberal views he was afraid of being accused of heresy. For five years 'Obeyd stayed in Baghdad. Shah Shoja', who had succeeded his father, was tricked and ousted from Shiraz by his brother Mahmud. Shah Shoja' went to Kerman and ruled that province for some years until in 1365 he managed to take back Shiraz. Mahmud took refuge in Isfahan and once with the help of the troops of Sultan Uwais fought with Shah Shoja', but neither side had any victory. It was in 1375 that both Mahmud and Sultan Uwais died, then Shah Shoja' not only occupied Isfahan but also held sway from Tabriz to Baghdad, and for a while became the master of the greater part of Iran. It seems that about the years 1362—63 'Obeyd decided to return to Shiraz, but not liking Mahmud he went to the court of Shah Shoja' in Kerman, and two years later accompanied him to his beloved city Shiraz.

At the court of Baghdad 'Obeyd met Salman-e Sawaji, who was the poet laureate of Sultan Uwais. Their relation at first was anything but cordial. Salman in a quatrain had called him a "damnable satirist," noted for his "obnoxiousness and heresy," who "is in truth only an ignorant country oaf from Qazvin."¹⁴ According to Dawlatshah, 'Obeyd arrived in Baghdad and found Salman on the banks of the Tigris, occupied with pleasure and diversion in the company of some learned men. 'Obeyd delighted the court poet by extemporaneously completing a hemistich that had been composed on the river. Salman, not knowing him, asked him where he was from. "From Qazvin," 'Obeyd replied. Here is the rest of this story in the translation of E.G. Browne:

"In the course of the ensuing conversation Salman asked him whether

his name was known or any of his verse familiar in Qazvin, or not. 'Obeyd replied, 'The following fragment of his poetry is very well-known:

"A frequenter of taverns am I, and a lover of wine,
Besotted with drink and desire at the Magians' shrine.
Like a wine-jar from shoulder to shoulder amongst them I pass,
And go from one hand to another like goblet or glass."'

"'Now although Salman is an accomplished man,' added 'Obeyd, 'and these verses may perhaps be truly ascribed to him, yet in my opinion they were most probably composed by his wife.'

"Salman perceived from this witty speech that this was no one other than 'Obeyd himself, whereupon he made much of him, apologized for his satire, and so long as 'Obeyd remained in Baghdad, fell short in no service which he could render him. And 'Obeyd used often to say to him, 'O Salman, fortune favoured you in that you so speedily made your peace with me, and so escaped from the malice of my tongue!'"¹⁵

This story of Dawlatshah, as quoted here by Browne, seems to be a fabrication, because the poem extemporaneously completed by 'Obeyd is to be found in the recently published *Divan* of Naser Bokharai, a fourteenth century poet. (See Parviz Natel Khanlari in *Sokhan* Vol. 4., No. 6. (1953). However, the story reflects the manner in which 'Obeyd was regarded as a wit and sharp-tongued satirist with access to leading figures of his day.

With the rule of Shah Shoja' the oppressive restrictions, which had been imposed by his father, were relaxed. The taverns were reopened and the sound of music could be heard again. Hafez says:

The harp began to clamour 'Where is the objector?'
The cup began to laugh 'Where is the forbiddler?'"¹⁶

In another poem he further celebrates the return of his patron to Shiraz:

At early dawn good tidings reached my ear from the Unseen Voice:
'It is the era of Shah Shoja': drink wine boldly!
That time is gone when men of insight went apart
With a thousand words in the mouth but their lips silent."¹⁷

'Obeyd himself voices his own happiness with the reign of Shah Shoja' and in a long panegyric to him says:

'Obeyd will not bewail the injustices of this time
As good fortune threw him to this auspicious threshold.
He was engulfed in the surging sea of sorrow,
But your favors cast him on the shore of security."¹⁸

'Obeyd was with Shah Shoja' when the latter conquered Isfahan in 1366, and in a poem he congratulated him on his victory. In another poem, dedicated to Shah Shoja', a few years later in 1370, 'Obeyd talks of his old age and the heartwarming patronage of the king. His death has been put in 1370 or 1371. It is definite that in 1371 'Obeyd was not alive, and his son, at the back of a book that had been transcribed by the poet, states that it has passed to him from his father by the right of inheritance.¹⁹

Turning to the social conditions of the period in which 'Obeyd lived, one finds it to be an age of moral depravity and social degradation. Some historians consider the Mongol invasion with its incredible bloodshed and destruction the major cause of this decline. Of course, there is no denying that this was one of the major factors, but the absence of a stable government for a relatively long period of time and the continuance of fighting between various local emirs who took possession of one or more provinces of the country created a chaotic situation in which no one was safe from rapid changes of fortune. In 1295 Ghazan Khan was converted to Islam and until the death of Abu Sa'id in 1335 some measure of normalcy returned, though occasional atrocities were committed by the Mongol emirs. The collapse of Il-Khanid rule ushered in a period of bloodshed, murder and court intrigues, which is most graphically described by 'Obeyd in his "Ethics of the Aristocrats." "These great and sagacious men whose existence honors the face of the earth"—as 'Obeyd mockingly calls them—"believe neither in the human soul nor in the world hereafter." Interestingly enough 'Obeyd quotes even the verses of the *Koran* out of context in order to demonstrate their points of view. For them "the supposed joys of heaven and the sufferings of hell exist in this world." "It is because of this belief that for the life, the property and the honor of the people they have not the least consideration." For them "a cup of fire-colored wine/is dearer than the blood of one hundred brothers." 'Obeyd continues to describe in his piquant humor the beliefs and manners of the aristocracy of his time, and very often what he says is hardly an overstatement. He gives a vivid picture of the moral degradation of his time, which reminds one of the *Satires* of Juvenal at the time of Rome's decadence. 'Abbas Iqbal, the historian of the Mongol period and 'Obeyd's editor, writes of this age: "The mother of one of the kings was known for prostitution and promiscuity; the wife of another killed her husband in the most hideous way in the bed, since he had imprisoned her lover; another wife in the hope of getting married to her brother-in-law urged him to depose his brother; another king blinded his father with his own hands and committed adultery with his mother; and a fourth monarch forced his emirs to divorce their wives so that he could woo them and write love songs for them."²⁰ Therefore, it is no wonder that 'Obeyd in his "Definitions" thus describes the ruling class of his time:

Nothing: Their existence.

Hollow: Their civility.
 Vanity and Folly: Their talk.
 Disapproval, Greed, Malice and Envy: Their characteristics.
 The Anqa of the West: Justice and Humanity
 Roguery, Violence, Hypocrisy, Dissimulation and Falsehood:
 The ways of the great men.
 Lust: their ailment.

'Obeyd's satirical works more than anything else in Persian literature illustrate the social conditions of this period. It is true that some other poets such as Saif-e Farghani (d. circa 1347) and Awhadi of Maragha (1270—1337-8) vehemently attacked corruption and social injustices in their poems, but the wit and insight of 'Obeyd give his works a special character. 'Obeyd looks upon this world of extravagant indulgence and corruption with the censorious eye of a Juvenal and portrays it with the cynicism and wit of a Voltaire and the hilarious grotesqueness of a Rabelais. Underneath his cheerful irresponsibility and nonchalance there lie a sadness and a bitterness. Seeing this scene of deceit, greed, lust, sycophancy, perversion, scorn of the old values and virtues, extremes of wealth and poverty, violence and bloodshed, he expresses his indignation in the form of scathing stories and sardonic maxims. He says: "Engage in ribaldry, cuckoldry, gossip, ingratitude, false testimony, selling heaven for the world, and playing the tambourine, so that you may become dear to the great and enjoy your life."

Though 'Obeyd expresses his religious sentiments and devotion in several of his poems, he has no time for the men who use religion in order to reach their worldly aims. With grinning irreverence he dismisses the claims to piety of sheikhs and preachers. He says: "Don't believe the sermons of the clerics, lest you go astray and end up in hell." For him a Haji is a person who goes on pilgrimage to Mecca once and for the rest of his life swears falsely by the Ka'ba. In his "Definitions" a Sufi is called a "freeloader," and 'Obeyd has nothing but scorn for the hypocritical Sufis of his time. A Sufi is asked by a man if he wants to sell his patchwork cloak. A bystander says: "If a fisherman sells his net, how is he going to fish?" In two letters, which are full of obscure and ridiculous terminology, 'Obeyd lampoons the high flown esoteric style of the Sufis, their claims of communion with the divine, and their state of spiritual expansion and contraction.

By contrast with ostentatious and sham-pious clerics and Sufis, 'Obeyd favors the true mystics whom he calls *rends* and *qalandars*. He says: "If you want salvation, attach yourself to the service of the all-sacrificing and pure-hearted *rends* in order to be saved." As is explained in the notes to this volume, *qalandar* has similarities to the Malamatiyya dervishes, who were somewhat like the hippies of today on account of their unconventional dress, behavior and way of life. They only performed very essential prayers and acts of devotion and laid a great emphasis on "purity

of heart” rather than pretentious acts of piety and excessive asceticism. The difference between a Malamati and a *qalandar* is that while the former keeps his acts of devotion secret and even goes to the extent of pretending to be impious, the latter does not care for his outward appearance, nor does he conform with popular beliefs and manners only because everyone follows them. *Rend*, also a very difficult term to translate, originally meant something like a “rogue,” and gradually came to mean a “liberal-minded man,” a “lover of truth,” a “social rebel,” or a true Sufi.” *Rend* in the poetry of Hafez has special significance: it stands for all the high and humane ideals that he talks about in his *Divan*. In short, it sometimes comes to mean the “perfect man.”

‘Obeyd in a poem defines a “true Sufi” as “one who with pure wine has a pure heart.” In another *ghazal* he describes himself as one “of a band of *qalandars*,” withdrawn from the world and their hearts set on poverty, “in whose purse or hand there is no one’s golden coin, nor in their hearts is there the sign of any coinage.” Free from any writ, even free from the fear of non-existence, they are “the sultans of their time, though they have neither drums nor flags, [and] ... under any circumstances they are reluctant to harm anyone.” Then ‘Obeyd asks: “Is it right to harm them?”²¹ ‘Obeyd seems to present himself not so much as a “true Sufi” or a *qalandar* as to use these terms to criticize the men of the cloak whom he describes with their rosaries as “asses, bells hanging from their necks.” His advice is: “Make yourself free from their hypocrisy and deceit. Sit with fair ones and drink wine.” While not being a practicing dervish of the Qalandariyya order, ‘Obeyd favored their tenets, and contrasted their idea of the “purity of the heart” and their candor with the hypocrisy and the corruption of the people of his time.

Now let us turn to the works of ‘Obeyd and describe them briefly. As was mentioned earlier, the number of his non-satirical works is not very great, and it is amazing that a poet of his talents should produce relatively few such poems. However, he is a great and remarkable poet, especially in his *ghazals*, which are both charming and beautiful and present an interesting contrast with his satirical works. A.J. Arberry notes in his *Classical Persian Literature* (George Allen & Unwin, 1958, pp. 298-9): “These poems deserve study not only for their own sake, but because they reveal their author as bridging the gap between Sa’di and Hafez, and introducing into the *ghazal* innovations that must assuredly have exercised influence on his junior contemporary who attended the same court circles.” Two of ‘Obeyd’s *ghazals* are translated by Arberry, but they lose so much in translation that I have decided against including some of them in this volume.

Of “Ethics of the Aristocrats,” written in 1340, some account was given earlier but a few more words should be added here. It is quite obvious that the title was inspired by a work of the great philosopher and statesman Nasir al-Din Tusi (1210—1274) entitled *Awsaf al-Ashraf* (Description of the Aristocrats). This latter work, which describes the Sufis, could also

be titled "Characteristics of the Chosen Ones." Though the title of *Obeyd* is very similar to this one, it is the famous *Akhlaq-e Naseri* (Nasirian Ethics) by the same author, as well as other books on ethics with their high flown and pompous style, that *Obeyd* is parodying. He mockingly agrees with the great men of his age who have rejected the manners and beliefs of the old and started new ones. He writes: "As the nature of our great men has been refined ... they have concentrated their undivided attention on the affairs of this world as well as the next, and in the eye of their judgement the customs and practices of the ancients seemed unfounded and contemptible." This is why *Obeyd* subdivides the chapters of his book into "The Abrogated Practice" and "The Adopted Practice." The former deals with traditional views on subjects such as justice, virtue, generosity, and the like, which every book on ethics highly recommends. The latter is *Obeyd's* satirical addition, and it sets forth the practices and beliefs of the ruling class of the time, which are of course exactly the opposite of the "abrogated" ideas. Thus they believe that "justice bequeaths misfortune," and chastity, fidelity, generosity and courage are frowned upon as the characteristics of naive and foolheaded men who don't know how to enjoy their lives. *Obeyd* concludes that he has written this "short treatise on the ethical principles of the ancients, now called abrogated, as well as some accounts of the practices and character of the great men of our time, now considered adopted, for the benefit of the students of this science and the novices of this path!"

In the treatise entitled "One Hundred Maxims" *Obeyd* treats satirically the practice of writing "Books of Councils" which was done *ad nauseam*. By stating that he follows the examples of Plato's maxims to Aristotle (as reported by Nasir al-Din Tusi) or those of Anushiravan to his vizier, *Obeyd* assumes an air of dignity, which before long is broken by his sarcastic pieces of advice. He ridicules the monitors of public morality by making the most self-evident statements such as "Do not waste your time," "Do not spoil a good day" or "At any rate, avoid death because it has been disliked since the days of old." Then suddenly he takes up subjects that are shocking and sometimes obscene. "Sow your seeds unlawfully so that your children will become theologians, sheikhs and favorites of the king," or "As far as possible refrain from speaking the truth, so that you may not become a bore to other people, and so that they may not be annoyed by you for no obvious reason." At the end *Obeyd* with his usual humor adds: "These are the sayings that have reached us from our masters and from great men, (and we have mentioned them)...so that those ready and well disposed might benefit from them."

In his "Definitions" *Obeyd* finds another ingenious way to satirize the vices of the society. In this brief and pungent work, which somewhat resembles *The Devil's Dictionary* of Ambrose Bierce, *Obeyd* gives under ten different headings a cross section of different people and professions and his views on them. It is the epigrammatical quality and sharp sarcasm of the "Definitions" that make them so memorable. He says: "The

Judge: He who is cursed by everyone"; "Justice: never to say the truth"; or "The Lady: She who has many lovers"; "The Housewife: She who has a few; The Virgin: A name denoting nothing." In the original the number of these definitions is greater than what has been here translated for two reasons. First, in some humor is so closely associated with word-play that it can not be rendered properly in English; second, the medieval openness of the language of 'Obeyd sometimes defies translation.

"*Risala-ye Delgoshā*" is a collection of 93 Arabic and 266 Persian anecdotes that have served as vehicles of social and political satire in the hands of our poet. The latter group can be divided into three main categories. First, there are stories that were already popular in 'Obeyd's time. He often weaves a satirical message into such stories, or they are by themselves satirical. Some of the stories are about Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna and his jester Talhak, as well as those related of Juha (or Juhi) the jester, are of this kind. The second category consists of stories related by 'Obeyd about the personalities who were more or less contemporary with him. Some of these men were forced to play clown and express their criticism in the form of witticism. Sultan Abu Sa'id, being drunk, forces the great theologian 'Azud al-Dinn Iji to dance in front of him. Someone remarks: "O, Mawlana, you are not dancing according to the rules," 'Azd al-Din retorts: "I dance by decree, not by the rules." In another story the tyrant Atebek Solghur Shah every year transcribes a *Koran* and sends it to Mecca. The poet Majd Hamgar tells him: "You are doing well. You don't even read it. You send it to the house of its Lord!"

The third category of satirical anecdotes is composed of stories concerned with the tyranny and corruption of society in a more straightforward way. For example, someone asks the same 'Azud al-Din: "How is it that in the time of the caliphs people would often claim to be God or a prophet, and now they don't?" He says: "These days people are so oppressed by tyranny and hunger that they think neither of God nor of the prophets!"

These stories thus graphically depict the social conditions of the time and are among the most remarkable works of 'Obeyd. Whether pre-existing or invented by him they expose the conditions of the age more accurately than any formal history. Some of the anecdotes may have been of popular origin, representing the injustice that people had experienced. Thus they constitute a then-contemporary folklore much like that which was evolving during the reign of the Mohammad Reza Shah and still is evolving in Iran today.

'Obeyd displayed a remarkable originality in the forms of satire that he wrote. So far we have seen him using "definitions," "maxims" and "short anecdotes" as vehicles of his satire. In *Mush u Gorba* (The Mouse and the Cat, which in this volume appears as "Rats against Cats" in Masoud Farzad's translation), 'Obeyd writes a political satire in the form of an animal fable that is at the same time a mock heroic imitation of the *Shah-nama*. Once more in "The Ethics of the Aristocrats" 'Obeyd

goes back to the well known epic of Ferdousi in order to portray the moral laxity of the gentry of his time engages Rustam and Human in a friendly homosexual match. The episode, which is part of chapter three, "On Chastity," is impossible to translate because of his very ingenious parody of the style of Ferdousi and the language he uses to describe the scene.

Now we should turn to the best known work of 'Obeyd, which is most certainly "The Mouse and the Cat." For many years scholars have discussed the political and historical meaning of this ingenious fable, but it is hard to say with certainty who were the butts of 'Obeyd's satire. Both Masoud Farzad and 'Abbas Iqbal agree that in many ways the cat resembles the hypocritical and tyrannical Mubarez al-Din Muhammad. His closing of taverns, his pretentious religiosity and his recognition of the authority of the successor to the 'Abbasid caliphs in Egypt all might have induced 'Obeyd to make him the villain of the poem. Further research reveals that this theory can be more firmly established.

Many characteristics of the cat interestingly enough match those of Mubarez al-Din Muhammad. He was a bully and physically an extraordinarily big man. The historian Hafez Abru (d. 1430) writes: "Amir Mubarez al-Din was very ill-natured, wrathful, foul-mouthed and abusive, and would utter obscenities which even muleteers would be ashamed of uttering." ²² In the fable the cat swears obscenely in Turkish at the mouse whom he has caught behind a wine vat in the tavern, and calls him a "Musulman" in contempt. The cat also swears at the king of the mice, who has asked him to come to his capital. It seems that the use of Turkish is also significant as we know that the mother of Mubarez al-Din was a Turkish princess.

R. Homayun Farroukh, who has made a lengthy study of Hafez, has found some other interesting references to the "cat." ²³ According to another history of the period, *Matla' al-Sa'dain*, Mubarez al-Din had no high regard for the valour of his son Shah Shoja' and would call him "a worthless cat." ²⁴ Apparently this was one of the idiosyncratic phrases used by Mubarez al-Din. Furthermore, when he was the governor of Yazd in 1319, he fought with a Turkish tribe in Kerman called "Nowruzi." In a battle scene, which resembles that of the fable, the horse of Mubarez al-Din is hamstrung, and he is only saved from being captured by one of his friends. Mubarez al-Din kills one of the tribal chiefs and captures another. Strangely enough the latter is nicknamed "the cat" (*gorba*). He is placed in an iron cage, and, while the head of his slain friend hangs from his neck, he is sent to the Il-Khan Abu Sa'id. ²⁵

To continue historical references to the "cat." mention should be made of a poem by Hafez. Describing a hypocritical sheikh who has laid a trap for people, he says:

O gracefully-moving partridge who walkest with so pretty an air,
Be not deceived because the cat of the ascetic hath said its prayer. ²⁶

It has been reported that a contemporary poet, 'Imad Faqih, had taught his cat to follow him in its genuflections when he performed his prayers.²⁷ The story of the "sanctimonious cat" brings to mind the cat of 'Obeyd. The cat eats up the mice and then like a true "mulla" feels penitent and vows that he will never eat another mouse. Even in his prayers to God he "opens the door of deception and falsehood until he starts weeping." All this reminds us of Mubarez al-Din. As was mentioned earlier, he cut off the heads of two prisoners and went on with his prayers as if nothing had happened. Before he fought some Turkish tribes in Kerman, he first declared them "heretics" and himself a *ghazi* or defender of Islam. Earlier in life he drank wine, but in 1351 repented and became extremely devout. With all these points, we may safely say that 'Obeyd modeled his cat after Mubarez al-Din.

To extend this analogy one step further, we know that his allegedly heretical foes were three Kara-Khatai tribes between Yazd and Kerman called Oumani, Jermai and Nowruzi. These are apparently the mice who, because of the tyranny of the cat, take their cases to the king of the mice. Historically, they complain to Abu Ishaq, who sends two thousand horsemen to fight Mubarez al-Din. The battle is inconclusive, and Abu Ishaq sends an "old and well spoken" envoy, who was 'Imad al-Din Mahmud, a wise minister and a patron of Hafez, to negotiate a peace treaty. Thus these tribes once more are left at the mercy of Mubarez al-Din. It is in an earlier encounter with these tribes that his horse is hamstrung and he is taken captive. But he is saved by one of his generals, Taj al-Din 'Ali Shah, and eventually the tribesmen are defeated. In the poem of 'Obeyd the "cat's army marches by the way of the desert" and that of the mice comes from Isfahan, and they meet in the plains of Fars. It seems that Obeyd makes these two battles and possibly the last encounter with Abu Ishaq into one battle in which the oppressed come close to victory, but alas it fails them.

To complete the list of 'Obeyd's writings, mention should be made of three works that are not included in the present volume. Two of them are *Fal-nama-ye Buruj* (Augury-book of Zodiac Signs) and *Fal-nama-ye Wuhush va Tuyur* (Augury-book of Animals and Birds). Both are satirical treatments of those who believe in divination of the future and who try to achieve this through different means. The third work is entitled *Rish-nama* (The Book of the Beard), which is a fantastic dialogue between 'Obeyd and the beard considered as the destroyer of youthful beauty. It is written in a style reminiscent of the *Gulistan* of Sa'di — an almost rhyming prose interspersed with lines of poetry. The style of Obeyd is both beautiful and skillful, but because of various Koranic verses and references to cultural peculiarities it loses its beauties in translation.

