



The Gardener

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

A
PUBLIC DOMAIN
BOOK

THE GARDENER

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By Rabindranath Tagore

Translated by the author from the original Bengali

1915

[Frontispiece: Rabindranath Tagore. Age 16—see tagore.jpg]

To W. B. Yeats

Thanks are due to the editor of *Poetry, a Magazine of Verse*,
for permission to reprint eight poems in this volume.

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Preface

Most of the lyrics of love and life, the translations of which from Bengali are published in this book, were written much earlier than the series of religious poems contained in the book named *Gitanjali*. The translations are not always literal—the originals being sometimes abridged and sometimes paraphrased.

Rabindranath Tagore.

1

SERVANT. Have mercy upon your servant, my queen!

QUEEN. The assembly is over and my servants are all gone. Why do you come at this late hour?

SERVANT. When you have finished with others, that is my time. I come to ask what remains for your last servant to do.

QUEEN. What can you expect when it is too late?

SERVANT. Make me the gardener of your flower garden.

QUEEN. What folly is this?

SERVANT. I will give up my other work.
I will throw my swords and lances down in the dust. Do not send me to distant courts; do not bid me undertake new conquests. But make me the gardener of your flower garden.

QUEEN. What will your duties be?

SERVANT. The service of your idle days.

I will keep fresh the grassy path where you walk in the morning,

where your feet will be greeted with praise at every step by the flowers eager for death.

I will swing you in a swing among the branches of the *saptaparna*, where the early evening moon will struggle to kiss your skirt through the leaves.

I will replenish with scented oil the lamp that burns by your bedside, and decorate your footstool with sandal and saffron paste in wondrous designs.

QUEEN. What will you have for your reward?

SERVANT. To be allowed to hold your little fists like tender lotus-buds and slip flower chains over your wrists; to tinge the soles of your feet with the red juice of *ashoka* petals and kiss away the speck of dust that may chance to linger there.

QUEEN. Your prayers are granted, my servant, you will be the gardener of my flower garden.

2

"Ah, poet, the evening draws near; your hair is turning grey.

"Do you in your lonely musing hear the message of the hereafter?"

"It is evening," the poet said, "and I am listening because some

one may call from the village, late though it be.

"I watch if young straying hearts meet together, and two pairs of

eager eyes beg for music to break their silence and speak for them.