"The Book of the Beard" mainly dwells on the subject of homosexuality and the fact that young and handsome boys had many lovers. In Persian literature the subject has been treated by many poets from Suzani to Sa'di among the classical poets, and from Qa'ani to Iraj Mirza in the

times nearer to us. Everybody was aware of it, but no one made an issue out of it. Sa'di typifies the general attitude. He writes in the *Gulistan*: "When young, as it happens and you know, I had an affair with a handsome boy." The love of Mahmud of Ghazna for his favorite slave Ayaz became proverbial, and the attachment of Naser al-Din Shah to his young courtier Malijak inspired many stories. 'Obeyd with his usual openness and biting humor gives a vivid picture of sexual life in his age. He voices the practice of the age when he says: "Buy young Turkish slaves at whatever price, when they are beardless, but sell them at whatever price when their beards begin to appear." Similarly the twelfth century Ziarid prince 'Unsur al-Ma'ali in the *Qabus-nama* advises his son how to buy slaves of both sexes and when to make love to them. Not only slaves, who had no choice but to submit to the passion of their masters, but many handsome boys vied with each other in getting more lovers. It seems that "The Book of the Beard" is a light-hearted and witty treatment of the subject, and 'Obeyd's recommendation is: "before the calamity of the beard" strikes, make the best use of your time.

In his other works 'Obeyd takes a much more critical view of the subject. He is heterosexual and he is very open about it, but what he can not tolerate is the attitude of the people who do what they sactimoniously rebuke others for. Hafez writes:

Preachers who on the pulpit such righteousness display,
 When in private another game do play.
 Ask this question of the scholar in his teaching bent;
 Those who preach repentence, pray why do they not repent?
 It is as if they do not believe in the Judgement Day
 That in the work of God they cheat and play.²⁸

The other "game" they play does not necessarily mean homosexuality; rather it could be any act that is condemned by hypocritical teachers of morality. 'Obeyd is full of sarcasm when he says: "When young do not withhold your sexual favors from friends and foes so that in old age you can attain the status of a sheikh, a preacher or a man of fame." Again Hafez says:

I am a drinker of wine, a *rend* and lover of beauties,
 Who is not like me in this city? Show me one.²⁹

But the way 'Obeyd puts the same point is very different. A preacher in Kashan says that on the Day of Judgement, 'Ali, the cousin of the Prophet, will be in charge of the heavenly well of Kowthar and will give its water to the person who has not slept with a homosexual. A Kashani gets up and leaving the mosque says: "O my friend, surely he has to put the water in the pitcher and drink it all himself!" Even the inhabitants of the holy city of Qom are not spared by 'Obeyd. Two old gays from the town, after making love at the top of a minaret—of all places—are

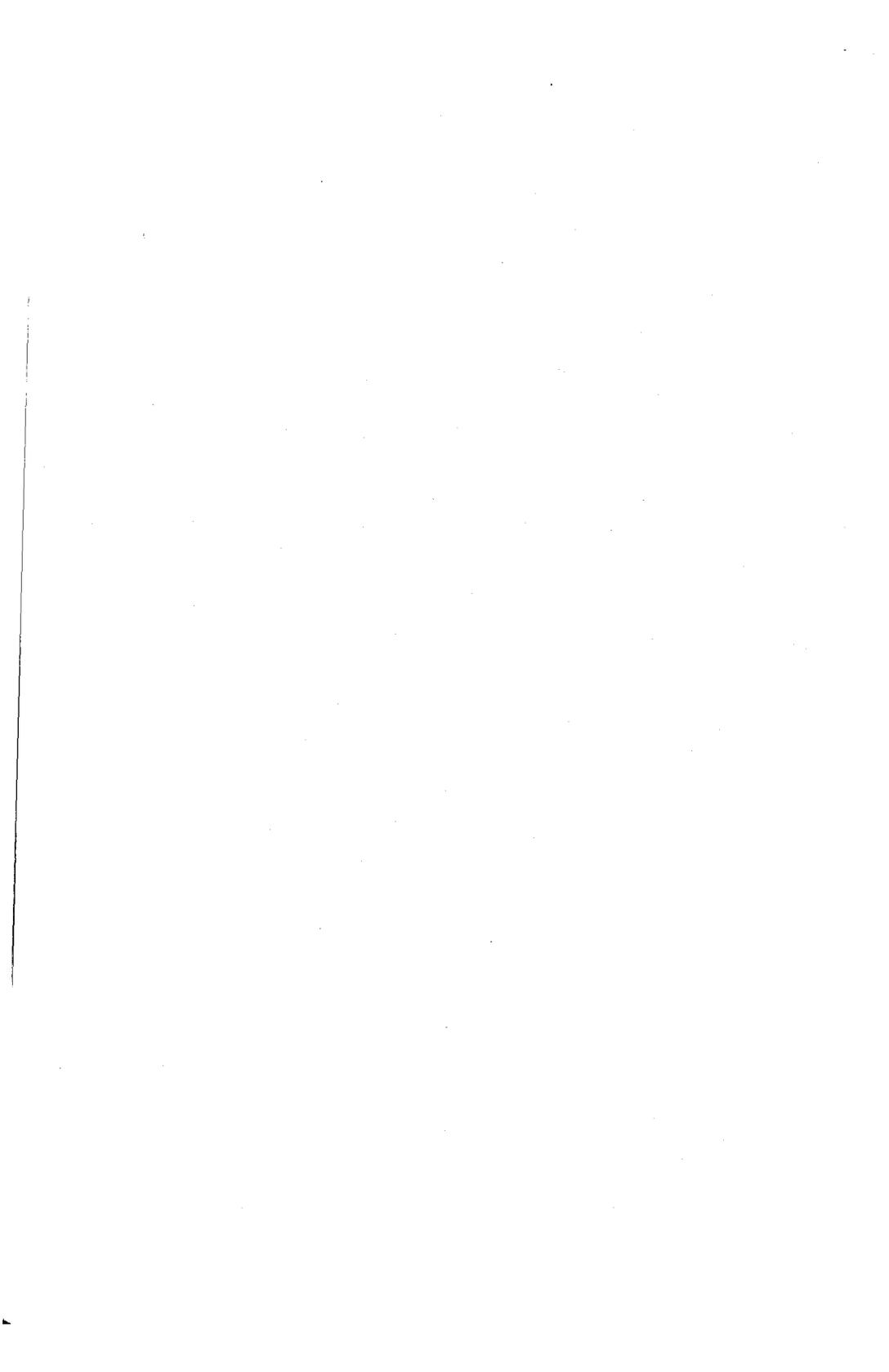
talking. One says: "This city of ours is full of corruption." The other answers: "What do you expect from a city where we are the blessed old men?" Men of the cloak are great butts for 'Obeyd. A preacher is asked, "What is Islam?" He says: "I am a preacher, I have nothing to do with Islam." In another story a preacher's son, who has seen his father having intercourse with their donkey, comes in during a Friday sermon, and innocently asks: "Father, will you service the donkey or shall I take her to graze?"

Lastly a few words should be said about my translation. As I said earlier the language of 'Obeyd has a medieval bluntness that in its archaic style does not seem to be offensive. But finding exact English equivalents for some Persian expressions is often impossible. For instance, the expression "service the donkey" in the story above is not as expressive as its Persian original. At the same time some English expressions would have an exaggerated force or undue flavors of class or period. This has been the main problem in the translation. Furthermore, 'Obeyd often plays with words in ways that are impossible to reproduce in English. In a story he writes, "There was a very tyrannical governor in Mazandaran called 'Ala. One year there was no rain and people went out to say prayers asking for rain. At the end of his sermon the preacher said: "O God, take from us the calamity, cholera and 'Ala." In the original the last three words (*bala*, *vaba* and 'Ala." rhyme and create an effectiveness that is lost in translation.

Of "The Mouse and the Cat" of 'Obeyd there are several translations available. That by the late Masoud Farzad (London, 1946) is reproduced here. It is a somewhat free but graceful rendering, more exact translations of the original verses in a more recent and authentic edition are noted in the bibliography.

Apart from some translations by E.G. Browne (*A Literary History of Persia*, Cambridge University Press, 1920, pp. 244-257) the other writings of 'Obeyd have never appeared in English. It is hoped that, inspite of being only a selection, the present volume may stimulate interest in the works of this talented and ingenious poet and satirist.

The Ethics of the Aristocrats



The Ethics of the Aristocrats

Infinite thanks and boundless glorification to God Almighty (may His power be exalted), Who made the Intellect the ornament of man's existence for him to do his utmost in achieving praiseworthy characteristics and estimable qualities. Incalculable greetings upon the luminous and fragrant sanctuary of the Master of Creation, Mohammad the Chosen One (upon whom be the most perfect salutations), of whose character and life the divine sayings that "were it not for your sake, We would not have created the firmament"¹ and "Truly you have an excellent disposition"² are ample glorifications. Also peace and salutations be upon his descendants and helpers; "Whosoever of them you follow will lead you to salvation."³

To continue, may it not be hidden to the wise, to whom these words are addressed, that in every human body a precious essence from the world divine is in charge and command, whose name is soul, and on whose virtue the Koranic verse reads, "Say to them, 'the soul is from the order of my Lord.'"⁴ The basis of human existence rests upon this essence which is self-existing, secure from destruction, and inclined to elevation and perfection. As the body feels and enjoys the familiarity of the Most High, Who is the goal beyond all goals, benefiting from the virtues and comprehending the realities, it tends to rise toward the heavenly spheres. As the body falls short of performing its functions because of chronic diseases, the soul also because of its own infirmities—of which there are many, such as love of wealth and position, engrossment with lust and pleasures— is restrained from realizing its nature and quality, which aims at attaining the presence of His Glorious Majesty, understanding the Intellects, and gaining purity. Well has the poet said:

You are brought forth from the two worlds,
And cared for by many intermediaries
You are the first concern after the Resurrection
Don't count yourself so trivial.⁵

Just as the physicians have tried their best to cure the illnesses of the body and to maintain its health, so similarly the prophets have spent their best energies to remove the ailments and misfortunes of the soul, in order to save it from the sea of perdition and the whirlpools of ignorance and imperfection, and convey it to the shores of safety and perfection. When the man of wisdom looks attentively at the matter, it will become obvious to him that the object of sending those who have been trusted with prophethood was to refine the character and purify the morals of God's servants. The poet has thus stated the point:

Whether the prophet comes or not, make virtue your goal,
For men of virtue to hell will never go.

The most excellent Prophet has unveiled the bride of this idea, and has exposed the beauties of this subtlety in this manner. He has said: "I have been sent to complete the virtuous qualities."⁶ In order to guide human nature to perfection in the best and safest way, the laws of this science, which is called "Ethics" or "Practical Philosophy," have been written and compiled by the scholars of the past in lengthy volumes, which the intellect of the present humble author unfortunately fails to comprehend. Since the time of Adam the Blessed until our own age the noblest of mankind, with great efforts and self-denial, have tried to attain the four major virtues of wisdom, courage, chastity and justice, which they consider the means of happiness in life and of salvation after death. Concerning these they say:

Of whatever faith you are, be generous and do good deeds
For unbelief with good character is better than Islam with ill humor.

Now in this age, which is the best of times and the choicest of all ages, the nature of great men has been refined, and leaders of lofty ideals have appeared who have concentrated their undivided attention and all-embracing thoughts on all the affairs of this world as well as the next, and in the eye of their judgment the customs and practices of the ancients were unfounded and contemptible. Since with the passage of time, the lapse of ages, most of these laws had become obsolete, their renovation seemed a burdensome prospect to the powerful minds and the bright intellects of these men. Therefore, they necessarily trampled all those ethical principles and practices under their manly feet, and, for the sake of this life and the next, they adopted the methods now practiced among our noblemen and leaders, and regulated their religious and worldly affairs accordingly. A brief account of these will be given in the following pages. And since the door of thought is open and the thread of discourse long, let us therefore begin the matter at hand.

For some time this humble writer, 'Obeyd-e Zakani, has been considering writing a short treatise on the ethical principles of the ancients, now called "abrogated," as well as an account of the practices and character of the great men of our time, now considered "adopted" or "approved," for the benefit of the students of this science and the novices of this path. Now, at last, in the year of the Hijra 740 (A.D. 1339-40), I have succeeded in writing this short account, entitled "The Ethics of the Aristocrats." This has been divided into seven chapters, and each chapter contains the two practices: first, the "abrogated practice," according to which our ancestors organized their lives, and second, the "adopted practice," which has now been revealed by our leaders and according to which they regulate

their affairs in this world and the next. Though this brief account
borders on satire, yet

He who from familiarity's town doth arise
Knows well the locale of our merchandise.⁷

The hope of this humble author in composing this short treatise is that

Perchance a man of pure soul one day
A prayer for this needy one will say.⁸



Chapter One

On Wisdom

The Abrogated Practice

Wise men have thus defined Divine Wisdom: "It aims at the perfection of the human soul in its powers of learning and practice. The former is to know the nature of things as they are, and the latter is to attain a spiritual capacity to enable one to accomplish good deeds and avoid works of evil, and this is called ethics."¹ This is to say that two faculties are concentrated in a rational being, and his perfection depends on their perfection. One is the faculty of speculation and the other, that of practice. The speculative faculty is that which yearns to acquire learning and knowledge by virtue of which it will obtain the capacity for knowing things as they truly are. Thus man will be ennobled by knowledge of the True Goal and the Ultimate Aim (may He be exalted and sanctified), which is the destiny of all beings, and being guided by such a knowledge, he may attain the World of Oneness or perhaps the Station of Union to assuage and soothe his heart.² "Verily with the invocation of God's name hearts become tranquil"³ and the dust of doubt and the rust of uncertainty are rubbed from the mirror of his thought. The poet has said:

Wherever certitude has arrived, doubt has fled.

The faculty of practice correlates one's power and deeds in such a way that they harmonize with each other, so that as a result of this harmony and balance one's character becomes worthy of praise. If a man combines knowledge and practice to this extent, he is called a perfect man and the deputy of God on the earth, and his rank will be highest amongst mankind. As God Almighty has said: "He bestows wisdom on whomever He will, and he who is given wisdom has been given a great blessing,"⁴ and after departure from the body his soul will be fit for everlasting happiness, eternal bounty, and Divine grace.

This is the work of Fate
May it fall upon whom it will.

So far we have been discussing the ways of the ancients and the wise.

The Adopted Practice

When the great and wise men whose existence honors the face of the earth pondered over the human soul, its origin and its destiny, and when they weighed the beliefs and practices of the great men of the past, they categorically rejected the entirety of these beliefs. They profess, "It has been revealed to us that the rational soul in itself is of little value, and that its existence is dependent upon bodily existence, and its extinction upon bodily extinction." They also declare, "That which the prophets have said concerning the rational soul, that it never diminishes or increases and after departure from the body it will continue to subsist through its own essence, is impossible." Likewise, the idea of resurrection is an absurd supposition. Life is the result of the harmony of bodily elements, and when the body decays the man is destroyed forever. The supposed joys of heaven and the sufferings of hell exist in this world. As the poet has said:

For one who has been favored
Here and now is his blessed lot.
But he who has been given naught
"Tomorrow" is his promised lot.⁵

Thus necessarily their minds are entirely unperturbed by the thought of resurrection, future punishment, proximity to or remoteness from God, divine favor or wrath, perfection or imperfection; and as a result of their convictions they spend their lives lusting after sensual delights. They say:

You who are resulted from four and seven,⁶
And always suffer from seven and four,
Drink wine for I've told you, aye, thousands of times,
That's all: when you're gone, you're no more.⁷

They often have the following quatrain inscribed upon the coffins of their forefathers:

Beyond this rotary vault, no arch or mansion lies:
None has wisdom or perception except for you and I.
You that something in nothing have thought
Pass by this fantasy, for it is naught.

It is because of this belief, they have not the least regard for the life, property and the honor of people :

For him a cup of fire-colored wine is
Dearer than the blood of one hundred brothers.

Indeed, they are great masters of success, and what was veiled and hidden for thousands of years from many men despite their purification of soul and intellect, was easily revealed to them.



Chapter Two On Courage

The Abrogated Practice

Philosophers have said: “The human soul has three distinct powers, from which issue forth various actions. First is the power of speech, which is the source of thought and understanding. Second is the choleric power, which leads to an urge to take chances, and a desire for supremacy. Third is the power of concupiscence, also called the animal power, from which comes the desire for food, drink and marriage. If the rational soul is in equilibrium in a person and he has an enthusiasm for the learning of certainties, he will tread the path of wisdom. Whenever the animal or choleric humor is in equilibrium and submissive to the rational soul, the virtue of courage will come forth, and whenever the movement of the animal nature is in equilibrium and follows the rational soul, the virtue of chastity will emerge. When these three virtues are produced and intermingled the result is the most perfect of virtues and is called the sense of justice. Philosophers have called a person courageous who possesses these qualities: chivalry, high aspiration, tranquility, steadfastness, forbearance, courage, humility, ardour and compassion. One who is characterized by the virtue of courage is praised, exalted and he stands without shame among men. Thus the pearls of his valour and exploits in battle have been strung on the thread of poetry, and the poet has said:

The capital of man is manliness,
Bravery, chivalry and wisdom.

The Adopted Practice

Our teachers have said that a person who commits the horrifying act of facing another man in combat confronts one of two conditions: either he overcomes his opponent and kills him, or else he is killed. If he kills the enemy, he has shed an innocent man’s blood, and in consequence he will sooner or later follow his victim. And if the foe overcomes him, again he will follow the path to hell. How should a wise man undertake an action having such potential ends? What proof is better than this, that whenever there is a wedding, a feast or gathering with food, sweetmeats, robes of honor and money, then eunuchs, rogues, lute-players, and men of lusty disposition will seek it out. But whenever there is a battlefield

with swords and spears, they will look for a fool to prop up facing the blades, and they will call him a real man, a hero, a destroyer of armies and a knight of valour. When the unfortunate man is killed, the lechers, eunuchs and effeminate of the town will waggle their hips and blamingly say:

I won't be hit by an arrow, axe or a spear,
Delicate food, wine and minstrels suit me best.

When a warrior is killed in battle, eunuchs and effeminate watch from a distance, saying: "O dear master, live in shame, but live long." The man of prudence in time of war must follow the maxim of the knights from Khorasan, who said: "Brave men dash onto the battlefield, but we dash into a barn full of straw!" This is why the knights of our time have this line engraved on their signet rings:

Fleeing in time is a true victory,
Happy the knight who has such a destiny.

It has been related that an upstart Isfahani encountered a Mongol soldier in the wilderness. When the Mongol attacked him the prudent youth humbly said: "O master, for God's sake do me, but do not do me in!" The Mongol took pity on him, and did as he had asked. I was told that the young man who was saved through this stratagem lived in great honor and esteem for thirty years. O what a fortunate young man! It seems that the following proverb has been said of him:

As for the bright and wise youths,
It is fitting, if they sit on top of the old.

O friends, take heed of the manners and customs of these great men. How unfortunate were our ancestors who lived out their lives in ignorance and whose minds never perceived such great ideas!

Chapter Three

On Chastity

The Abrogated Practice

I have read in the biographies of the great men of the past that they regarded chastity as one of the four virtues and defined it as "Impeccability." Chaste was a person who kept his eyes from seeing the unlawful, his ears from hearing gossip, his hands from seizing the property of others, his tongue from uttering unbecoming words, and his soul from carrying out evil deeds. Such a person was respected and endeared, as the poet has said:

One who is virtuous, honest of hand and of the utmost sincerity
Will stand high amongst the people like a cypress tree.

This point is exemplified by the following story: It has been related that a wise man, having heard his son criticizing someone, said: "O my son, why do you allow a fault upon your tongue, which you do not approve of on the body of another person?"¹ A man was complaining of another man and was vilifying him before the Leader of the Faithful, Hasan ibn 'Ali. The Commander of the Faithful said to his son: "Keep your ear away from his speech, since what is most wicked in his vessel may pour into yours."² When Mansur al-Hallaj was being crucified, he said: "When I was a boy, I was playing along a street and heard the voice of a woman from a roof top. In order to see her I wantonly turned and looked up at her. Now looking down from the cross is a punishment for that looking up."

The Adopted Practice

Our masters say that the ancients have made a grave mistake on the subject and have wasted their precious lives in ignorance and error. Whoever follows this path can never enjoy his life. The text of the Revealed Book reads: "Know that the present life is but a sport and diversion, an adornment and a cause for boasting among you, and a rivalry in wealth and children."³ They have interpreted this as meaning that it is impossible to enjoy life without playing and indulging in vices and forbidden pleasures. Likewise it is not feasible to amass a fortune without hurting

and tyrannizing people, and gossiping or lying about them. Whoever is virtuous inevitably will be deprived of all these benefits and cannot be counted amongst the living, as his life should be considered wasted. He must be held responsible according to this verse of the *Koran*, which says: "What, did you think that We created you in vain, and that you would not return to Us?"⁴ What an insanity if a man be alone with a moonlike beauty, and on the grounds of chastity refuse her soul-reviving embrace, and forever regret the occasion. It is quite possible that such an opportunity might never occur again up to the end of his days, and his life-long regret might cause his death, while he says: "Missing an opportunity brings sorrow!" A person once described as a pious, virtuous, and self-controlled man would now be called a donkey's ass, frigid and a complete failure. Our teachers argue that the eyes, tongue and other members of the body are made to attract benefit and defy loss. Thus, if one deprives a member of the function for which it has been created, one has wasted it. Since it is not permissible to waste the members of one's own body, one must watch whatever pleases one's eyes, hear whatever delights one's ears, and utter whatever conforms with one's interest such as vilifying, molesting, gossiping, backbiting, swearing balatanly, and giving false testimony. If as a result the house of another person is ruined or he otherwise suffers, one should hold one's thought above such pettiness. Do and say whatever you please, and sleep with whomever you please without any scruple, so that your life may not be burdensome.

As much as possible seek to find
A sweetheart—graceful, playful, refined.
When you have found her, waste no time.
Love her, leave her, then make another thine.

It is said if a master or a friend would have a claim for enjoyment on a certain person, he should accept it without hesitation and without making any excuses. As the saying goes, "Opportunity passes as the passage of clouds."

Let not today's affair until tomorrow go;
Of what will come tomorrow how can you ever know?

One has to bear in mind that "forbidding is a heresy."*

* [The rest of this chapter which mainly consists of a parody of a passage of the *Shah-nama*, describing a homosexual contest between Rustam and Human, was not translated because of its language.]

Chapter Four

On Justice

The Abrogated Practice

The great men of the past regarded justice as one of the four virtues, and upon it they based the foundation of this world and the next. Their belief was that "By justice the heavens and the earth stand upright,"¹ and to exercise the message of the *Koran* which says, "God orders you to practice justice and be generous."² Therefore, the kings, emirs, and noblemen always tried to be just and look after their subjects and soldiers as the means for attaining good repute. They so firmly believed in this that they encouraged the common people to be just in their dealings and partnerships and said:

Be just since in the heart's own lands
The just the Prophet's state commands.

The Adopted Practice

But the view of our contemporaries is that this quality is the worst of all attributes and that justice brings forth much loss, a thesis that they have proved with the clearest of proofs. They say: "Punishment is the bulwark of kingship, lordship and mastership." Unless a man is feared no one will obey his orders, and all will feel themselves equals. Thus the order of affairs will be disrupted and the administration will be undermined. One who practices justice (God forbid) and refrains from beating, killing, and fining his subjects, and who does not get drunk and make an uproar and quarrel with them, will not be feared by anyone. Such kings will not be obeyed by their subjects, and children and slaves will not heed the words of their parents and masters. Consequently, the affairs of the country will lapse into chaos. This is why they have said:

Kings for gaining one of their objects
Will sacrifice one hundred subjects.

They say: "Justice bequeaths adversity." What proof can be more convincing than this: that as long as the kings of Iran, such as Zakhak the Arab³ and Yazdigird the Sinner,⁴ who now honor the best seats in hell along with the other potentates who arrived after them, practiced injustice, their kingdoms prospered and flourished. But when the time of Khosrow Anushiravan⁵ arrived, he followed the counsel of feeble-minded ministers

and chose the way of justice. Before long the pinnacles of his palace fell to the ground and the sacred fire in the temples, which were their places of worship, was extinguished, and all traces of their existence vanished from the surface of the earth. The caliph of the faithful and the establisher of the laws of religion, 'Umar ibn Khattab⁶ (may God rest his soul in peace), who was well-known for his justice, used to make bricks and eat barley bread, and as they relate, his (patch-work) robe weighed seventeen mans;⁷ whereas Mu'awiyah⁸, by virtue of his injustice, usurped the kingdom from 'Ali (may God ennoble his face). Nebuchadnezzar did not establish himself as a king and was not exalted in both worlds, until he murdered twelve thousand innocent prophets in Jerusalem and enslaved several thousand more. Chingiz Khan, who now despite his enemies is the leader and guide of all the Mongols, ancient and modern, in the deepest compartments of hell, did not attain the rulership of the whole world until he shed the blood of thousands and thousands of people.

Anecdote

It has been related in Mongol histories that when Hulagu Khan conquered Baghdad he ordered all the inhabitants who had escaped the sword to assemble in front of him. Then he asked each class about its circumstances, and after learning about them all, he said: "The artisans are indispensable and should be allowed to go to their work." The merchants were provided with capital so that they could trade for him. Considering the Jews as an oppressed people, he was content with a poll-tax from them. He also sent the eunuchs back to their jobs in order to look after their seraglios. Then he separated the judges, sheikhs, Sufis, Hajis, preachers, noblemen, Seyyids⁹, beggars, religious mendicants, wrestlers, poets and story-tellers from the rest, and said: "These are superfluous creatures who wrongfully waste the bounty of God." By ordering them all to be drowned in the Tigris, he purified the earth of their vile existence.

Consequently, sovereignty was firmly established in his family for about ninety years, and their prosperity increased every day. But since the poor Abu Sa'id was obsessed with the idea of justice and distinguished himself with this quality, before long the days of his monarchy were numbered, and the House of Hulagu and his endeavors disappeared through the aspirations of Abu Sa'id.¹⁰ It is true to say:

When the time of man begins to pale
He does only the things that are of no avail.¹¹

Blessings be upon these great and successful men who guided mankind from the dark delusion of justice into the light of proper direction.

Chapter Five

On Generosity

The Abrogated Practice

Trusted sources have noted that people in ancient times admired generosity, and one who was characterized by this quality was praised and glorified. They encouraged their children to be generous. They believed in this to such an extent that if someone fed a hungry person or clad a naked one, or helped one in distress, he was not ashamed. They went to such an extent in upholding this trait that people not only did not disparage someone generous but praised and admired him. The learned wrote books to glorify his name and the poets eulogized him. This point can be proved by the clear verses (of the *Koran*): “One who brings forth a good deed is rewarded ten times more,”¹ and “You will not attain goodness until you have given away what you have.”² Also the Blessed Prophet is related to have said: “Though sinners, a generous man will not enter the fire of hell.”³

A dear friend has said concerning the subject:

Bind your heart to munificence, if it is greatness that you seek;
Bind your purse with nothing but a single branch of leek.

The Adopted Practice

When the great men of our times, who have distinguished themselves by virtue of their perceptive minds and steadfast views from the sages of the past, pondered over this subject, their keen minds perceived the shortcomings of this quality. Therefore, they have tried hoarding wealth and enjoying the best of life, and have taken the Koranic verses as their mottoes that say: “Eat and drink but don’t waste,”⁴ or else, “Truly God does not love the extravagant people.”⁵ It became evident to them that generosity and extravagance brought the ancient families into ruin. One who is known for munificence will never rest in peace. From every side men of greed will seize him and rob him of his wealth with flattery and other pretences. That poor good-hearted man will be elated by vanity on account of their nonsensical tales and before long will squander all his acquired as well as his inherited wealth only to become poor and disappointed. But the person who is protected by the quality of miserliness would be safe in the refuge of avarice from the evil intentions and the insistence of beggars, and would live in bounty and plenitude far away from bothersome people. Our contemporaries put wealth on the same level

as one's very life, and say: "Since one's precious life is spent in the search of wealth, it would be unwise, for instance, to waste it on clothing, drinking, and eating or on bodily comforts or on pleasing words from another person." Consequently, if a great man has left some money, not even a single penny can be extracted from his heirs by means of a thousand pincers. Even though the entire kingdoms of India and Rome would be his lot:

Even if the press-stone, which extracts oil from cotton seeds,
Be placed on his belly, a wind will not parted be.

Also the following lines are appropriate here:

Lest he hears the words "to part,"
He'll die of cholic ere letting a fart.

Anecdote

One of the great men of our time told his son: "O my son, know that the word 'No' averts calamity, whereas 'Yes' increases misfortune. Another one has said: "O my son, close your ears to the word 'Aye' and utter nothing but 'Nay', because your prosperity will be high with 'Nay', whereas 'Aye' equals 'despair.'

Anecdote

One of the great men, who was a Croesus of his time, lay on his deathbed and his hopes were severed from life. He summoned his dear ones who were the children of the House of Generosity, and said: "O children, a long time have I suffered and toiled in search of wealth at home and abroad, and I have pressed my throat with the grip of hunger in order to collect these few golden dinars. Never be neglectful of guarding them, and under no circumstances spend them. As they have said:

Gold is a dear creation of God;
Whoever debases it will be debased.

If someone tells you that he has seen your father in a dream asking for sweetmeats to be given in the way of charity, never believe him, for I have not said it, and a dead man will never eat. Even if I myself appear in a dream and make such a request, pay no heed, and consider it nothing but a dream. Perhaps a demon has assumed my shape. What I have not eaten in my life I should not request after my death." He uttered these words and gave up his soul to the guardian of hell.

Anecdote

It has been said of another great man that in dealing with someone he haggled beyond reason over the value of two silver grains. He was told that such a trivial amount is not worthy of such a refusal. He said: "How can I dispense with some of my own property, which suffices me for one day, or a week, or a month, or a year or even for the rest of my life?" He was asked, "How can this be?" He said: "If I buy salt with it, it will be enough for one day. If I go to the public bath, it will be enough for a week. If given to a blood-letter, it will suffice for a month. If a broom is bought with it, it will last for a year. If I buy a peg, it will last me a lifetime. Why then should I give away the money through sheer negligence which can attend to so many needs?"

Anecdote

It has been said of a great man that when bread was being baked in his house, he would take the loaves one by one in his unblessed hands and say:

May you remain safe from any harm!

Then he would entrust the loaf to his butler. When the smell of the baked bread reached his servants, they would say:

You are behind the veil and our hearts bleed,
O what will happen if from the veil you are freed?

Anecdote

Not long ago a nobleman's son gave his robe to a beggar. His critics informed his father, and he reproached his son. The son said: "I have read in a book that one who wishes greatness must bestow whatever he has (on the people). It was because of this that I gave away my robe." The father said: "O foolish boy, you are mistaken, for that was a misprint for 'stow'.⁶ The wisemen have said: 'You should store whatever you have, if you wish to attain greatness.' Don't you see that great men of our time are forever hoarding?" The poet has said:

Little by little it becomes more,
Grain by grain it fills the store.⁷

Anecdote

Another nobleman of our time said to his slave: "Get some meat from your own money and prepare a dish from it. I will eat it and set you free. The slave was happy, and prepared a fried chicken. The master ate and gave some of it to the slave. The following day he told him: "Add some chick peas and suffaron to it. I will eat it and set you free." The slave obeyed and prepared a dish. The master gobbled it up and gave some to the slave. The next day the meat had gone to pieces and was of no use. he said: "Sell this meat and get some butter and make it into another dish. I will eat it and set you free." The slave said: "O master, for the sake of God, let me remain in your servitude, but if you have any good intentions in your mind, set this piece of meat free."

Truly great and prudent is the man who can be so cautious in spending. So as long as he lives he will be held dear and everyone will be in need of him. And in the world to come the exaltation of his status will be beyond description.

Chapter Six Forbearance and Dignity¹

The Abrogated Practice

Forbearance comes from patience. The ancients have called a man forbearing whose carnal self has gained tranquility and serenity, such that wrath cannot easily stir it up. If an unpleasant event befalls him, he is not agitated. It has been related from his holiness the Prophet: "Forbearance is the veil to misfortunes." If read backwards, *hilm* (forbearance) will become *milh* (salt or grace), and hence the saying :*al-hilm milh al-akhlaq*—"forbearance is the salt (or charm) of one's character." The poet has thus praised the forbearance of his patron:

The burden of your forbearance
Has broken the mountain's back,
So that it stands fixed in place
Like one with affliction racked.
When between two consonants
A meeting has occurred,
The bearing of a vowel to one
Inevitably is transferred.²

The Adopted Practice

It is true that our contemporaries do not reject this characteristic completely. They say, "Although if one practices forbearance or displays patience people will be more impudent toward him and consider it a sign of weakness, in the well-being of his life it is of great significance." The proof of the argument is that one who has borne the weight of rogues and sodomites in his youth and who has displayed forbearance and dignity in this respect, now in the parties and gatherings of great men will not be subjected to much mistreatment. They won't slap him on the face, or pluck his beard, or finger him on the back, or throw him into the pond and speak disrespectfully of his wife and sister. As for the wise man, who is called the ideal man of our time, the virtue of forbearance and dignity with which his rational soul has been endowed, had he not borne those past sufferings, he could not have gained any results. He would always have been distressed, wretched and in an evil plight. People would admit him into their house, and no great man would honor him. This is why they say, "Impudence is the key to success." The meaning of the following couplet also emphasizes the foregoing fact:

Man in the strife of the world
Should be as the lower stone in a mill.³

One of the advantages of forbearance is as follows: if the family members and wives of a prominent man are accused of infidelity, and he is bereft of the ornament of forbearance and dignity, fury will overwhelm his constitution and he will go mad, and by beating and killing his wife and children and mutilating his servants he will bring ruination upon his own family by his own hands. As they say, "Anger is the demon of the intellect," and he necessarily will make his wife and children hate him. Day and night he is grieved and thoughtful lest a critic breathes a word of censure about his household, and says:

If you have a sense of honor,
Then you will feel distress;
If you have no sense of honor,
You will lose your manliness

But the blessed minds of those dignified and successful men will not be disturbed in the least if all the members of their families be raped in front of their eyes one thousand times. Therefore, as long as such men live, they will enjoy peace of mind and tranquility. They will be pleased with their kindred and they will be completely self-assured, and they will never pay attention in the event of any accusation, but rather will say:

If a dog barks at the roof of the barn grieve not.

Anecdote

I heard that one of the noblemen of our time had a chaste but ugly wife. He was saved from her by divorce and took in marriage a beautiful prostitute. The lady, as it is the custom, denounced him everywhere. They reproached him, saying: "Having left a chaste wife, you have chosen a prostitute instead." The nobleman with forbearance and perfect dignity, said: "Your imperfect wisdom never can comprehend such a matter. Formerly I was eating dirt alone, but now I am eating halvah with one thousand men." It is a proverb that "The cuckold is happy in both worlds." The interpretation is that not being afflicted with the disease of honor, he will live in peace in this world; and in the world to come, according to the tradition "no cuckold will enter heaven", he will neither be bothered by the company of ascetics and sheikhs nor by their long and disagreeable faces. Whenever he sees a sheikh he says:

If you have a place in heaven,
The others will choose hell.⁴

For this reason the cuckold is happy in both worlds. But the point might be raised here: If someone asks, "The cuckold hates going to heaven because of the company of the sheikhs, but he will be similarly opposed if he goes to hell, since for each sheikh there, here there are one thousand

judges along with his deputies and lawyers. How is it that he will not be annoyed by their association?" We answer: "Since the sheikhs were well-known for their cleanliness and devotion in this world (though this was never free from hypocrisy and pretension) and since the poor cuckold has never purified himself properly or prostrated himself in prayer, their states will be diametrically opposed to each other. But judges and their followers are well-known for their trickery, deception, usury, sinfulness, injustice, calumny, and faultfinding, as well as bearing false witness, the falsification of the rights of Muslims, their greed and avidity, their working mischief amongst the people, their being shameless and thier accepting bribes; and since similar qualities are inherent in a cuckold's nature, they could arrive at full accord. It is because of this homogeneity that the cuckold will be inclined to the company of judges and their dependents. It has been said, "Everyone seeks out his own kind." Moreover, it has become proverbial that "Homogeneity is the cause of attraction." Consequently, when the fire-blazers of hell drag such a man to their domain, he will say in self praise:

If they take me with the pious to heaven
Tomorrow if without a friend,
It would be better were they to drag me,
With the sinners to hell.

As one of the great commentators has said of Koranic verse, "There is not one of you but shall pass [the bridge of Sirat]."⁵ All people will pass over the bridge of Sirat⁶ as swiftly as lightning, except for the judges and their followers, who will remain in hell forever and who will play a fiery game of chess with each other.

It has been recorded in the traditions of the Prophet: "The people of hell play with fire." It is for this reason that such men prefer this attribute to other characteristics.



Chapter Seven

Modesty, Fidelity, Sincerity, Mercy and Compassion

The Abrogated Practice

Sages have said: "Modesty is the restraining of the carnal soul from the commission of acts of obscenity which are worthy of blame." The Prophet, upon whom be peace, says, "Modesty is part of faith." Fidelity is making (one incumbent that) one should tread the way of fellowship, and (recompense for) what another person has done for him. The Koranic verse reads, "Whoever fulfills his promise to God will be given a great reward." Sincerity is to be of one heart with friends, so that nothing untruthful will be uttered. In the case of mercy and compassion, if a person sees another one in an unfortunate situation, he will be moved to pity and try to change it.

The Adopted Practice

Our contemporaries say, "These qualities are extremely hollow and disagreeable." Whoever is afflicted with one of these fatal qualities will always be dejected and unfortunate and unable to attain any goal. It is self-evident that a shy or modest person will be deprived of all good things, and will be unable to gain glory or wealth. Between him and his goal, modesty is a great barrier or a thick veil, and he would always be weeping over his misfortune and fate. This is why in Arabic the weeping of a cloud is also called "*haya*" (bashfulness). The Prophet, upon whom be peace, says, "Bashfulness is an obstacle in the way of livelihood." It has been observed that a man who is shameless and impudent will do whatever he pleases and will not give a hoot for anyone. He will flay the people, overcome all barriers, and reach the highest positions in such a way that he will surpass those with whom he has had an intimate relationship. The people will fear him because of his impudence. But the poor man who is known for his shame will be left behind doors, and in waiting rooms he will be beaten by the ushers, and enviously watching the men of impudence he will say:

The ignorant is upon the throne, the learned outside the door,
Seeking a way by trickery, he can't reach the doorman.

Concerning fidelity, they say that it is the result of the baseness of the carnal soul and excessive avidity. If someone receives a trivial thing from a patron or a friend, or attains some livelihood from the latter or former, greed and avarice will induce him to seek more, and he will pester that

person everyday like an impudent blood-letter to such an extent that the poor man will be sick and tired of his life due to the intruder, and he will seek a way to rid himself of such a company of nuisance.

Seeing the Angel of Death is better than seeing you.

The ancients have praised such behavior unknowingly, and they have likened the person who has reached the utmost stage of fidelity to a dog. One must rather have in mind his own interest, and when the goal is attained and no expectations are left, he should definitely not pay any attention to anyone, not even to his own father. One should spend every morning and every evening with new company. For the enjoyment of life, one should not heed restrictive notions, so that one may fully enjoy the company and wealth of one's peers. Consequently, people will not be saddened by him, and will know for certain that:

A morsel from every pot is delightful.

Anecdote

It has been related that Muhy al-Din Arabi,² who was the great philosopher and leader of the scholars of his time, for thirty years was intimately associated day and night with Muwlanā Nur al-Din Rasadi, and they could not rest one moment without being in each other's company. In the last few days of the life of Nur al-Din, Muhy al-Din was busy drinking wine at his bedside. After going one night to his own chamber and returning the next morning, he saw that the slaves had shortened their hair and were bewailing the death of Nur al-Din. He asked what had happened. They said that Nur al-Din had passed away. Muhy al-Din said, "Alas! Nur al-Din." Then turning to his slave he said, "let us go and find another companion," and then he went to his quarters. They say that he lived for twenty years after that incident and that no one heard the name of Nur al-Din from his lips.

In truth, it is only appropriate to our contemporaries to learn fidelity from this unique philosopher of his time. Another obvious proof (of the uselessness of fidelity) is that whoever had persisted in faithfulness will always be dejected and eventually will spend his life in futility, as was the case with Farhad, who carved Mount Bisutun; he never reached his goal, and finally spent his sweet (*shirin*) life on the love of Shirin.³ While he was dying, he said:

The wretched Farhad has thus sacrificed his life
For the sake of Shirin, that sweet love.

And that helpless lover who is known as Majnun⁴ of Bani Amir was at first a wise and learned youth but was suddenly struck by the love of a girl called Laili. In faithfulness to her, life became bitter to him, and he could never enjoy her. He would run naked in the deserts and sing:

If I find Laili all alone
I will perform the pilgrimage to Mecca on bare feet.

Our great men are right. People who meet such an end should be avoided. (But concerning sincerity,) our great men say that this is the worst of attributes because sincerity is the source of loss and animosity. One who is sincere will never prosper. As much as possible a man must flatter his friends and patrons, and lie or please them, and always use the phrase "The emir says the truth" as his motto. Whatever pleases people should be said. For instance, if at midnight a great man says, "Now it is the time of the early prayer," one should jump forward saying, "Of course it is."⁵ *And one should add that today the sun is very warm, and in order to prove it he should swear by the Koran or an irrevocable divorce of his wife.* If an old, miserly and ugly eunuch is being addressed, he should be called "the champion of the age," "the most chaste of the world", "a sweet budding youth," "the Joseph of Egypt," and "the generous Hatam Tai" so that one might benefit from his gold, his bounty, his robes of honor and his influence, and thus establish one's friendship in the eunuch's heart. If one calls a hairless man bald, or a hernia a rupture, or a wife-prostituted husband a cuckold, for the sake of this ill-omened truth, they will be annoyed, and having the power, they will give him a sound thrashing. If a cuckold or a bald man is not strong enough, he will not cease from his animosity, troubling one in a multitude of ways. Consequently, for the rest of one's life, thanks to this one word of truth, antagonism will not cease between them. This is why great men have said, "A well-motivated lie is better than a seditious truth"⁶ What evidence is better than the fact that if a truthful man gives a hundred truthful testimonies, not only he will not be appreciated, but those who hear him will even be annoyed and will bring forth a hundred interpretations to falsify him. But if a faithless man wants to give a false testimony they will bribe him in a hundred ways and lavish various considerations on him so that he will give that testimony. It is for the very same reason that today in Islamic countries many thousands of judges, sheikhs, theologians, and reliable witnesses and their dependents earn their livelihood in this way, and they say:

A lie which brings you happiness
Is better than the truth which causes sadness.⁷

Concerning mercy and compassion, our masters have great doubts. They say whoever pities an oppressed or deprived person has sinned and made himself the object of (Divine) wrath, based on the fact that nothing

happens without God's desire. Therefore whatever comes to His servants comes out of necessity from His Exalted desire .

Plato says: "The case is not eventuated unless it is necessitated." God, who is the Most Merciful, surely would not have sent misfortune, had that person been unworthy of it, because whatever befalls a person befits that person. As the proverb says:

May the dog be hungry, the raven blind, and the goat lean.

And also it has been said:

There is no blind man unworthy of his blindness.

So if you want to have pity on a person who has been struck by God's wrath, you will sin and be a transgressor, and will be punished on the day of Resurrection for that. The analogy of this would be the case of a man who beats his slave in order to train him, and a stranger caresses and kisses him, saying "Your master is doing wrong in beating you. You should be rewarded and given a robe of honor." Of course, the master will be annoyed by this stranger.

Anecdote

In the blessed days of the Prophet, the pagans were told to feed the poor. They answered, "The poor are the servants of God. If He wanted to feed them, He would have done so. If He does not, why should we do so?" Similarly, the *Koran* states: "Are we to feed those whom God would have fed if He chose? Surely you are in manifest error."⁸ So it is incumbent upon every created being not to take pity and not pay attention to the condition of an oppressed or wounded person, an orphan, a family man in distress or a servant who has grown old and paralytic serving in the house of the master. Rather, for the sake of God, he should annoy them as much as he can, so that his reward and station may be elevated, and on the day of Resurrection, when "neither wealth nor children will be of any help"⁹, this will come to his aid.

This was what I had promised at the beginning of the book to my brothers. It is hoped that if a beginner persists in practicing the characteristics of great men and making them part of his rational soul he will succeed both in this and the next world.

Definitions
Known as the Ten Chapters

Definitions

Known As Ten Chapters

First Chapter: The World and What is Therein

- The World: The place where no one can rest.
The Wise Man: He who does not concern himself with the world and its people.
The Perfect Man: He who is not greatly affected by sadness or joy.
The Generous: He who does not have his eyes on other people's property.
The Ideal Man: He who wishes good for everyone.
Thought: That which worries people sick for no purpose.
The Man of Learning: He who can not even earn his own livelihood.
The Ignorant: Fortune's favorite.
The Miser: The wealthy.
The Coward: The seeker of learning.
The Professor: Their chief. [I.e., of the seekers of learning.]
His Assistant: Ever-desirous.
The Miserable: The theologian.
The Well of Disappointment: His inkwell.
The Broken: His pen.
The Pawned: His book.
The Dirty: His folder.
The Mother of Sleep: His studies.
The Closed One: His school.
Wasted and Ruined: His time.
The Used Up: The religious endowments.
The Salary, Stipend and Wages: Things which do not reach people.
The Promisory Note: A useless piece of paper that worries people.
The Pressure: The letter written by a governor to his deputies, which they ignore.

Second Chapter: On the Turks and Their Friends

- Gog and Magog: The Turkish tribes when they set out for a land.
The Infernal Guards: Their vanguards.
The Famine: The result of their invasion.
The Confiscation and Distribution: Their gifts.
The Flag of Calamity: Their banner.
Plundering: Their profession.
The Sudden Earthquake: When they come.
The Angels of Interrogation:¹ The two heralds who go in front of them and lean on their clubs.

Canis Major: Night watchman.
Canis Minor: His deputy.
 The Plunderer: The envoy.
 The Hay of Hell: The fodder of their horses.
 The Hot Water of Hell: Their wine.
 The Unjust: The officer for the endowment.
 The One Who Should be Killed: The holder of the seal.²
 The Foreman: The thief.
 The Jackal: The secretary of the Chancellery.
 The General: The thief of the warehouse.
 The Constable: He who robs by night and asks the shopkeeper for his wages by day.
 The Tax-collector: He who puts the squeeze on the thief.

Third Chapter: On the Judge and his Followers

The Judge: He who is cursed by everyone.
 The Cottonball: His turban.
 His Deputy: The faithless.
 The Attorney-at-law: One who distorts the truth.
 Justice: One which never speaks the truth.
 The Meditator: One with whom neither man nor God is pleased.
 The People of the Judge: Those whose testimony is on short sale.
 The Importunate: His servant.
 The Ill-Omned Folk: His friends.
 The Searcher of Gold: His Companion.
 Heaven: What they will never see.
 The Lawful Money: What they never want.
 The Properties of Orphans and Endowments: What they regard their own.
 The Eye of the Judge: A vessel that never fills.
 Dreadful: His end.
 The Bottom of Hell: His place.
 The House of Fire: His courtroom.
 Satan's Threshold: Its threshold.
 The River of Fire, the Scorching Desert, the Bottomless Pit and the River of Woes: Four corners of it.
 Bribery: The helper of the helpless.
 The Lucky: One who does not see the face of the judge.
 The Drunken Carousel: A place frequented by the judge.
 The Preacher: An ass.
 The Prefector: the tail of an ass.
 The Clergyman: One who preaches but does not practice.
 The Teacher: The fool.
 The Courtier: A sycophant.
 The Fox: A man of cloak who always accompanies the emirs and khans.

The Poet: A greedy braggart.

Fourth Chapter: On Sheikhs and Their Dependents.

The Sheikh: The devil himself.

The Donkey: His son.

The Devils: His followers.

Hypocrisy: What he says about the world.

Nonsense: What he says about the world to come.

Delerium: His dreams.

The Sufi: A freeloader.

The Haji: He who swears falsely by the Ka'ba.

The Pilgrim of Two Holy Places:³ May God increase the torture of that accursed devil.

Fifth Chapter: On the Gentry and their Manners.

Boasting and Insolence: The stock-in-trade of the gentry.

Nothing: Their existence.

Hollow: Their courtesies.

Vanity and Folly: Their talk.

Disapproval, Greed, Malice and Envy: Their characteristics.

The Fool: He who expects any good from them.

The Wretched and Unfortunate: Their attendants.

What is Lost: Their generosity.

Non-existent: Their good behavior.

The Anqa of the West⁴: Justice and humanity.

Roguary, Violence, Hypocrisy, Dissimulation and Falsehood: The ways of the great men.

Lust: Their main ailment.

Sixth Chapter: On Artisans and Officials

The Businessman: He who fears not God.

The Cloth-merchant: The highwayman.

The Money-changer: The petty thief.

The Tailor: The nimble-handed one.

The Imam: The seller of prayers.

The Druggist: He who wishes everyone sick.

The Forger: The goldsmith.

The Physician: The executioner.

The Liar: The astronomer.

The Unfortunate: The fortuneteller.

The Wrestler: The idle rogue.

The Bath-attendant: The key-holder to coitus.
The Salesman: The brigand of the market.

Seventh Chapter: On Wine and Matters Pertaining to it.

Wine: The cause of every trouble.
Backgammon, the Cup-bearer, the Candle and Sweetmeats: Its means.
The Harp, the Lute, the Flute: Its instruments.
Soup and Kebab: Its food.
The Meadow and Garden: Its place.
Poison: The early morning wine.
The Free: The drunk.
The Carefree: The Topsy.
The Angel of Death: A bearded saki.
The Conjunction of Two Evil Stars: Two bearded sakis kissing each other.
The Alert: The sober amongst the drunk.
The Laughing Stock: The drunk amongst the sober.
Brawling: A prayer performed in the tavern.
The Destroyer of Joys : Ramadan.
The "Hallowed Night": The festival ending that month.
Satan, The Ill-wisher and the Meddler: He who sits next to you in the chess or backgammon game and instructs your opponents.
Heaven: Seeing of the beloved.
Calamity: Seeing of the rival.

Eighth Chapter: on Bhang and its Accesories

Bhang: That which fills the Sufi with ecstasy.
Chess: Its means.
The Lute and the Tar⁶: Its instruments.
A Sunny Corner: Its place.
A Dish of Meat and Rice accompanied with Sweetmeats: Its food.
Nobility on Both Sides: He who takes bhang with wine.
The Deprived: He who does not do so.

Ninth Chapter: The Householder and the Things Pertaining to Him

The Bachelor: He who enjoys the world.
The Ghoul: The procuress.
The Unfortunate: The householder.
The Two-horned: He who has two wives.
The Most Unfortunate of the Unfortunates: He who has more.
The Sour-faced Cuckold: The father-in-law.

The Cold-hearted Shrew: The mother-in-law.
The Futile: The householder's life.
Wasted: His time.
Dissipated: His wealth.
Distracted: His mind.
Bitter: His enjoyment.
The Abode of Mourning: His house.
The Family Foe: His son.
The Unlucky: A young man with an old wife.
The Cuckold: A old man with a young wife.
The Horned Ram: A man whose wife reads the romance of *Vis and Ramin*.⁸
Divorce: His Cure.
Joy after Sorrow: The triple divorce⁹.
Love: The occupation of the idle ones.

Tenth Chapter: On the True Nature of Men and Women

The Lady: She who has many lovers.
The Housewife: She who has a few.
The Virtuous: She who is content with one lover.
The Real Lady: She who makes love gratis.
The Charitable: A man who makes love to an old lady.
The Poor: She who is after strangers.
The Aphrodisiac: The leg of another's wife.
Virginity: A name denoting nothing.



The Treatise of One Hundred Maxims

The Treatise of One Hundred Maxims

I would like to present to the thoughtful and sagacious reader the fact that the present writer, 'Obeyd-e Zakani, may God fulfill his desires, though he has no high standing in the world of learning, has nonetheless devoted himself since his youth to pursuing knowledge and reading books and attending the lectures of the learned and the philosophers. It so happened that in the year A.H.750 (A.D.1350) a work of Plato, the prince of philosophers, written for the sake of his pupil Aristotle and translated from the Greek into Persian by the unrivalled man of our times, Nasir al-Din Tusi,¹ fell into my hands. This work on ethics was accompanied by some other treatises such as *The Book of the Counsels* of the just king Anushiravan,² which was dictated to Taj Rabi'.³ After reading these with much eagerness and enthusiasm, the author decided to compose a book of counsels in a similar fashion, which would be a work of sincerity, devoid of the shadow of hypocrisy and signs of affectation—a kind of book that will be beneficial to everyone and will also enable the writer to be ranked among the men of taste. It is hoped that everyone will profit greatly from these pieces of advice.

If you need a medicinal draught,
Then by my counsel's cure be taught,
In wisdom's sieve it is sifted through
And mixed with wit's sweet honey, too.

1. O dear friends, make the most of your life.
2. Do not waste your time.
3. Do not leave the pleasures of today for tomorrow.
4. Do not spoil a good day.
5. Consider wealth, leisure and health as a real kingdom.
6. Enjoy the present, since you will not live a second life.
7. If someone forgets his origin and status, do not remind him of them.
8. Do not greet the conceited.
9. Do not count the days of illness among the days of your life.
10. Give our regards to the high-spirited and good-natured people of dervish-like temperament.
11. Forget about expecting help from other people, so that you can merrily laugh in their faces.
12. Do not frequent the courts of the kings, and forsake their rewards in order to avoid their chamberlains.⁴
13. Sacrifice even your life for the sake of good friends.

14. Consider seeing beautiful people as the happiness of life, the light of the eye and the joy of the heart.
15. Curse those who lift their eyebrows, wrinkle their foreheads, talk seriously and have a sour face, as well those who are ill-tempered, liars, miserly and ill-mannered.
16. Pass wind onto the beard⁵ of merciless lords and dignitaries.
17. As much as possible refrain from speaking the truth, so that you may not become a bore to other people, and cause undue annoyance.
18. Engage in ribaldry, cuckoldry, gossip, ingratitude, false testimony, selling heaven for the world, and playing the tambourine, so that you may become dear to the great and enjoy your life.
19. Don't believe the sermons of the clerics, lest you go astray and end up in hell.
20. If you want salvation, attach yourself to the service of the all-sacrificing and pure-hearted *rends*⁶ in order to be saved.
21. Do not take lodging in the neighborhood of the sanctimonious clerics, so that you may live to your heart's delight.
22. Do not take rooms in a street where there is a minaret, so that you may be safe from the annoyance of cacophonous muezzins.
23. Help the addict by giving him food and sweetmeats.
24. Give a helping hand to the drunkards.
25. As long as you live, live happily without a thought for your vulturous inheritors.
26. Consider being a bachelor and a *qalandar*⁷ as the foundation of life happiness .
27. Liberate yourself from the chains of good and ill repute, so that you may live freely.
28. Don't fall into the traps of women, especially widows with brats.
29. Do not waste your precious time on lawful but cold love-making.
30. Do not marry daughters of judges, theologians, sheikhs or dignitaries, and if such a union does take place against your will, have anal intercourse with your bride lest her evil origin show itself and your children become hypocrites, beggars or headaches for their parents.
31. Don't marry the daughter of a preacher, lest she give birth to an ass.
32. Fear the provision for the wet-nurse, the philosophizing of the mid-wife, the dominance of the pregnant wife, the babble of the cradle, the greeting of the son-in-law, the duties toward the wife, and the commotion of the child.
33. Consider masturbation far better than seduction.
34. Don't expect the friendship of young women when you become old.
35. Don't make love to old women gratis.
36. Don't get married, lest you become a pimp.
37. Beat old women soundly in order to attain the status of the warriors for the Faith.
38. On the street be deceived neither by with the tall stature of veiled women, nor by the veils hemmed with brocade.
39. Take advantage of the money and bodies of slaves, so that you may be regarded as a perfectly law-abiding man.
40. Don't leave idle the instruments of eating and copulating for a

- moment.
41. Whenever you find pretty boys drunk and asleep, seize the opportunity before they wake up.
 42. Extend the alms of your sexual favors to such deserving persons as secluded women who cannot leave their houses, old and penniless homosexuals, youths whose beards have grown and prevent them from doing their business, and young women whose husbands have gone on a trip, since giving alms brings great blessings.
 43. Do not wine and dine alone, since this is the practice of the Jews and judges.
 44. Do not ask anything of the upstart sons of beggars.
 45. Buy Turkish slave boys at any price when they have no beard, and sell them at any price when their beards begin to grow.
 46. Do not withhold your posterior favors from friends and foes when young so that in old age you can attain the status of a sheikh, a preacher or a man of fame and dignity.
 47. Buy soft-handed, not hard-fisted, slaves.
 48. Do not take wine from the hand of a bearded *saki*.
 49. Do not expect comfort, peace and blessing in the house of a man with two wives.
 50. Expect neither chastity from a lady who reads the romance of *Vis and Ramin*^s, nor anal integrity from a boy who drinks wine and smokes bhang.
 51. Have anal intercourse with the daughter of your neighbor and do not tamper with her hymen so that you will not have betrayed your neighbor's trust and so you will have been a considerate and good Moslem. Thus on her wedding night she will not be ashamed before the bridegroom and she will be proud among the people.
 52. In this age of ours do not expect to find a just governor, a judge who does not accept bribes, an ascetic who does not speak hypocritically, a pious chamberlain, or a statesman who has preserved his anal integrity.
 53. If you want God to be compassionate to you, show compassion toward young women whose husbands have gone on a trip, toward the lover who has a chance with his beloved for the first time but fails to perform, toward a cupbearer who goes to a party where a rake does not like him and turns him out, toward a group of half drunk men who have spilt their wine, toward the young man in the hands of a shrewish wife, and toward the girl who has lost her virginity and fears the approaching wedding night.
 54. Have intercourse with women on their death bed as much as possible and consider this a great opportunity.
 55. With children be content with a dry humping so that you will have been kind toward them.
 56. Do not consider the man who floors his opponent an athlete or a wrestler, but rather the one who places his face on the floor and eagerly lets the other one mount him.

57. Don't pin your hopes upon the promise of the drunk, coquetry of women, vows of hookers, and the compliments of homosexuals.
58. Be courteous to your teachers, masters, patrons and bed partners, so that you will not be betrayed.
59. Do not be offended by the cursing of beggars, the slapping of women, and the sayings of poets and jesters.
60. Enjoy sleeping with handsome boys because it is a joy that you will not find in heaven.
61. Exercise every trick that you know in gambling and backgammon so that you might be called a perfect gambler. If the other party presses you hard, vow that if you are not speaking the truth may your wife be divorced irrevocably,⁹ because swearing is not a sin in gambling.
62. Before finishing with them do not pay young boys and prostitutes so that they will not deny it in the end and so there won't be a fuss.
63. Do not let talkative, gossipy and mean people into your parties nor drunkards and inharmonious minstrels who repeat their doleful songs endlessly.
64. Keep away from a party of brawlers.
65. Do not lodge a prostitute and a pretty boy in the same room.
66. Do not play backgammon on credit so that you will not talk people's heads off in vain.
67. Be cautious when you take a young boy to your room and when he leaves be on your guard that he does not steal something from you.
68. Unless you see food and sweetmeats laid before you, do not start smoking bhang.
69. Tell the busybodies and hungover revelers to go to hell when in the morning they frown at you and blame and criticize you, saying that the night before you were badly drunk, broke the bottle and gave away your money and clothes, so that they won't bother the others as well.
70. Beat women hard and then make love to them passionately so that they will fear and obey you. The work of the master of the house can be achieved through fear and hope, and displeasure changes to pleasantness.
71. With compliments and sweet words seduce your beloved.
72. Do not go drunk near a pond or a stream so that you may not fall in.
73. Do not talk with sheikhs, the newly rich, fortune tellers, morticians, mendicants,¹⁰ chess players, spendthrifts, descendants of old families or any others stricken with misfortune.
74. Do not expect honesty, fairness and the conduct befitting a good Moslem from a businessman.
75. Do not grudge gentle slapping and robbing from old homosexuals.
76. Beware of the hypocrisy of judges, the uproar of the Mongols, the hue and cry of pederasts, and the friendship of those with whom you once had an affair and who are now daring and powerful heroes.

- Beware also of the tongues of poets, the deception of women, the evil eyes of jealous people and the hatred of your relatives.
77. Do not expect anything of a disobedient child, a shrewish wife, an old and lazy horse, a servant who wants to nail you down, or a useless friend.
 78. Do not pass wind without a proper ablution at the foot of the preacher's pulpit, because it has not been authorized by past scholars.
 79. Consider youth better than old age, health better than illness, wealth better than poverty, prostitution better than cuckoldry, drunkenness better than soberness, and wisdom better than madness.
 80. Do not repent lest you become unfortunate, ill-starred, afflicted and boring.
 81. Do not go on the pilgrimage of the Hajj lest greed overcomes you and you become faithless and unjust.
 82. Do not show the house of your beloved to anyone.
 83. Do not make love to women alone, because such is not gentlemanly.
 84. Do not be ashamed of cuckoldry so that you can spend your days without sorrow and your nights without any thought.
 85. Be friends with wine sellers and traffickers in bhang so that you will insure your future pleasures.
 86. Do not drink wine in front of people in the fasting month of Ramadan so that they will not look at you as an apostate.
 87. Do not accept the testimony of the blind in the month of Ramadan even if they be on a mountain top.
 88. Do not ask the poll tax of shoe-makers, cuppers, and weavers if they are Moslems.
 89. Do not exaggerate being honest and faithful, lest you become afflicted with colic or other such ailments.
 90. Make a point to attend early morning bhang and wine parties so that fortune may come to you, for corruption has great auspiciousness everywhere.
 91. Try to lie with the sons of the sheikhs by whatever means because this is considered a virtue comparable to a great pilgrimage.
 92. Do not make yourself known as a generous man in the tavern, the gambling hall, or the parties of hookers and pederasts so that they will not turn to you for everything.
 93. Do not offer your place to the nouveau riche, to the upstart sons of slaves and peasants.
 94. Flee from indebtedness to your relatives, from the table of the miserly, from the grimace of servants, from the discord of your family members, and from those who ask for loans.
 95. At any rate, avoid death because it has been disliked since the days of old.
 96. Do not throw yourself into a well and injure yourself unless absolutely necessary.

97. Do not listen to the words of sheikhs and opium smokers since it has been said:

Whatever piece of wisdom a smoker of opium imparts,
Write it on the phallus of an ass and offer it to him.

98. Sow your sperm unlawfully so that your children will become theologians, sheikhs and favorites of the king.
99. Despise not ribaldry, nor look down at satirists.
100. Take heed and listen to these words willingly, as they are the words of great men.

These are the sayings that have reached us from our masters and from great men. We have also mentioned in this brief account our gleanings from books and our observations from the biographies of great men, so that those ready and well disposed might benefit from them:

Fortunate ones take heed of advice
Great men accept the counsel of dervishes.¹¹

May God Almighty open the door of happiness, peace and strength to all.

Risalay-ye Delgosha

The Joyous Treatise

Stories from *Risala-ye Delgosha* (The Joyous Treatise)

God be praised for His blessings, bounty, benevolence and grace, and praise be upon Mohammad and his family.

To continue: The author of this treatise 'Obeyd-e Zakani, may God Almighty fulfill his wishes, says that the virtue of speech, which distinguishes mankind from other animals, has two forms: serious and humorous, and the advantage of the latter to the former is obvious. However, continuous seriousness creates boredom, and continuous humor brings forth lightness and lack of dignity. The men of old have said:

All year round seriousness wastes your body;
Joking every day consumes your dignity.

But humor is acceptable if it is for the sake of dispelling sorrows and gladdening the heart, as the wise men have said: "Humor in speech is like salt in food." Likewise, a poet has said:

Console your grief stricken heart
With wine and cure it with humor;
But when you do this it should not exceed
The amount of salt that is put in food.

One should devote some time to study/varieties of humor, and follow the saying of the poet who wrote:

Though the unity (of God) and the exegesis (of His book) are of first order;
Some delirium and lightness should not be forgotten.

The reader should excuse me because our great men have thought it permissible to this extent. Following this introduction I thought of some anecdotes and witty remarks, and collected them under two headings: Arabic Anecdotes and Persian Anecdotes. I have called them "The Joyous Treatise" (*Risaleh-ye Delgosha*) since a delighted heart and a joyous mind are suited for these pages. May God grant us these both blessings.

Stories from the Arabic

1

A man was asked, "How is it that your son does not resemble you?" He said, "If the neighbors leave us alone, our children will resemble us."

2

A Jew asked a Christian, "Moses or Jesus, which one was superior?" He answered, "Jesus gave life to the dead, but one day Moses quarreled with a man and threw him to the ground, whereupon the man died. Jesus spoke while in cradle, whereas the forty year old Moses would say, "O God, loosen the knot to my tongue so that people will understand me."

3

A soldier was asked, "Why don't you want to go to the war?" He replied, "By God, I don't know a single person among the enemy army, and they don't know me, so how could enmity exist between us?"

4

One day Juha² was going to the market to buy a donkey, and a man asked him, "Where are you heading?" He said, "To the market to buy a donkey." The man said, "Say *inshallah* (God willing)." Juha answered, "There is no need for *inshallah*. The donkey is in the market and the gold in my pocket." When he reached the market he was robbed of his gold. Coming back he saw the same man, who asked Juha, "Where are you coming from?" He said, "From the market *inshallah*. They stole my money *inshallah*. I could not buy a donkey *inshallah*, and I am going home penniless *inshallah*!"

5

Mu'awiyya³ was well known for his tolerance, and nobody could make him angry. A man claiming that he could make him angry went to see him, and said, "I want to marry your mother since she has big buttocks." Mu'awiya said, "This was the reason for my father's love for her."

6

A slave girl was asked, "Are you a virgin?" She said, "May God forgive my sins, I was."

7

A man saw another man making love to his slave girl. He asked her, "Why did you do that?" She said, "O master, he swore to me by your head to make love to me, and you know my love to you. I could not refuse him!"

8

A woman called her husband a penniless pimp. The husband said, "God be praised that none of it is my fault. The former comes from God and the latter from you!"

9

In the month of Ramazan a homosexual boy was asked if the market was sluggish. He said, "Yes. But may God keep Christians and Jews for us!"

10

A judge told his people, "Give thanks to God." They thanked God, but asked him, "What was this thanking for?" He said, "We should thank God that angels have no excrement, otherwise all our clothes would have been soiled."

11

A young wife went to the judge and complained, "I am a young woman and my husband does not serve me right." The husband said, "I serve her as much as I can." She said, "I am not content with less than five times a night." He said, "More than three times is not in my power." The judge said, "What a strange plight I am in! They don't bring a case to me unless I have to contribute something myself. But, let it be. I will undertake the other two times myself."

12

A man saw a friend who was traveling on a slow-paced donkey, and asked him, "Where are you heading?" He said, "I am going to the Friday prayer." The man retorted, "But today is Tuesday." The friend said, "I would be happy if this donkey gets me to the mosque by Saturday!"

13

A fox was asked, "In escaping from a dog how many tricks do you

know?" He answered, "More than a hundred, but the best one is that we two never meet."

14

Abu Dulaf⁴ became a Shi'ite and used to say that whoever was not a Shi'ite was a bastard. His son told him, "I am not of this sect." Abu Dulaf answered, "Yes, indeed, before I bought your mother I slept with her."

15

A man said to a woman, "I want to taste you to see if you are sweeter than my wife." She said, "Go ask my husband, who has tasted both of us."

16

Abu Nuwas⁵ saw a drunken man and looked at him in amazement and laughed. He was asked, "Why are you laughing, you do the same every-day?" He said, "I had never seen a drunken man before." They said, "How is this possible?" He answered, "I get drunk before everyone and become sober after everyone, so I don't know how a drunken man behaves."

17

Abu Nuwas was sitting one day with a cup of wine in his hand. On his right there were some grapes and on his left some raisins. He was sipping the wine and then eating grapes and raisins. They asked, "What is this?" He said, "Father, Son and the Holy Spirit."

18

A man was complaining of his wife to Abu'l-'Aina.⁶ He said, "Do you wish her dead?" He replied, "No, not really." Abu'l-'Aina said, "But how is that you are so troubled by her?" The man answered, "That is true. But I am afraid that I might die of joy if I heard the news of her death!"

19

Abi Harith⁷ was asked, "Is it possible for an eighty year old man to get a child?" He said, "Yes, provided he has a twenty year old neighbor."

20

A man who claimed to be a prophet was brought to Caliph Mu'tasim.⁸

The caliph said, "I truly believe that you are a stupid prophet." He answered, "That is true, because I have been sent to a people like you."

21

A man stole a robe and took it to the market to sell. Someone else stole it from him. He was asked, "How much did you sell it for?" He said, "For the same price I bought it for."

22

A man claimed to be God. The ruler of the Day ordered him to be imprisoned. Someone saw him in the prison and asked him, "Can God be in prison?" He answered, "God can be anywhere."

23

In a race a horse was leading the rest. A spectator was boasting and beside himself with joy. Another man asked him, "Is this your horse?" He said, "No. But his bridle is mine."

24

A man with bad breath went to see a physician, complaining of a toothache. When he opened his mouth, a terrible smell came out. The physician said, "This is not a job for me. Go to the street sweepers."

25

A man said to Hajjaj,⁹ "Last night I saw you in a dream, and it seemed that you were in heaven." Hajjaj replied, "If your dream is true, then the injustice in the world to come is even greater than it is here."

26

They said to a Sufi, "Sell your special cloak." He said, "If a fisherman sells his net, with what shall he fish?"

27

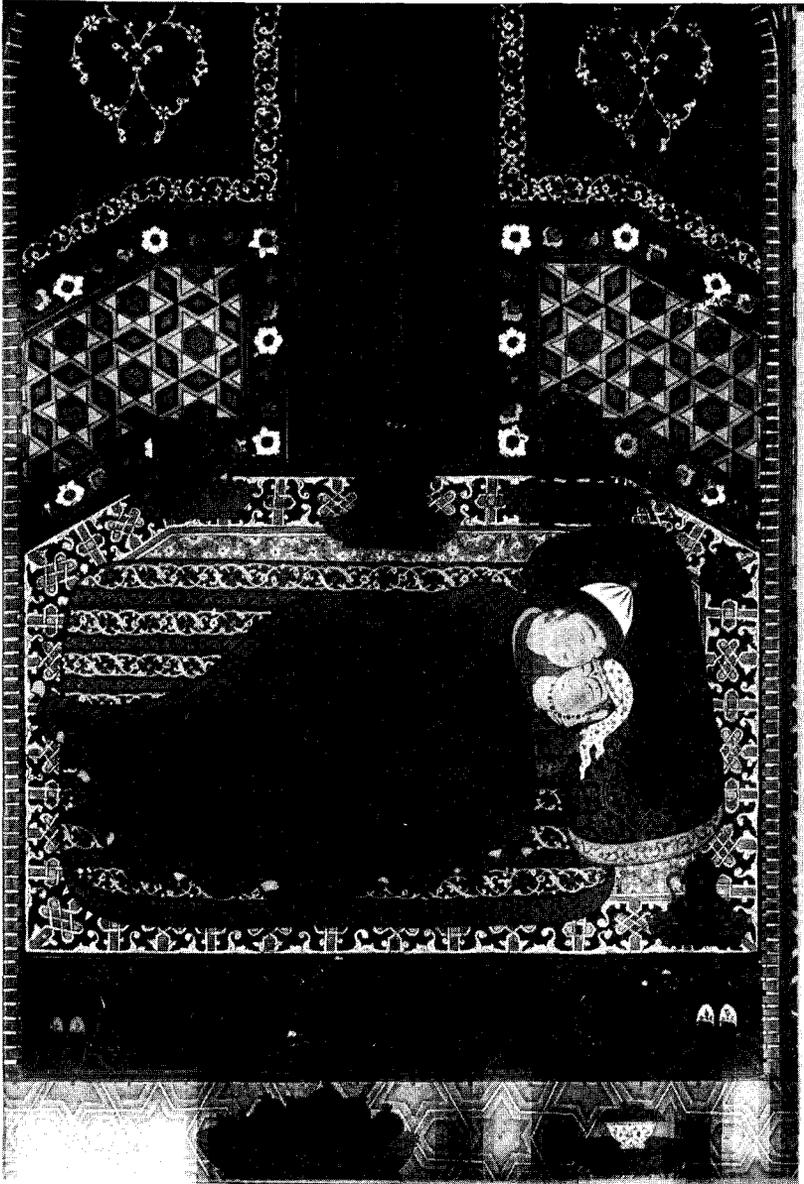
A Bedouin went on pilgrimage and arrived at Mecca before the others. He took hold of the curtains of the Ka'ba and said, "O God, forgive me before the crowd gets to you."

28

A fool is a man who comes at the wrong time and stays too long.

A man got married, and on the fifth day after the wedding his wife gave birth to a son. The man went to the market and bought writing pads and ink. They asked him, "What are these?" He answered, "A child that can come into the world after five days will surely go to school in three more days."

A drunk old man was brought to Caliph Hisham ibn 'Abdul-Malik¹⁰ with a bottle of wine and a lute. The caliph said, "Break his tambourine on his head and flog him for drinking raisin wine." The old man sat down and began to cry. They said, "Why are you crying before being flogged?" He replied, "My crying is not for flogging but because you did not know lute from tambourine, and furthermore, you called the musk wine raisin wine." The caliph liked his remarks and let him go.



Persian Anecdotes

1

Sultan Mahmud,¹ accompanied by Talhak,² the jester, attended the sermon of a certain preacher. When they arrived the preacher was saying that whoever had made love to a young boy, on the day of judgement would be made to carry him across the narrow bridge of *Sirat*, which leads to heaven. Sultan Mahmud was terrified and began to weep. Talhak told him: "O Sultan, do not weep. Be happy that on that day you will not be left on foot either."

2

A man from Hamadan was going into his house when he saw a handsome young man coming out. He was offended and said: "A curse upon this kind of life you lead! Why do you keep going into the houses of other people? Damn it all, get yourself a wife like everybody else, so that you can supply the needs of ten other men."

3

A man said to an interpreter of dreams: "I dreamed that I was making eggplant casserole from the dung of a camel. What does this mean?" The dream interpreter answered: "Give me two gold coins first, and then I will tell you the meaning of it." The man replied: "If I had two gold coins, I would buy eggplants to make casserole so that I would not have to dream about making it."

4

Caliph Mahdi³ got separated from his army one day on a hunting trip. At night he came upon the house of a nomadic Arab and ate a humble meal there. The Arab brought out a jug of wine. After they had drunk a cup, Mahdi said: "I am in the retinue of Caliph Mahdi." After the second cup was served, the caliph said: "I am one of the lieutenants of Mahdi." After drinking a third cup, he said: "I am Mahdi himself." The Arab took the jug away, saying: "You drank the first cup and claimed to be a servant; with the second you became an emir; and with the third you claimed to be the caliph himself. If you drink another cup you will certainly claim to be God." The next day, when the army was once again united with Mahdi, the Arab fled in fear. Mahdi had him brought into his presence and rewarded him with some gold. The Arab said: "I swear that you were telling the truth, even if you claimed to be the fourth one!"

5

A certain person arrived at a graveyard and saw a very long grave. He inquired whose that grave was. They said: "It is the grave of the Prophet Mohammad's flag-bearer." He said: "Have they buried him with his flag?"

6

They sent Talhak on a mission to the court of the Kharazmshah.⁴ He remained there for some time, but he did not get the attention from the king of Kharazm that he desired. One day, he was telling stories about different birds and their characteristics in the presence of the king. He said, "The stork is the smartest of all of the birds." They asked him: "How do you know?" He said: "Because he never comes to the court of Kharazm."

7

A man claimed to be God. They took him to the caliph, who told him: "Last year, a man was here claiming to be a prophet, and we had him killed." The man said, "You did the right thing, because I had not sent him."

8

Abu Bakr Robabi⁵ went stealing one night, but as hard as he tried, he could not get anything. He "stole" his own turban and hid it under his arm. When he came home, his wife asked: "What have you brought?" He said: "I have brought this turban." "But this is your own turban," she said. "Be quiet," he answered, "You don't understand. I have stolen it so that I don't get out of practice in my profession as a thief."

9

Juha⁶ would steal a sheep, slaughter it and give its meat as alms. He was asked: "What is the meaning of this?" He said: "Giving alms compensates the sin of stealing, and I get to keep the intestines and the fat."

10

Talhak had a few donkies and Sultan Mahmud ordered them to be taken for unpaid labor to see what he would do. He was annoyed and wanted

to complain to the sultan. Under instruction from the king he was told that he could not have an audience that day. Talhak went around the royal palace and arriving under the window of the room where the king was sitting, shouted, "The cuckold who does not give an audience, why does he need people's donkies to work for him unpaid?"

11

When Juha was young he became an apprentice to a tailor for a few days. One day his master brought a bowl of honey to the shop. He wanted to leave the store for an errand, so he told Juha: "There is poison in this bowl. Don't eat it or you'll die." Juha answered, "I will have nothing to do with it." As soon as his master was gone Juha exchanged a piece of cloth for a large loaf of bread and ate all of the honey with it. His master returned and asked for the piece of cloth. Juha told him, "Promise not to beat me, and I will tell the truth. It happened that I was careless and a thief stole the cloth. I was afraid that you would come and beat me. So I decided to eat the poison so that when you returned I would be dead. I ate all of the poison that was in the bowl, and I am still alive. Now you can do whatever you want to me."

12

Juha's father gave him two fish to sell. He went around the streets until he came to the house of a very beautiful woman. She said, "Give me one fish and I will make love with you." Juha gave her the fish and received what she had offered in exchange. Having enjoyed it tremendously, he gave her the other fish and made love to her a second time. Then he sat by the door of the house and said, "I would like to have a drink of water." The woman gave him a pitcher of water; he drank it and then threw the pitcher to the ground and broke it. Juha suddenly saw the lady's husband coming, and he began to cry. The husband asked him, "Why are you crying?" Juha said, "I was thirsty and asked for some water at this house. The pitcher slipped from my hands, fell, and broke. I had two fish and now this fine lady has taken them in exchange for the pitcher. Now I dare not return home for the fear of my father." The man reproached his wife saying, "So what if he broke the pitcher?" Then he took the fish and gave them to Juha, so he could go home happily.

13

A notorious freeloader was asked, "Don't you have any appetite?" He said, "Poor me. It is the only thing that I have in the whole world."

14

A man from Qazvin went to fight the heretics' carrying a large shield. A big stone from the fortress hit him on the head and badly hurt him. He was annoyed and said, "You fools, are you blind? Why did you hit me on the head? What do you think this huge shield is for?"

15

The son of a Qazvini fell into a well. The father said, "Oh, my dear, don't go anywhere till I go and bring a rope to pull you out."

16

A muezzin would call out and then run. He was asked, "Why are you running?" He said, "They say that my voice is beautiful from afar. I was running so that I could hear it from a distance."

17

A thief went to the house of Abu Bakr Robabi. He was awake and ensconced himself in front of the door, leaving the thief no way out. Then Abu Bakr called, "Oh, Shadi," (which was the name of his slave girl). The thief was forced to answer. Abu Bakr said, "Come and rub my feet." The thief rubbed his feet and Abu Bakr had an erection. He said, "Oh Shadi, come here and let us make love." The poor man had to give in and Abu Bakr made love to him once. After a while Abu Bakr said, "Oh, Shadi, come here and let us repeat it." So he slept with the thief three or four times. A thin horse of a neighbor was tied in the garden, and Abu Bakr told the thief, "Oh Shadi, go and water the horse." The thief went to the well. The bucket had a hole and as much as he tried he could not pull enough water to quench the horse's thirst. Finally, after troubling the man by every possible means, Abu Bakr pretended that he was asleep. The thief seized the opportunity and ran away. He saw some other thieves who were tunneling under the wall of the same house. He said, "O friends, don't waste your time. In this house there is nothing of value; except for a homosexual who has taken an aphrodisiac and never tires of screwing, and a horse who has been affected by dropsy and no amount of water can satisfy."

18

A man from Ardabil told a physician that he was sick. The doctor took

his pulse and said, "To regain your health, every day, you must eat five fat and well roasted chickens and saffroned lamb stew⁸ with honey and throw it up immediately." The patient said, "What a wise man you are! If somebody else should eat such food and throw it up, I will immediately eat it."

19

A preacher was saying in Kashan that on the day of Resurrection the custody of the holy well of *Kothar*⁹ will be with Imam 'Ali (the cousin of the Prophet), and he will give its water to the man of anal integrity. A man from the audience got up and said, "Your reverence, if this is the case, he will have to put it back in the pitcher and drink it all himself."

20

Muwlana 'Azud al-Din¹⁰ had an assistant called 'Ala al-Din, who accompanied him on a trip. On the way they stopped, and 'Ala al-Din drank some wine. Muwlana called him several times, and after a while he came running and was drunk. Muwlana realized that he was drunk and said, "'Ala al-Din, I thought you were with me on this trip, but now I see that you are not even with yourself."

21

There was a governor of Khorasan called Khalaf.¹¹ Once he was told that there was a certain man who looked much like him. He called the man and asked him, "Was your mother a saleswoman frequenting the houses of the nobility?" The man answered, "My mother was a shy woman who would not go out of the house, but my father worked as a gardener in the houses of the great men."

22

A number of Qazvinis had gone to fight the (Isma'ili) heretics. On their return each man was carrying a head on his spear. One man was carrying a foot. He was asked, "Who killed him?" He answered, "I did." "Then why didn't you bring his head?" they said. He answered, "Before I arrived and killed him, they had already taken away his head."

23

Someone asked his holiness 'Azud al-Din, "How is it that in the time

of the caliphs people would often claim to be God or a prophet and now they don't?" He said: "These days people are so oppressed by tyranny and hunger that they can think neither of God nor of prophets."

24

A man told his friend: "My eyes ache. What should I do?" He said, "Last year my tooth ached, so I pulled it out."

25

A scald headed man went to a public bath, and as he was leaving, he found his hat stolen. In answer to his outcry the bath-keeper said, "When you came here you had no hat." "My good man," the man replied, "Is this the kind of head that you can take out without a hat?"

26

A Qazvini put his right foot into the stirrup and mounted the horse, but he was facing the back of the animal. He was told that he had mounted the horse backwards. He said, "It is not me, but the horse that is backwards."

27

A woman and her son fell into the hands of a Turk¹² in a wilderness. He raped them both and left. The woman asked her son, "If you see him, will you recognize him?" He answered, "His face was toward you. You should recognize him better."

28

One day Sultan Mahmud was very angry, and Talhak wanted to change his mood. He asked, "O Sultan, what was your father's name?" The Sultan was annoyed and turned away from him. Talhak walked around him and once more asked the question. The Sultan said, "You cuckold, what do you want my father's name for?" Talhak retorted, "Now we know what your father's name was. What about your grandfather's name?" Thus the sultan was made to laugh.

29

Three friends from Ray, Gilan and Qazvin went to Mecca for pilgrimage. The Qazvini was poor, but the other two were wealthy. When the man

from Ray took hold of the sacred ring of the *Ka'ba*, he said, "O God, in gratitude for bringing me here I free my slave girls Bilian and Benefsheh. When the Gilani took the ring, he said, "O God, thanking you for this pilgrimage, I free my slave boys Mobarak and Songor." The Qazvini took the ring and said, "O God, you know that I neither have Bilian and Banafsheh nor Mobarak and Sonqor. I express my gratitude by freeing the mother of Fatemeh by a three-fold divorce."¹³

30

A woman went to Caliph Watheq¹⁴ and claimed to be a prophetess. He asked her if Mohammad was a prophet. She said, "Yes." "But he has said that there will be no prophet after him." the caliph argued. The woman said, "But he has not said there will be no prophetess after him."

31

A carpenter took a wife, and after three months she gave birth to a son. The the father was asked, "What shall we call this boy?" He said, "Since it took him three instead of nine months to come to this world, he must be called the royal courier."

32

They brought an eggplant dish to Sultan Mahmud when he was very hungry. It pleased him greatly and he said, "Eggplant is a tasty dish." A court favorite who was present gave a lecture in praise of the eggplant. When the sultan was full, he declared, "Eggplant is a very harmful thing." Then the same courtier made an exaggerated speech on the harmfulness of the eggplant. The sultan asked in amazement, "You wretch, how come you are not praising it anymore?" The man said, "I am your courtier, not that of the eggplant. I have to say something to please you, not the eggplant."

33

Mas'ud the astrologer saw Majd al-Din Homayounshah¹⁵ working in his garden. He asked, "What are you planting?" "Nothing very useful," was the answer. The other retorted, "Your father was the same. He too never sowed a useful seed."

There was a Turk who would go to public baths and after coming out would claim that his clothes had been stolen. He became such a nuisance that no bath-keeper would allow him in. One day he went to a bath and took several witnesses that he would not make any claims and whatever he said would be a lie. When he went in, the bath-keeper took all of his clothes and sent them home. The Turk came out and could not make any claims. He came out naked and fastened his quiver and scabbard on his naked body and said, "O Musulmans, I would not make any claims, but you ask the bath-keeper if I had come here dressed like this."

Atabek Sulghurshah¹⁶ gave Majd al-Din¹⁷ a shirt made of Egyptian cotton on which was written, "There is no God but Allah." It was worn out, and Majd al-Din did not like it. Someone in the room asked, "How is it that the writing is not followed by 'Muhammad is His Prophet'?" He replied, "This was made before Muhammad was made a prophet."¹⁸

Sheikh Sharaf al-Din Daragazi¹⁹ asked Muwlana 'Azud al-Din: "Where has God mentioned the clergy in the *Koran*?" "Next to the learned," he said, "where He says, 'Are the learned and the ignorant equals?'"²⁰

A certain person claimed to be a prophet, so they took him before the Caliph Ma'mun.²¹ The caliph said, "This is caused by hunger, which has unsettled his brain." He called his cook and said, "Take this man to the kitchen. Give him good food and scented drinks and make him a fine bed until his brain is rested." The man stayed in the kitchen for some time in luxury. His brain was rested. One day, Ma'mun remembered him, and asked for him. He asked, "Does Gabriel still appear before you?" He said, "Yes, and he told me, 'A wonderful chance has fallen into your hands. Such an easy life has never been granted even to a prophet. Take care not to leave this place.'"

A Qazvini²² had lost his donkey and was going around the town saying

that he was grateful. He was asked why he was so grateful. He said, "If I had been riding the donkey I would have been lost for the past four days."

39

Juha came to a certain village and was hungry. He heard a funeral dirge from a house so he went in and said, "Give alms for I will make this man come to life." The dead man's relatives served him food and treated him well. When he was full, he said, "Take me to the deceased." Seeing the man he asked, "What was his profession?" They said that he was a weaver. He bit his finger in anguish and said, "Alas! If he had been anything else I could bring him back to life, but the weavers, when they die, they really die."

40

A Christian got converted to Islam and was being taken around the town in a procession. Another Christian saw him and said, "Were there not enough Moslems that you became converted too?"

41

A woman had a lover called Mohammad, who was a tailor. One day her husband was consulting her, saying, "Tomorrow I want to bring some friends home. Name anyone who could make a good addition." The woman said, "Also bring Mohammad the tailor." He invited him too. When they had eaten dinner, they got up from the banquet. Mohammad went inside and amused himself with the lady of the house. The husband found out and went into the room. He tried to catch him, but he could only get hold of his penis. Being wet it slipped out of his hand and Mohammad got away. The husband chased him all the way to his house but could not catch him. When he got back, his wife was indignant and would not speak to him. He said, "Dear lady, what sin have I committed that you hold me in disfavor? I brought Mohammad the tailor as you commanded me, I fed him. You made love to him, I cleaned his penis and accompanied him all the way until he reached the safety of his own home. If there has been any shortcoming on my part, please point it out so that I can apologize for it. And if there is any other service that I can render, tell me and I will rise to the occasion.

Muwlana Sharaf al-Din of Damghan²³ passed by the door of a mosque. The mosque attendant had cornered a dog that had wandered inside, and was beating him. The dog was barking loudly. Muwlana opened the door and the dog got away. He reproached the attendant, saying, "O friend, please excuse the lack of intelligence on the part of the dog, because of which he had entered the mosque. Do you ever see any of us who are intelligent inside the mosque?"

A beggar came to the door of a house asking for a piece of bread. A young girl was home and she told him, "There is not anything." He asked for some firewood. She said, "There is none." "A bit of salt," he said. She said, "There is not any." He said, "A pitcher of water." She said, "There is not one." He asked, "Where is your mother?" The girl replied, "She has gone to the funeral of a relative." The beggar said, "From what I have seen of the state of your house, ten other relatives should come and mourn for you."

A man from Shiraz was cooking bhang in a mosque. The attendant saw him and rebuked him severely. The Shirazi looked at him and found him to be a lame, bald and half-blind man. He said, "You fool, God has not blessed you with such a special favor that you now should defend His house so well."

An Arab went to Mecca on pilgrimage and his turban was stolen. He said, "O God, once in my life I came to Your house and You had my turban stolen. If You ever see me here again have my teeth broken."

A woman had very beautiful eyes. One day, she brought a charge against her husband before a judge. The judge was licentious and got attracted by her eyes. Desire overwhelmed him, and so he took her side. The husband understood what was going on and pulled her veil off her head. The judge saw her face and found it rather unattractive. He said, "Rise up,

oh woman. You have the eyes of the oppressed and the face of the oppressor.”

47

A policeman came across a drunk Qazvini one night. He told him, “Stand up so I can take you to the jail.” The man said, “If I were able to make my way, I would rather go to my own house.”

48

A man made ablutions in the public bath. The bath attendant asked for the money. Having none, he passed a wind and said, “Now, I owe you nothing.”

49

A Khorasani was carrying a ladder in order to pick fruits from a garden. The owner of the garden arrived and said, “What are you doing in my garden?” he said, “I am selling this ladder.” “In my garden?” the man asked. The Khorasani replied, “This is my ladder and I can sell it wherever I want.”

50

A certain Qazvini had a hatchet and every night he would put it in a safe place and secure the door. His wife asked him, “Why do you put the hatchet in this place?” “So that the cat won’t get it.” She asked, “What would the cat do with a hatchet?” He said, “You are a foolish woman. He took six pieces of meat that were not worth ten cents. Do you think I am going to leave a hatchet laying around that I paid six coins for?”

51

Muwlana Qotb al-Din²⁴ visited a great person. He asked him, “How are you feeling?” The man said, “I had a fever and my neck was bothering me. But fortunately, one or two days ago my fever broke; however, my neck still hurts.” Muwlana said, “Be of good cheer and let us hope that in a few days that will break too.”

52

A certain Khorasani went to a doctor and said, “My wife is sick. What should I do?” The physician said, “Tomorrow, bring me a urine specimen in a bottle so that I can look at it and tell you.” By chance, the Khorasani also became sick that day. The next day, he brought the urine specimen

to the doctor. A string was tied around the middle of the specimen. The doctor asked, "Why have you tied this string?" He said, "I became sick too. The upper half is my urine and the lower half that of my wife." The next day, the doctor related this story at every assembly. A Qazvini was present and said, "Pardon this lack of intelligence on the part of the Khorasanis. Tell me, was the string tied to the inside of the specimen bottle or the outside?"

53

A man told his friend, "I had fifty pounds of wheat. Before I knew it, the mice had eaten it all." His friend said, "I had fifty pounds of wheat also, but before the mice knew it, I had eaten it all."

54

A man asked a preacher what was the name of Satan's wife. He said, "Come here, I will tell you." The man went to him and the preacher said in his ear, "You pimp, how should I know?" When he returned to his place, he was asked what the answer was. He said, "Whoever wants to know should go ask his holiness himself."

55

An Isfahani peasant went to the house of Khajeh Baha al-Din Sahib Divan²⁵ and told his chamberlain, "Tell your master that the Lord is outside waiting to see him." Khajeh summoned him and asked, "Are you the Lord?" The man replied, "Yes." Khajeh asked, "How?" The peasant replied, "Formerly I was the Lord of the village, the garden, and the house. But your agents have forcibly taken the village, the garden, and the house, so I am only the Lord."

56

A Khorasani lost his donkey on a caravan. He took another one and put his goods on it. The owner of the donkey caught him and said, "This is mine." He denied it. They asked him, "Was your donkey a male or a female?" He said, "Male." They said, "This one is a female." He said, "Well, my donkey was not much of a male."

57

Someone saw a thief in his garden with a sack tied full of onions. He

said, "What are you doing in this garden?" The thief replied, "I was just going my way and suddenly a wind cast me into the garden." He asked, "Why did you dig up those onions?" He replied, "The wind seized me and so I grabbed the onions by the roots and pulled them out of the ground." The man said, "I can accept that, but who gathered them and tied them in that sack?" He said, "By God, I was just thinking about that when you came."

58

A Qazvini lost a ring in his house. He was searching for it in the street because it was too dark in the house.

59

Someone wanted to say his prayers in the house of a Qazvini, and asked him, "Which way is the *qibleh* ?²⁶" The Qazvini replied, "I have been in this house only two years. How do I know which way is the *qibleh*."

60

An Arab was saying his prayers behind an Imam, who, after reciting the first chapter (of the *Koran* ²⁷), quoted, "The wandering Arabs are the ones most hardened in disbelief and hypocrisy." The Arab was annoyed and gave the man a hard slap on the neck. In the second part of the prayer the Imam recited, "And of the wandering Arabs there is he who believeth in God and the Day of Judgement." The Arab said, "You crook, the slap changed your mind."

61

A poet saw a man making love to a boy in a mosque. He made a big fuss and rebuked him for committing sodomy in the house of Lord. The man kept watching the poet, and one day saw him doing the same thing in the mosque. He said, "What was that you were telling me, and now you are doing it yourself?" The poet answered, "Have you never heard of poetic license?"

62

The governor of Nishapur said to Shams al-Din, the physician, "I can not digest food. What do you advise me to do?" he replied, "Eat what has already been digested."

A woman was present at the meeting of a certain preacher. When she came home, she told her husband, "The preacher said that they will build a house in heaven for whoever has intercourse with his lawful wife tonight." That night when they went to bed, the wife said, "Get up if you desire a house in heaven." The man made love to his wife once. After some time passed, she said, "You have built one house for yourself. Now build another one for me." So he built another one. After a while she said, "What shall we do if we have company?" So the man built a guest house as well. The next day, the man caught his wife unaware and had anal intercourse with her, saying, "Anyone who has built three houses in heaven should build at least one in hell."

A certain Qazvini had a toothache so he went to a surgeon. The surgeon said, "Give me two coins. I and will pull it out." The Qazvini said, "I won't pay more than one coin." When the pain became unbearable, he was compelled to pay two coins. He brought his face close and showed him a tooth that was not bothering him. The surgeon pulled it. The Qazvini said, "I made a mistake." Then he showed him the tooth that was really aching, and the surgeon pulled it out. The Qazvini said, "You wanted to take advantage of me and take two coins, but I am more clever than you. I made a fool of you and got my own way so that I got two teeth pulled out for the price of one."

A man got married. On the wedding night, when he and his wife were left alone, the man went out to do something. When he came back to the room, he saw the bride piercing her ears with a needle. When they made love he found out that she was not a virgin. He got angry and said, "Lady, the holes which you should have bored in your father's house, you are doing here, and the one you should do here, has already been done in your father's house."

A certain man claimed to be a prophet. They brought him before the caliph. He asked him, "What is your miracle?" He said, "My miracle is that whatever is in your heart I can read it. What is now in the hearts of all is the belief that I am lying."

A great man had a beautiful wife named Zohreh. He had to go on a journey, so he had a white dress made for her and gave his servant a bowl of indigo dye and said, "Whenever the lady of the house commits an indecent act, put one finger of dye on her dress, so that when I return, if you are not here, the state of things will be clear to me." After a while, the master wrote to the servant:

Has Zoreh done anything which is a disgrace,
To have on her dress any indigo trace?

The servant replied:

If in the master's return there be further delay,
A leopard will become your beloved Zohreh!

A Qazvini on his death bed passed wind. Someone asked, "Are you not ashamed before the people present?" He said, "Where am I going to see them again, so that I should be ashamed before them?"

A man from Shiraz was making love to his wife. She had not removed her pubic hair, as was the custom, and it was too long. He got annoyed and said, "This is all right with me since I am your husband and intimate with you, but you should really be ashamed if a stranger finds you like this."

A man from Luristan was present at the congregation of a preacher. The preacher was saying, "The bridge of *Sirat* (which leads to heaven) is narrower than a strand of hair and sharper than the blade of a sword, and on the day of Judgment everyone must pass over it." The man asked, "Is there a rail or something to hold on to?" The preacher said, "No." The Lur said, "You are making a fool of yourself, sir. Not even a bird can pass over it."

A certain judge had colic. The doctor told his family to give him a wine enema. They poured a lot of wine into him, and the man got drunk. He

started beating his family and yelling. They asked his son, "What is your father doing?" He said, "He is making a riot from his bottom."

72

They asked a preacher, "What is Islam?" He replied, "I am a preacher. What should I know about Islam?"

73

A Turkman had a lawsuit. He filled a vat with plaster and covering it with butter gave it to the judge. The judge took the side of the Turkman, and passing the verdict in his favor gave him a sealed letter as he had desired. After a week the case was discovered, and the judge called him and said, "Bring back the letter. There is an error in it, which should be corrected." The Turkman replied, "There is no error in the letter. If there is any it must be in the vat."

74

A Qazvini came back from Baghdad in the summer. They asked him, "What were you doing there?" He said, "Sweating."

75

A poor dervish was saying his prayers with his shoes on. A thief who had his eyes on the shoes said, "It is not right to pray with your shoes on." The dervish, who knew the intention of the man, replied, "If my prayers are not accepted, at least I will have my shoes."

76

A Qazvini went on a lion hunt. He was roaring and breaking wind. They asked him, "Why are you roaring?" He said, "So that the lion will be afraid." "Why are you farting?" They asked. He said, "Because I am afraid too."

77

One night a thief broke into the house of a poor man. The man woke up and said, "My dear fellow, what are you searching for in the dark we look for in day light and don't find."

78

A Qazvini was going to battle without any arrows. He was saying that the arrows will come from the enemy. Someone said, "Perhaps they will not come." He replied, "Then there won't be any fight."

79

A witty man saw some fried chicken on the table of a miser. It had been served for three days in a row, and still it was completely not eaten. He said, "The life of this fried chicken after death had been longer than before it."

80

Talhak said, "I had a dream that was half true and half false." They said, "What was it?" He replied, "I dreamed that I was carrying a treasure on my shoulders. It was so heavy that I wet myself. When I got up I found out that my bed was wet but there was no trace of the treasure."

81

The wife of Talhak gave birth to a child. Sultan Mahmud asked him, "What it is?" He replied, "What else is born to poor people? Either a boy or a girl." The sultan said, "What else is born to the great men?" Talhak said, "Something that swears at people and destroys their lives."

82

Talhak was asked, "What is cuckoldry?" He replied, "This you have to ask of judges."

83

Talhak's mule was stolen. Someone said, "It is your own fault since you did not watch it." Another man said, "The groom is to blame for leaving the stable door open." Talhak said, "In this case, the thief is not to be blamed at all."

84

A man hard of hearing said to a Qazvini, "I heard you have got

married.” He said, “By God, you don’t hear anything. How did you hear this?”

85

A man made his guest sleep in the downstairs of his house, but in the middle of the night he heard him laughing upstairs. He said, “What are you doing there?” The guest said, “I rolled up in my sleep.” He replied, “But people roll down, not up.” The guest said, “That is exactly why I am laughing.”

86

A tailor was making a cloak for a Turk. The Turk was so watchful that the tailor could not steal a piece of the material while cutting it. Suddenly the tailor farted, and the Turk laughed and laughed until he fell on his back and the tailor managed to accomplish what he wanted to do. Then the Turk got up and said, “Master tailor, do that again.” The tailor replied, “No, it is not right, because the cloak will become too tight.”

87

They gave a Qazvini a job as nightwatchman in a certain town. One afternoon he arrested a man and said, ‘I am the nightwatchman and I must take you to jail.’ He said, “A nightwatchman does not arrest people during the day.” The Qazvini said, “Where will I find you tonight?” People gathered around and prevented the Qazvini from taking the man. He said, “All right, I’ll let you go now, but you must promise to return tonight.”

88

A certain Khorasani had a very thin horse. They asked him, “Why don’t you give this horse some barley?” He said, “Every night he eats ten pounds of barley.” They asked, “Why then is he so thin?” “Because,” he said, “I owe him one month’s barley.”

89

Majd al-Din Hamgar²⁸ had a very ugly wife who had gone on a trip. One day when he was at a meeting his slave came running in, saying, “Oh, master, your lady has come down to the house,” He said, “I wish the house had come down on my lady.”

90

Sultan Mahmud was lying down with his head on the knee of Talhak. Suddenly he asked, "What is your relation to cuckolds?" He said, "I am their pillow."

91

Shams al-Din Muzaffar²⁹ was saying to his students, "One should learn in childhood because, whatever you learn in childhood you never forget. For instance, I learned the first chapter of the *Koran* when I was a child, and now after fifty years, though I have never repeated it, I still remember it."³⁰

92

A certain person shot an arrow at a bird but missed. His friend shouted, "Bravo!" The archer was upset and said, "You are making fun of me." The friend said, "No. I was saying 'Bravo' to the bird."

93

Someone had stolen Talhak's shoes when he was in a mosque and thrown them into a church. He said in amazement, "It is strange that I am a Moslem and my shoes are Christians."

94

A preacher said from his pulpit, "Whenever a man dies drunk, he is buried drunk, and he will rise drunk from his grave." A man from Khorasan who was at the foot of the pulpit said, "By God, one bottle of such a wine is worth a hundred gold coins!"

95

Muwlana Qotb al-Din was making love to someone in his room in the school. Suddenly someone put his hand on the door of the room and opened it. Muwlana said, "What do you want?" He said, "I want somewhere to sit down and say my prayers." Muwlana replied, "Are you blind? Don't you see that this place is so small that one has to go on top of the other?"

96.

Someone played music in the presence of Sultan Abu Sa'id.³¹ He took the hand of Muwlanā 'Azud al-Dīn³² and asked him to dance. While he was dancing, someone said, "Oh, Muwlanā, you are not dancing in good tune." He replied, "I don't dance by the tune, I dance by decree."

For the feast of Nowruz³³ Sultan Mahmud gave everyone a robe of honor, but he ordered a donkey saddle to be given to his jester Talhak. He put it on his back and came to the presence of the Sultan and, turning to the dignitaries, said, "Gentlemen, see how gracious the king has been to me. For you he has given robes of honor from the treasury to you, whereas for me he has taken out his own robe and given it to me!"³⁴

A certain person had eaten some yogurt, and a little of it had spilled on his beard. Someone asked him, "What have you been eating?" He said, "A young pigeon." He said, "You must be telling the truth since its droppings can still be seen on your beard."

During a famine Juha arrived at a village and heard that the headman was ill. Juha went to his house and it chanced that they were baking bread. He said, "He could be cured if you bring me some bread with butter and honey." So they did. Juha kept putting the butter and honey inside the bread, turning each morsel around the head of the sick man, and then putting it into his mouth until everything was finished. Finally he said, "Today's treatment is enough. I will be back tomorrow." Soon after the headman died. They asked Juha, "What kind of treatment was this?" He replied, "Don't say anything. If I had not eaten it, I would have starved to death even before him."

A man brought a sheikh home as his guest and put some cushions behind him. Behind the cushions there were some gold coins, and the sheikh stole them. The man searched for the gold coins and did not find them. The sheikh said, "Tell me whoever you suspect from those present so that we

can search them.” The host said, “ Sheikh, I suspect those present but I am sure of you.”

101

Harun³⁵ asked Bohlul³⁶, “Who is the most dear to you? ” He replied, “The one who feeds me well.” Harun said, “I will feed you well. Then you will be my friend.” Bohlul said, “You can not have friendship on credit.”

102

A woman had survived two husbands and her third husband was deathly ill. She was crying and asking him, “Oh, my dear, where are you going and who do you entrust me to?” He replied, “To the fourth cuckold.”

103

A woman asked Talhak, “Where is the candy shop?” He said, “Inside the lady’s skirt.”

104

Abu Bakr Robabi³⁷ took the harpist Khar Maghzi³⁸ home as his guest. It was a cold winter night and the latter could not sleep because of the cold. He said, “Master Abu Bakr, throw something on my bed.” He put a piece of old rushmat that was in the house on him. After a while Khar Maghzi asked for something more. He brought a ladder which he had at home and put it on the bed. After a while the guest asked for something warm. The day before the neighbors had washed their laundry and there was a tub with some water still in it, and Abu Bakr put it on top of the ladder. Khar Maghzi moved and the water spilled and went through the rushmat and he cried out, “Oh, Master Abu Bakr, be kind enough to remove the top blanket, for now I am sweating.”

105

A preacher was giving a sermon and among the audience was a man who was crying mournfully. The preacher said, “Learn sincerity from this man who is really touched and is weeping.” The man got up and said,

“Sir, I don’t know what you are talking about, but I had a goat with a red beard just like yours, who died two days ago. Whenever you talk and move your beard I remember that goat and can not stop crying.”

106

A preacher of the pulpit was saying, “Writing the names of Adam and Eve and hanging them in the house will keep Satan away.” Talhak got up and said, “Sir, while they were living next to God in heaven, Satan seduced them. How do you expect their names to keep him away from our houses?”

107

Satan was asked, “Which class of people do you like most?” He said, “Salesmen,” They asked the reason. He said, “I was content with lies from them, but they added false oaths as well.”

108

A coffin was being carried to the grave and a poor man was standing on the road with his son. The son asked, “Father, what is in this?” He replied, “A person.” The son asked him again, “Where are they taking him?” The man said, “To a place where there is no food, no clothes, no wood, no fire, no gold, no silver, not a mat or a rug.” The son said, “Surely, father, they are taking him to our house.”³⁹

109

The father of Juha had a slave-girl with whom he would occasionally have intercourse. One night Juha crept into her bed and embraced her. She asked, “Who are you?” He said, “Me, my father.”

110

There was a mad man called Ibrahim in Baghdad. One day he became a guest in the house of the vizier to the caliph, but he could not get anything to eat except some loaves of barley bread. After a while they said that

a three-karat sapphire was missing, and so they stripped and searched everyone present, but did not find the jewel. Believing that someone had swallowed it, they decided to keep Ibrahim and some others in the house for three days, so that the gem might come out from one of them. After three days Ibrahim saw the caliph and shouted: "O caliph! I have eaten only a loaf of barley bread in this house and have been confined here for the last three days, with you saying that I have stolen a three-karat sapphire. You who have much luxury and have wasted so much wealth, what will be done to you?"⁴⁰

111

A grammarian was on board a ship. He asked a sailor, "Have you studied syntax?" He said, "No." The grammarian said, "Half of your life is wasted." The next day a strong storm hit the ship and it was on the verge of sinking. The sailor asked the grammarian, "Have you learned to swim?" He said, "No." The answer was, "All of your life is wasted."⁴¹

112

A king had three wives: Persian, Arab, and Coptic. One night he was sleeping with the Persian and asked her what time it was. She said, "Morning is near." He asked, "How do you know?" She said, "Because the fragrance of flowers and grass has filled the air and the birds have begun to sing." The next night he was with the Arab wife and he asked the same question. She said, "Morning is near because the beads of my necklace are cold and they make me cold." The third night the king was with his Coptic wife and asked the same question. She said, "It is morning because I have to go to the bathroom."

113

On the gate of a palace of the Chinese Borkan Khan⁴² they have painted pictures of three men: one sitting sad and thoughtful, the second beating himself on the head and pulling his beard, and the third dancing joyously. Above the first one they have written: "This is the man who is thinking of marrying." The second inscription said: "This is the man who has gotten married and is sorry." The third one said: "This is the man who has gotten a divorce and is happy."

114

An Arab was taken to the caliph. He saw him on a throne with everyone else standing, and he addressed him, "O God, peace be upon you." The caliph said, "I am not God." The Arab said, "Peace be upon you, o Gabriel." The caliph said, "I am not Gabriel." "The Arab asked, "If you are neither God nor Gabriel, why are you sitting so high and all alone? Come down among the people."

115

Someone asked, "Muwlanā 'Azud al-Din, which is colder, the ice of Sultanieh or the ice of Abhar?"⁴³ He said, "Your question is even colder."

116

A Qazvini went to a physician and said, "My beard aches." He asked, "What have you eaten?" He replied, "Bread and ice." The doctor said, "Go and die. Neither your food resembles that of a human being nor your sickness."

117

A woman was sitting next to her lover during a sermon. While the preacher was describing the wings of Gabriel, she threw the corner of her veil onto the knees of her lover and touched him. He had an erection and she cried out. The preacher was pleased with this sudden expression of emotion and said, "O, true lover, did the wing of Gabriel reach your soul or heart that you let out such an amorous sigh?" She replied, "I don't know about Gabriel's wing, but suddenly the trumpet of Seraphiel reached my hand and made me scream."

118

A peasant had a cow and a donkey with a foal. The donkey died and he had to give the cow's milk to the foal until there was nothing left. One day he got depressed and said, "O God, take this foal from me so that my children can have the milk." The next day when he went to the stable he found out that the cow had died. He got so angry that he exclaimed, "O God, I said take the foal, not the cow. Don't you know them apart?"

A beggar reached a village and saw a number of its elders sitting in a place. He said, "Give me something, otherwise I will do what I did to the last village." They grew afraid and thought that he was a sorcerer or a saint and might cause some harm to the village. They gave him whatever he asked for. Then they asked him, "What did you do to the other village?" He said, "I begged there, but they did not give me a thing so I left the village and I would have done the same if you had disappointed me."

A gypsy scolded his son and said, "You do no work and waste your life in idleness. How often must I tell you to practice somersaults and learn how to dance on a rope and make a dog jump through a hoop so that you can achieve something in your life. If you don't listen to me, I swear by God I will send you to the school to learn their good-for-nothing sciences and become a scholar so as to live in misery and adversity and never be able to earn a penny wherever you go."

Rats against Cats

Rats against Cats

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Prologue

If thou hast attained to wisdom and refinement,
Thou shalt listen unto the tale of rats and cats.
A tale it is, the true meaning whereof
(Shouldst thou perceive the same)
Will surely steep thee in deep wonder.

1—The Cat

O learned, wise and intelligent one
Listen unto this tale of rats and cats
It is a tale told in goodly verse,
Even as a string of rolling pearls

* * * *

Destiny, heaven-ordained, once so ordained
That there should live in Kerman¹ town
A cat, but no mere cat; a dragon of a cat.
Drum-bellied, shield-chested,
Serpent-tailed, eagle-clawed.²
His roaring was terror to the rapacious panther;
And on one occasion at least, they say,
When he arrived unawares
Upon several lions feasting on honest prey
The latter prudently, and peacefully,
Turned tail and fled, leaving to him the feast

2—The Drunken Rat

One day to the wine-vault he went,
To make easy prey of the rats,
Behind the wine-cask he sat at ambush
Like a robber of the desert.

Suddenly from a cranny up the wall

A clamorous little rat
Jumped on the edge of the cask
Wherein his nose he dipped, and drank.
And was anon as drunk, with wine,
As a lion that in the fullness of pride and power
Gloryingly roars.

So he said: "I wonder where on earth
Is the Cat hiding for fear of me.
Let him, (ha ha, the shrewd old thing)
But step out and show himself,
And I will simply wring his head off his neck,
And fill his skin with chaff
To me less than a contemptible dog³ is he
For never dares he face me in fair fight's open field"

The Cat, he heard all this and was silent;
But merely kept filing his claws and teeth,
Then, all of a sudden, crying: "Thou art doomed,"
He pounced upon the poor rat and caught him,
Like a tiger, a deer of the mountains.

The rat said: "I am thy most unworthy slave,⁴
Pardon thou this my sin.
Foul was my speech, it has made foul my mouth.
As if I had eaten of filth itself;
But it was my drunkenness that spoke, not I;
And much filth may the drunken eat
Innocently."

But the Cat said: "Rats!...Lie thou less.
Thy words are deceit and falsehood,
Whereto my ears are deaf.
Yet I heard well what thy tongue uttered;
And now, thy wife shall wail for thee⁵,
Thou contemptible Mussulman."

3—The Holy One

In fine, the Cat killed that rat and ate him;
But then, ah, then,
Unto the mosque he went,
And took holy ablution on his hands and face
And prayed unto the Lord,
And most devout was he.

“Mighty Creator, I humbly repent’
Nevermore shall my teeth rend the poor rats,
Oh, nevermore...
And to make amends, O Clement One,
For this unrighteously spilled blood,
Two mans⁶ of bread I will give in alms to the poor.”

Indeed, so passionate was his plea
That his tears began to flow,
A great, terrible cat though he was,
His tears freely did flow...

As Chance would have it, behind the pulpit,
A little rat there was.
Quickly he carried the news to Ratland,
“Tidings, gladdest tidings.
The Cat has repented,
And now is a virtuous Mussulman,
With mine own eyes I saw him in the mosque,
Passionately praying, devoutly wailing,
A rosary had he in his meek hand,
And diligently counted prayers on the beads
Even His Holiness our Mullah.”

Hearing which all the rats laughed for joy.
Oh, how they laughed for joy...

4—Food-offerings

Forthwith up jumped seven rats ,
Each a noble chieftain,
And took up for the Cat
(So full were their simple hearts of the love of him)
Presents varicoloured.

One bore on his palm a flagon of wine,
The other a dish of fine roast lamb,
The third a tray full of raisins,
The fourth a huge plate of big dates,
The fifth a cake of cheese,
the sixth a bag of yogurt, with bread,
And the seventh a khanche⁸ of pilaw.
(The which on his head he carried)
Seasoned with choicest Oman-lemon juice.⁹

Thus to the Cat they went, those seven rats,
His constant praise upon their lips.

And when they reached their journey's end,
And were admitted into his blessed presence,
They reverently greeted him, bowing low,
Then bashfully, most bashfully,
A thousand and one polite protestations making,
They thus: "May our heads be strewn in thy path,
Our lives sacrificed to thy will.
Thy servants we, and as of servants it behooves,
A present we bring thee,
A most unworthy present it is indeed,
But may we hope that thou wilt deign to accept it,
Honouring and gladdening us thereby,
Because thy heart is great?"

Replied the Cat: "It is written
'Verily the portion of the faithful
Shall not fail to reach them duly,¹⁰
For heaven's prime care it is
To see that it shall duly reach them.'

Long days have I spent in pious hunger,
Bountiful Allah well doth know,
Many a long day—fasting,
To please and appease Him,
And whoso performeth the divine will,
Surely his portion shall increase,
Even as mine has.

But...I do beg your pardon,
I forget all about manners;
I am so rapt, you know—
Why stay you so near the lowly threshold?

Come forward, please, just a few steps,
And take the seats of honour (oh, no trouble)
Nearer my heart.
Come forward, my dear ones."

The little rats obediently advanced,
But their little bodies quivered like willow-branches.

Suddenly the Cat sprang upon them,

Like a warrior¹¹ on the day of battle.
Five select rats he caught at once,
Each a noble chieftain—
Two in one hand, ¹²two in the other,
And one between the teeth—
And roared like a lion.

5—Complaints

The two rats that saved their poor lives,
To Ratland forthwith took the news.
Saying: “How can you sit still, O rats.
Dust on your heads, ye young gallants.
The Cat with claws and teeth,
Has torn five chief rats to pieces.”

The little rats, in mourning for their chiefs,
Wore black, and threw dust on their heads.
And wailed, and wailed...

But at last they unanimously said:
“We will go to the capital of His Majesty King Rat
For it is incumbent upon us all
To lay our woe before our king—
What hideous wrongs we have suffered
At the hands of the feline horde.”

King Rat, he sat upon his throne,
He saw the multitude of rats in the distance,
And he wondered...

They all bowed to him together,
Saying: “O Monarch of the age, ¹³O King of Kings,
Hear thou what ails our hearts.
The Cat has done us hideous wrong,

Whereas he formerly took one of us each year,
Nowadays his rapacity has so increased,
That it scarcely knows any bounds—
He takes five of us at a time,
And withal professes to be a chaste Mussulman.”
The king, his ire was roused,
He said: “O my dear hearts, grieve not.
Such vengeance shall I wreak upon the Cat,
As shall be a tale told the wide world over.”

6—Preparations

And lo! within a week,
An army had the king equipped
Of three hundred and thirty thousand rats,
Each soldier-rat armed with bow and arrow,
And lance, and trenchant sword.

When the grand army had assembled
From Khorasan, Gilan¹⁴ and thereabouts,
A peerless rat who was army vizier¹⁵ to the king,
(Astute was he, and brave, and judicious)
Said: "One of us should go
To the Cat in Kerman town, and say:
'Come thou to the capital, professing servitude,
Or be prepared for war.'"

A little rat there was, royal courier of old,
He to Kerman town sped,
And most gently addressing the Cat, said:
"I come to your sire, as courier from the King,
His Majesty is gathering his vast army,
That you may go to the capital professing servitude
Else be prepared for war."

The Cat said: "Rats!...
Vile is the Rat, and viler are his doings.
And as to this his message,
It is unworthy of our notice.
I will not move from Kerman town."

But secretly he did muster
A great army of cats,
From Isfahan, and Yazd and Kerman town itself,
And when his army was ready,
"To the battlefield!" was his immediate order.

7—The Great Battle

The rats' army by way of the desert marched forth,
The cats' army by way of the mountain,
The two armies in the open plain
Met and did battle, both bravely fighting.

Hand to hand in every corner of that great battlefield
Rats and cats fought each other Rostam-like.¹⁶

And so many of them were slaughtered, that space
Was scarce for the hoofs of the warriors' steeds,
And Numbers failed to keep abreast of casualties.

Anon, the Cat gathered a chosen band, and straight
At the heart of the rats' army he charged;
He broke the first line, and
Pierced the second line, and
Still advanced, killing many capital rats.

Confusion spread among the rats.
Two columns, shattered, turned to flee,
Amid loud curses from the rest.

Just then, a little rat
Felled the Cat's horse...,
Down went the Cat,
And level with the dust was he,
Groaning in dire agony....

The rats shouted: "Allah, Allah,
Catch them, catch the fighting giants."

Forward sprang seven select rats,
Roaring like so many lions,
And caught the Cat, and bound his hands together,
And took him to the King.
The Cats' army, left leaderless,
Knew a defeat no army had yet known,
And those few cats that could save their poor lives
Dispersed in shame and haste toward Kerman town.

The little rats, because of the great victory,
Beat drums of joy.
All the drums that were in the capital.
Beat hard,
And long...

8—The Hanging

King Rat, he sat upon his throne, and no sooner
Saw he the captive Cat in the distance
Than he shouted:
"Accursed, vile, ignorant wretch,
Why didst thou eat my grand army?
What didst thou think of me—King Rat
Wast not afraid of my wrath?"

Black is my face—with shame¹⁸
But pardon thou my sin
For thy mercy is great.”

Thundered King Rat: “To the gallows with him
The black-faced dog of Kerman.
I will come to the market-place myself
Where he shall swing for the noble rat-blood
He has treacherously shed.”

Forthwith King Rat mounted his riding-elephant
And, his army having gathered—
Wildly cheering—in front and behind him,
Moved forward to the market-place.

The Cat, both his hands bound together,
Stood at the foot of the gallows
Bitterly wailing.

King Rat uttered the dread command:
“Hang the black-faced dog of Kerman.
Why breathes he yet?”

There were bewildered whisperings—
But not a rat stirred!¹⁹
For there was never a rat
That dared step forth
And hang the Cat from the gallows,
King Rat bristled with rage from ears to tail,
And cried: “You cowardly, contemptible rats
Shame on you all.
You are good for nought but to be devoured by cats.”
And forthwith drawing his trenchant sword
He rushed forward to sever the Cat’s head
From his shoulders...

But the sight of King Rat so roused the Cat
That all his courage surging within him
(Even as boiling water in a cauldron)
Strongly he knelt
And struggled like a lion
And tore the cords asunder with his teeth
And caught the little rats and flung them down
So hard he flung them down
That level with the dust were they
And never rose again.

The army fled in one direction
King Rat in another²⁰
Elephant and elephant-rider
With sceptre and throne, and crown and court
Came to nought...

This strange story is a souvenir
From 'Obeyd of Zakan
And thou, who art as dear as life to me
Learn thou what it teacheth,
For behind every tale a moral is—
The which shouldst thou perceive,
Thou shalt attain to happiness;
Therefore, having read the story of rats and cats,
Think, and see what meaning lies behind it, dear son.

Epilogue

What of rats, what of cats and what of war?
Learn thou what was meant by it all.
Well said the sage
“In jest I told thee not these things
Break thou open the solid outer stone of jest and lo! within,
Thou shalt find a delectable kernel of Truth.”

Tehran, 15 March, 1933



2

Notes

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

1. Hamd Allah Mostofi, *Tarikh-e Guzida*, ed. A.H. Nawa'i, Tehran, 1957, pp. 845-6.
2. *Kulliyat-e 'Obeyd-e Zakani*, Tehran, 1953, p. 73.
3. E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia under Tartar Dominion*, Cambridge, 1920, III, pp. 232-3.
4. Gertrude Bell, *Poems from the Divan of Hafez*, London, 1928, pp. 8-10.
5. Bell, *op. cit.* pp. 10-11.
6. Ibn Battuta's *Travels* quoted by A.J. Arberry in *Shiraz: Persian City of Saints and Poets*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1960, p. 53.
7. *Kulliyat-e 'Obeyd*, pp. 67-69; 81-82.
8. A.J. Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, London, 1958, p. 297.
9. Khandamir, *Habib al-Siyar*, III, p. 275.
10. *Ibid.* 275.
11. Browne, *op.cit.*, III, p. 277.
12. Browne, *op.cit.*, III, p. 278. The fanaticism of Mubraiz al-Din Mohammad knew no bounds. It has been reported that around the year 1360-61 when he was the ruler of Bam and Kerman as well as Isfahan and Yazd in order "to strengthen the hand of the faith" in less than two years, he gathered four thousand manuscripts on philosophy and ordered them to be washed away. See *Asia-ye Haft Sang* by M.E.Bastani Parizi, Tehran, 1967, p.239.
13. *Kulliyat-e 'Obeyd*, p.126, cf. pp.123,111 & 129.
14. Dawlarshah Samarqandi, *Tazkirat ul-Shu'ara*, Tehran, 1958, p. 324, Browne, *op.cit.*, III, 223.
15. Browne, *op.cit.*, III pp. 234-5.
16. Browne, *op.cit.*, III pp. 279-80.
17. Browne, *op.cit.*, III p. 279.
18. *Kulliyat-e 'Obeyd*, p. 42.
19. *Kulliyat-e 'Obeyd*, (introduction of Iqbal) p. 25.
20. *Kulliyat-e 'Obeyd*, (introduction) pp. 37-8.
21. *Kulliyat-e 'Obeyd*, p. 92.
22. Humayun Farrokh, *Hafez-e Kharabati*, Tehran, 1976, I, p. 425.
23. Quoted by Farrokh, I, pp. 404-434.
24. Quoted by Farrokh I, p. 419.
25. Farrokh, *op.cit.* I p. 420.
26. Hafez, translated by Browne, *op.cit* III, p. 280.
27. See my article "Tanz va Enteqad dar Dastan-e Hayvanat" in *Alefba* IV, Tehran, pp. 16-18.
28. *Divan-e Hafez* ed. Mohammad Qazvini, p. 135.
29. *Divan-e Hafez*, *op.cit.*, pp. 33.

NOTES

THE ETHICS OF THE ARISTOCRATS

INTRODUCTION

1. A *hadith* where God tells the Prophet Mohammad: "Were it not for your sake we would not have created the world and the world to come." See Fruzanfar, *Ahadith-e Mathnavi, Tehran, 1955, p.172.*
2. *Koran*, 68:4.
3. This is a *hadith* reported by the Sunnite Moslems.
4. *Koran*, 17:85.
5. These couplets are from Ferdausi's *Shah-nama*, introduction.
6. This is a *hadith* attributed to the Prophet Mohammad.
7. This poem is from Nizami (circa 1140-1230).
8. This line comes from the *Gulistan* of Sa'di (Kaviani edition, p.16.)

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1. These lines are in Arabic. 'Obevd-e Zakani mockingly adopts the high-flown style of Muslim philosophers and brings in many Arabic quotations.
2. For the different stages (or *maqamat*) of Sufism see A. J. Arberry's *Sufism*.
3. *Koran*, 13:28.
4. *Koran*, 2:272.
5. I.e., there is no future life.
6. Mankind was believed to be the outcome of four elements and the working of the seven heavens.
7. Cf. *Rubaiyyat-e Omar Khayyam*, Lucknow edition of 1312, A.H., No.723:

Child of four elements and sevenfold heaven,
Who fume and sweat because of these eleven,
Drink! I have told you seventy times and seven,
Once gone, nor hell will send you back nor heaven.

The Quatrains of Omar Khayyam, tr. E. H. Whinfield, London, 1883, No. 431.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. The expression is originally in the Isfahani dialect: "Ay Agah Khonda ra bem gam mam kosh", "which means, please rape me but don't kill me."

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. Imam Hasan was the grandson of Mohammad and the son of Imam 'Ali. After the assassination of his father in 661 Hasan became the caliph, but before long he lost his position to his rival Mu'ayyad, and retired to Medina where he was poisoned and died nine years later.
2. Husain Ibn Mansur Hallaj was the great Iranian Sufi who was executed in Baghdad in 922 on account of his outwardly heretical and pantheistic say-

ings. For his life see E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, I, p.428 *et seq.*

3. 'Obeyd quotes the Koranic verse out of context in order to prove his point. The actual text is "Know that this present life is only a toy and a vain amusement; and worldly pomp, and the affection of glory among you, and the multiplying of riches and children are as the plants nourished by the air. The springing up whereof delighteth the husbandmen, afterwards they wither, so that thou seest the same turn yellow, and at length become dry stubble. *Koran*, 57:20.
4. *Koran*, 23:115
5. A proverb that comes from a poem by Ferdausi.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. A *hadith*.
2. *Koran*, 16:90.
3. Zahhak or Azhi Dahaka is the evil king of the Iranian saga who was brought to the throne by the devil. When the later kissed him on the shoulders, two serpents grew from each of them and they had to be fed by human brains every day.
4. Yazdigird I of the Sassanian dynasty (339-420), was an energetic and intelligent ruler who sought to put an end to the persecution of the followers of other sects. He was opposed by the Zoroastrian clerics and some of his chiefs. In Persian tradition he is consequently known as "The sinner".
5. Chosroes I (531-379) surnamed Anushiravan "the Blessed". He was not a particularly just king, but the Persian tradition depicts him so. In the time of 'Obeyd the pre-Islamic history of Iran was little known and consequently he follows the well known traditions of his time. A note on Anushiravan is also given in the notes to "One Hundred Maxims."
6. 'Umar Ibn Khattab, the second successor of the Prophet Mohammad.
7. Man is a weight about 3 kilos.
8. For Mu'awiyya see the notes to the "Arabic Stories".
9. Seyyids are the people who are descended from the Prophet or the Imams.
10. Abu Sa'id Bahador Khan (d. 1335) was the last king of the House of Hulagu.
11. This is well a well known proverb coming from the *Shah-nama*.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. *Koran*, 6:160.
2. *Koran*, 3:92
3. A *hadith* attributed to Mohammad.
4. *Koran*, 7:31
5. *Koran*, 6:141.
6. 'Obeyd is making a play upon the words which can not be properly translated. "*Ither*" is to give away and liberality, whereas "*anbar*" is hoarding. The two words are written in a very similar manner, the only difference is that one has five dots and the other two.
7. This is a famous line by Sa'di *Gulistan*, Furughi ed p. 193.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. In the original it is *fidelity*'' (*vafa*) which seems to be a mistake of the copyist for *viqar* (dignity). Since "fidelity" only appears in the title and never is repeated in the whole chapter. Christensen argues that it must have been "dignity." Furthermore, *vafa* is one of the subjects treated in the seventh chapter. See "Remarques sur les facettes de 'Ubaid-i-Zakani," *Acta Orientalia*, Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 1.
2. In Persian two consonants cannot occur at the beginning of a syllable; when this happens, the first or second consonant must be followed by a vowel.
3. This line is from Sa'di.
4. This line is from Sa'di's *Gulistan* (Frughi ed. p. 133)
5. *Koran*, 29:73.
6. In Islamic Traditions, "Sirat" is a bridge over hell which leads to heaven.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. *Koran*, 48:10.
2. Muhy al-Din Mohammad Ibn 'Ali Ibnu 'l-'Arabi (1165-1240), who was born in Murcia, Spain, lived in various cities of the Middle East, and died in Damascus. He is the author of many works, of which the *Fusus al-Hikam* (Bezels of Philosophy) is the most well known.
3. Shirin was the niece of the queen of Armenia who became the favorite wife of Khosrow Parviz, the Sassanian king. She committed suicide at the grave of Khosrow when he was killed by his son Shiruya. *Khosrow u Shirin* is one of the famous verse romances of Nizami (1141-1204), in which another man Farhad, a stone-cutter, is also in love with Shirin. According to Persian traditions he carves inscriptions and pictures on the Mount Bistun for the sake of her love, and when he treacherously is led to believe by Khosrow that Shirin has died, he kills himself.
4. Laili and Majnum were two famous Arab lovers whose tragic love has become the subject of many poems.
5. This line is in fact paraphrase of a story in the *Gulistan*, (Furaghi ed. p. 47) where the minister of Anushiravan, Buzurgmehr is criticized by the king and the dignitaries of the court for expressing his candid opinion. Then Sa'di adds:

Contradicting what the Sultan would say
Is to waste your life in this way.
Should the prince say "It is night" amidst noon-day,
Declare that you behold the moon and stars.
6. This is a well known line by Sa'di in the *Gulistan*, (Furughi ed pp. 13-14).
7. This is a line by Sa'di
8. *Koran*, 36:47.
9. *Koran*, 26:88.

NOTES TO DEFINITIONS

1. According to Islamic traditions there are two angels, Nakir and Munkar, who interrogate the dead.
2. *Tamgachi*, was an official in possession of a seal for collecting taxes.
3. The two holy places are Mecca and Madina, and whoever visits them is called *Haji al-Haramayn*.
4. The Anqa of the West is a legendary bird which is rarely seen.
5. This is the night in which the *Koran* is revealed to the Prophet Mohammad.
6. Tar is a musical instrument.
7. *Zul Qarnain* (a man with two horns) is supposed to be either Alexander or Cyrus the Great. Having two horns represents a terrible affliction. 'Obeyd equates such a condition with having two wives.
8. For *Vis va Ramin* see note 8 of "One Hundred Maxims".
9. Al-faraj ba'd al-Shidda, (Joy after sorrow) is in fact the name of a work in Arabic by Muhsin al-Tanunkhi. It was rendered into Persian by Mohammad 'Aufi, and then made into another collection of stories under the same name by Husain Mu'ayyid Dehistani.

NOTES TO "One Hundred Maxims"

1-Nasir al-Din Tusi (1201-1274) was a great philosopher, astronomer, mathematician and statesman. He was first in the service of the Isma'ilis of Alamut, and when Hulagu defeated them in 1256 he offered his services to him. Nasir al-Din rewrote many scientific and philosophical works that had been translated from Greek into Arabic and Persian, but unlike what Obeyd-e Zakani claims, he does not seem to have known Greek himself. The works of Tusi entitled *Awsaf al-Ashraf* (Descriptions of Noblemen) and *Akhlaq-e Nasiri* (Nasirian Ethics) seem to have been special objects of satire for 'Obeyd. Tusi in his *Nasirian Ethics* (tr. by G.M. Wickens, London, 1964, pp. 258-260) gives a number of maxims or "testaments" attributed to Plato that seem to have inspired 'Obeyd.

2-Chosroes I or Anushiravan (531-579) is the Sassanid king who is called "Just" or 'Blessed.'" However, this is a misnomer and he was not all that just. When he was the crown prince toward the end of his father's reign in conjunction, with the chief Magian priest, he massacred a large number of the followers of Mazdak, a contemporary prophet and reformer, in the year 528 A.D.

3-Anushiravan displayed a great interest in learning and literature. It was during his reign that the celebrated book of *Kalileh va Dimneh* as well as the game of chess were brought from India. Among didactical works of his reign a collection of maxims is attributed to his minister Buzorgmehr. But I could not find any reference to Taj Rabi'.

Apart from book of Buzorgmehr there is a versified version of *Anushiravan's Counsels*, which was probably written by a Persian poet of the late eleventh century. The poet's name is given as Sharif or Bada'eiyi. (See Charles Scheffer, *Chrestomathie Persane*, Paris, 1883, pp. 205-232. Sa'id Nafisi, "Pand Nameh-ye Anushiravan", *Mehr*, Tehran, 1934, Nos 2-3, pp. 181-8 and 254-64.) Interestingly enough some maxims in this book somewhat correspond to what we find in the

“One Hundred Maxims” of Obeyd. Here are some examples: “Do not lodge near the palace of the king”; “Do not expect fidelity of gossip-mongers”; “Do not become a captive in the hands of women”; “Do not expect any good of young women when you become old.”

4-The *hajib*, or chamberlain or usher, was an important official in the court of Iranian kings, and one had to see him before being admitted to an audience.

5-Literally “To fart in the beard of someone,” means “to hell with someone” or “ignore him completely.”

6-The words *rend* and *qalandar*, as explained in the introduction, are difficult to translate because of their rich cultural associations. Apparently, both words originally meant something like a “rogue” or “scoundrel,” and probably were used by the official circles to describe the people who deviated from the norm and were considered to be some kind of social rebels. Gradually these terms, especially in Sufi terminology, came to have meanings such as “devil of a fellow,” “initiate,” or even the “perfect man.”

On the subject of *rend* see J.C. Brugel’s article entitled “Pious Rogue” in *Edebiyat*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1979, pp. 43-64.

7-While having similar connotations, *qalandar* is used for a dervish who does not care about his clothes and appearance, nor does he care about hypocritical manners and customs of the society. In the age of Obeyd-e Zakani the term was used for the members of a Malamati Sufi. On the subject see the introduction of the present volume. See also Ahmad ‘Ali Raja’i, *Farhang-e Ash‘ar-e Hafez*, Tehran, 1951, pp. 492-496; E.G. Browne, *A Year Amongst The Persians*, Cambridge, 1927, pp 531-589; Hellmut Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele, Welt und Gott in den Geschichten des Farid al-Din ‘Attar*, Leiden, 1978, pp. 487-91; Hatib-i Farisi, *Manakib-i Camal al-Din Savi*, ed. by Tahsin Yazici, Ankara, 1972.

8- *Vis va Ramin* is a romance by Fakhr al-Din Gorgani (11th century). Since the story is taken from a pre-Islamic source it talks of the passionate love of Vis for her brother Viro, to whom she is betrothed before she falls in love with Ramin. It seems that this romance has had a reputation for licentiousness and eroticism during the Islamic period. For an account of this work see V. Minorsky, *Bist-maqala* (A Memorial Volume), London, 1964, “Vis-u-Ramin, a Parthian Romance”, pp151-199.

9- In Islam if a man three times declares that he has divorced his wife, he can not return to her unless she marries another man and then gets divorced. *Se Talaqeh-kardan*, or divorcing one’s wife three times can also be used as some kind of oath.

10- A *kongar-zan* was a special kind of beggar who would beat a horn and a comb together and ask for money. If he failed to get money he would sometimes threaten to inflict a wound upon himself.

11- This poem is from Sa‘adi (1184-1292).

ANNOTATIONS ON THE *RISALA-YE DELGOSHA*

Before annotating the anecdotes of 'Obeyd-e Zakani, I would like to give a general view of the historical and popular characters that appear in them and compare these stories with other sources. One interesting point to note is that nearly all of the Arabic stories relate to an earlier period and are about such characters as the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs such as Mu'awiyya, Yazid, Mahdi, Harun al-Rashid, Ma'mun, Mutawakkil and Watheq, the minister Ja'far the Barmacide, the poet Abu Nuwas, the Muscian Ishaq of Mosuel and the scholar and writer Jahiz. On the other hand, the Persian stories of the *Risala-ye Delgosha* predominantly relate to more contemporary figures such as the Atabek Sulgar Shah (first part of the 13th century), the Mongol emir Tugachar (d. 1295), the minister Shams al-Din Sahib Divan (d.1284) and his son Baha al-Din (d. 1279), the well-known vizier Rashid al-Din Fadl-allah (d. 1318) and his son Giyath al-Din (d.1336), Sultan Abu Sa'id (d. 1335), and a number of other poets, theologians and scholars of this period. It seems that the Arabic stories (93 in number) are mostly derived from various Arabic joke books or books of *Nawader* and relate to the earlier part of the Islamic period, whereas the Persian stories (226 in number) with the exception of a few, are about characters nearer to 'Obeyd's own time. Of the latter group, seven relate to the Umayyad or Abbasid periods and seventeen to the reign of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna (d. 1030). Obviously, the stories about Mahmud and his jester Talhak as well as other Persian stories of an earlier period were not likely to be found in Arabic joke books, and they are collected by 'Obeyd himself.

The characters most often met with in the stories of 'Obeyd are described below:

Juha

Juha (sometimes written as Juhi or Joha) is the hero of a great number of popular stories in the Middle East and his popularity extends as far as Italy and the Balkans. Most of the jokes attributed to him by the Arabs are attributed by the Turks and the Iranians to Nasr al-Din Hoca (Mulla Nasr al-Din), who allegedly was the jester of Timur-e Lang and died sometime in the fifteenth century in Aq Shahar of Turkey. Most of the parts of the Arab text of the *Nawader* of Juha, which has been published many times in Arab countries, correspond to the Persian and Turkish texts of Mulla Nasr al-Din.

Arthur Christensen in his article "Juhi in Persian Literature" (*A Volume of Oriental Studies presented to Prof. E.G. Browne*, 1922, p. 122 et seq.) shows that Joha, or Juhi as he is sometimes called in Persian, was a historical personality. The first reference to him comes in the *Kitab al-Mahasin* by Ibrahim al-Baihaqi (10th Century) and later in the *Amthal* of al-Maidani (d. 1124). (See also Martin Hartmann, "Schwanke und Schnurren im islamischen Orient," *Zeitscher. d. Vereins f. Volkskunde*, V, p. 50). Furthermore, there are three references by Jalal al-Din Rumi in his work, *Mathnavi*. Apart from the Juhi stories of 'Obeyd-e Zakani, Christensen has collected nine stories which are from sources earlier than the fifteen century. Two of these, one related by Al-Maidani and one by Rumi, are also found in the collections of Mulla Nasr al-Din. Christensen therefore concludes that the collection of Nasr al-Din Hoca, more than being a translation of

the old joke book, which is mentioned by Ibn Nadim (d. 996) in his *al-Fihrist*, is an independent collection incorporating most of the old stories. On the other hand, the Arabic versions of the *Nawader* of Juha are mostly based on the Turkish collection.

Altogether there are ten stories (one Arabic and nine Persian) among the anecdotes of 'Obeyd on Juha in Parviz Atabaki's edition (Tehran, 1963): No. 10 in Arabic (No. 4 in my translation) and Nos. 14, 20, 21, 33, 55, 76, 207, 210, and 229, of which only four are translated in the present volume (Nos. 9, 11, 12 and 99 of my translations). Two more, Nos. 228 and 262 (Nos. 107 and 116 in my translation), are given under the name of Juha by Rumi in his *Mathnavi*, but 'Obeyd does not mention his name in these stories. Furthermore, Christensen has 27 other stories of 'Obeyd which although not attributed to Juha are nonetheless found in the collections of Hoca Nasr al-Din or the *Nawader* of Juha. (See "Remarques sur les faceties du 'Ubad-i-Zakani, avec des extraits de la Risala-ye dilgusha" in *Acta Orientalia*)

Talhak And Other Jesters

Talhak is perhaps the most often mentioned jester in the works of 'Obeyd. There are thirteen stories about him (and Nos. 1, 11, 17, 156, 161, 165, 177, 183, 191, 203, 204, 226 and 105 of the original text are translated). Talhak was a very outspoken and bold character, and apparently his name has changed in Persian into *Dalqak* which simply means a jester. Some Talhak stories are also found among the anecdotes attributed to the court jester of Naser al-Din Shah (1848-1896) who was called Karim Shira'i. For instance, No. 204 (92 in translation) is identical with a story in which Karim Shira'i receives a donkey saddle as a royal present. This story was later made into a humorous play. (See Husain Nurbakhsh, *Karim Shira'i Delqak-e-Mashhur-e Darbare-Naser al-Din Shah*, Tehran, 1958, pp. 396-414.) There are also a number of less known jesters and wits who will be cited individually in the following notes.

Apart from these there are numerous anecdotes about the kings, emirs, poets, theologians and men of letters, who were mostly contemporaries with or to have lived shortly before 'Obeyd. In his *Risala-ye Delgusha*, as well as in his other satirical works, 'Obeyd is very candid and revealing about the social mores and degraded morality of people in those turbulent years during the Mongol domination. 'Abbas Iqbal, the great historian of this period and the editor of 'Obeyd, writes: "By reading the *Risala-ye Delgusha* it becomes clear that in the lifetime of 'Obeyd, or forty or fifty years before him, a number of wise men and scholars, though unique in their knowledge and proficiency in their subjects, when they encountered the social conditions and the tyranny of the rulers, wanted to laugh stoically at everyone and everything. It was through satire and humor that they levelled their criticism at the mighty of the age" (*Kulliyat-e-'Obeyd-e Zakani*, p.22). Among these were the celebrated scientist and philosopher Qutb al-Din Shirazi (d. 1289), the well-known writer and philosopher 'Azud al-Din Iji, the author of the book called *al-Mawaqif* (1335), the poet Majd al-Din Hamgar (d. 1279) and two lesser men of learning, Sharaf al-Din Damghani and Sharaf al-Din Dargazini. Being a member of such a group, 'Obeyd not only criticized the wrong doings, deprivations and corruption of his age, but also recorded the biting and witty remarks of these men for us.

Amin put to death.

This story is versified by Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207-1273) in *Mathnavi* (Book V).

22. Qazvinis are associated with numerous humorous stories. 'Obeyd being a native of that city apparently feels free to attribute every funny incident to his fellow citizens.
23. Sharaf al-Din of Damghan was apparently a well known scholar.
24. Muwlanā Qotb al-Din of Shiraz (1250-1210) was a famous scientist and physician who wrote numerous works on scientific and philosophical subjects. For his life see, Z. Safa, *Tarikh-e-Adabiyat-e-Iran*, Tehran, 1973, Vol. II, part III, pp. 1227 *et seq.*
25. Baha al-Din Sahib Divan was the son of the famous vizier of Abaqa Khan (1265-1282), Shams al-Din Mohammad the Sahib-Divan. Baha al-Din died in 1279 and was one of the few members of the family to die a natural death. He was one of the tyrants of his day, and Browne writes: "He was a terribly stern governor (of Persian Iraq), who inspired the utmost terror in the hearts of his subjects, and whose ferocity went so far that he caused his little son, and he a favorite child, to be put to death by his executioner because in play he had caught hold of his beard (*A Literary History of Persia*, III, p. 21), Baha al-Din's father was put to death by Arghun (1284-1291) in 1284 along with his seven sons and two brothers.
26. The *qiblah* is the direction of Mecca to which every Moslem turns his or her face five times a day in prayer.
27. The first chapter of the *Koran* (al-Fatihah) has only seven verses and should be recited twice at each prayer. After this another chapter is elective, but normally a very short chapter is chosen. Here the preacher quotes a different verse in order to appease the Arab.
28. Concerning the story of Majd al-Din's wife see E.G. Browne, *op.cit.* III, p. 119.
29. Shams al-Din Muzaffar. I could not find a reference to this man.
30. As was said in note No. 27, the first chapter of *Koran* should be recited in prayers at least ten times a day by every Moslem.
31. Sultan Abu Sa'id (1317-1334) was the last king of the Ilkhanid dynasty upon whose death the line of successors of Hulagu came to an end.
32. 'Azd al-Din Iji was the great scholar and philosopher who was contemporary with 'Obeyd.
33. Noruz is 21st of March and the festival of the new year among the Iranians.
34. As was mentioned in the introduction to these notes, this story was made into a play during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah.
- 35-36. Harun is the famous fifth caliph of the Abbasid dynasty, Harun al-Rashid (786-809) who was mentioned earlier in these notes. Bohlul was his contemporary and some kind of "sagacious fool," who would make very wise remarks but pretend to be a fool. They say Harun wanted to appoint him to be the judge of Baghdad, and in order to avoid this post Bohlul pretended to be insane.
37. For Abu Bakr Robabi see note No. 5.
38. Khar Maghzi literally means "someone with a donkey's brain."
39. This story has also been given by Rumi in his *Mathnavi* (R. Nicholson's translation, Book II, pp. 383-4):

A child was crying bitterly and beating his head
beside his father's coffin,
Saying, "Why, father, where are they taking you
to press you tight under some earth?
They are taking you to a narrow and noisome
house: there is no carpet in it, nor any mat;
No lamp at night and no bread by day; neither
smell nor sign of food is there.
No door in good repair, no way to the roof; not
one neighbour to be (your) refuge.
Your body, which was a place for the people's
kisses—how should it go into a blind and murky
house?—
A pitiless house and narrow room, where neither
(your) face will be lasting nor (your) colour."
In this manner was he enumerating the qualities of
the house.
The father said to Juhi, "Don't be a fool!"
"O papa," said he, "hear the marks (of identity).
These marks which be mentioned one by one—
our house has them (all), without uncertainty of doubt
(It has) neither mat nor lamp nor food; neither its
door is in good repair, nor its court nor its roof."

40. This story is attributed to Bohlul by Farid al-Din Attar (1136-1234)
in his *Mosibat-nameh* (ed. Nurani Vesal, p. 117):

One day the drunken Bohlul
Climbed the throne of Harun.
The royal guards beat him such
That blood from his every wound gushed.
Being beaten soundly, he opened his mouth:
"O, Harun, the king of the world!
I sat for a while on this throne,
And behold me thus inflicted with wounds;
You who have sat a life-time upon it,
Joint by joint they will separate your body.
I paid for sitting a mere moment dearly;
What will be forthcoming for you.

41. This story also appears in the *Mathnavi* (Nicholson's translation),
42. Borkan is a Mongol word for "Great" "Good" or "Buddah." Borkan
Khan here simply means great Khan.
43.- Abhar is a city near Qzvin, and Sultanieh was the capital of Uljaitu
(1305-1316).

NOTES TO "RATS AGAINST CATS"

There is a MS. of 'Obeyd's works in the Majlis Library of Tehran, dated 1540 A.D., and some lines of the *Mush u Gorba* are different from the version of Masoud Farzad. In the following notes the most significant differences are noted. The notes of Farzad to his translation are given with his initials.

1. The Majlis MS. has: "I heard a blood-thirsty cat lived in Kerman."
2. Here there are also two extra couplets:
With the bride he would go to bed
When was a guest in the house of the groom.
He would overlook the pot, bowl and laddle
And he would supervise the table and the house.
3. DOG. The rats are Moslems and Islam looks with disfavour upon the dog.(M.F.)
4. SLAVE The rat, immediately he is caught, turns humble and apologetic and begs for forgiveness. The Cat, when he in turn is caught, does exactly the same thing and as readily.(M.F.)
5. MY WIFE. The original is obscene and in Turkish. This suggests that the Cat knew the language and was perhaps a Turk. His manner of mentioning "Musulman" shows that he was a Moslem-hater. The word is another indication that the rats in this story are Moslems.(M.F.)
6. MAN. This is a Persian weight which is usually about three kilograms or nearly seven pounds avoirdupois. Another and rarer variety of the mans weighs twice this.(M.F.)
7. SEVEN SELECT RATS. Curiously enough, the number of rats functioning in various incidents in this story happens to be either one or seven. On both occasions when seven rats appear on the scene, they are all "head-villagers and tribal chieftains." Note that the presents taken to the cat are all village or tribal produce.(M.F.)
8. KHANCHE. A large dish or tray.
9. OMAN-LEMONS are sour, and a favourite flavouring in Persian cookery.(M.F.)
10. VERILY THE PORTION. The original of this passage is an Arabic quotation from the *Kor'an* (M.F.)
11. "Like a warrior". Interestingly enough 'Obeyd uses the word "Mubarez" for a "warrior" which might be a reference to Mubarez al-Din Mohammad.
12. TWO IN ONE HAND. Some texts would make the Cat ludicrously acrobatic here by representing him as taking a mouse in his mouth, as well as one in each of his four paws!(M.F.)
13. O MONARCH. The rats here address a Turkish phrase to the king, indicative of their devotion to him. This may show that the king as well as the cat know Turkish. Many a king in fourteenth century Persia did.(M.F.)
14. KHORAASAN AND GILAN. These names indicate that the king's domain included eastern and northern Iran respectively, while the Cat's sphere as shown by Esfahan, Yazd, and Kerman was central and south-eastern Persia.(M.F.)
15. VIZIR. A minister of state.(M.F.) This could be a reference to Khajeh 'Emad al-Din the minister of Shah Abu Ishaq, who served as a messenger between the two kings.

16. ROSTAM. The legendary Iranian warrior.
17. SLAVE. See Note 4 also. The cat refused to forgive the drunken rat and now King Rat, in turn, refuses to forgive the cat. But on both occasions, such is 'Obeyd's art, one feels against the cat.(M.F.)
18. BLACK IS MY FACE. Notice that the king, too, calls the cat blackfaced. These references, I believe, should be taken literally as well. The cat is, therefore, a black one. So far, however, he has in all of the Persian illustrated editions of this poem which I have seen, been drawn as a white cat. The superstitious in Iran believe that black cats are the abodes of evil spirits, and therefore avoid and even fear them. This would increase the suitability of black for the colour of this story's villain. An interesting question is: Why is it that the superstition in England about black cats (i.e., that they bring good luck) is diametrically opposed to that in Persia?(M.F.)
19. BUT NOT A RAT. The situation is strongly reminiscent of the famous western fable about belling the cat.(M.F.)
20. KING RAT IN ANOTHER. Some texts make the cat kill the king of the Rats here. This is by no means a dramatically satisfactory incident, and this translation is in accordance with the better texts. It is obviously the note of burlesque confusion rather than senseless tragedy that is most suitable for the conclusion of this story.(M.F.)

At the end it should be added that some of the notes of Farzad are omitted here and some transliterations changed.

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A gypsy scolded his son and said, "You do no work and waste your life in idleness. How often must I tell you to practice somersaults and learn how to dance on a rope and make a dog jump through a hoop so that you can achieve something in your life. If you don't listen to me, I swear by God I will send you to the school to learn their good-for-nothing sciences and become a scholar so as to live in misery and adversity and never be able to earn a penny wherever you go."

In such witty and pungent anecdotes 'Obeyd-e Zakani criticizes the social corruption of his age. 'Obeyd-e Zakani (died circa 1372) is one of the most remarkable poets, satirists and social critics of Iran, whose works have not received proper attention in the past. After being translated into Russian, Danish and Italian, this is the first selection of his works in English.

'Obeyd's satirical works more than anything else in Persian literature illustrate the social conditions of this period. It is true that some other poets of his age vehemently attacked corruption and social injustice in their poems, but the wit and insight of 'Obeyd give his works a special character. 'Obeyd looks upon this world of extravagant indulgence and corruption with the censorious eye of a Juvenal and portrays it with the cynicism and wit of a Voltaire and the hilarious grotesqueness of a Rabelais. Underneath his cheerful irresponsibility and nonchalance there lie a sadness and bitterness. Seeing this scene of deceit, greed, lust, sycophancy, perversion, scorn of the old values and virtues, extremes of wealth and poverty, violence and bloodshed, he expresses his indignation in the form of scathing stories and sardonic maxims. He says: "Engage in ribaldry, cuckoldry, gossip, ingratitude, false testimony, selling heaven for the world, and playing the tambourine, so that you may become dear to the great and enjoy your life."

Dr. Hasan Javadi, a graduate of Cambridge University, has taught Persian and English at Cambridge and Tehran Universities. He is the author of several books, including a comprehensive study—forthcoming—of satire in Persian literature. He is currently teaching Persian Literature at the University of California, Berkeley.

دل‌دین تو مانده کنش نیکو

ما در سوی او دو سو پس بچسبند

فراموشی کن که کل ما در دور

گرچه در کمال در آن کسب

دور از طاعتی ما از آنج

سازد برین نیکو

ایستاد به کمال که در آن



مهرجانی است در آن

ریشانی است ما از آن

تو در آنست ما را

گرچه در کمال در آن

نشدن آن بویست می از آن کسب

که روزی این نیکو در آن

نشدن آن بویست می از آن کسب







