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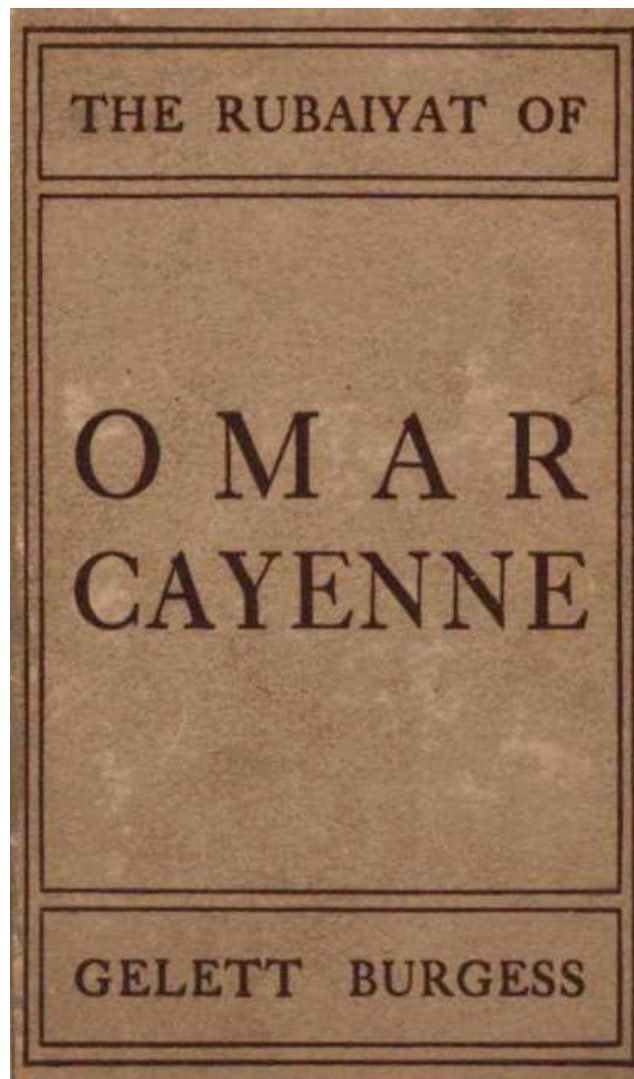
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE RUBAIYAT OF OMAR CAYENNE ***



THE RUBAIYAT OF OMAR CAYENNE

BY
GELETT BURGESS

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[Pg 4]

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BY
GELETT BURGESS

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THE RUBAIYAT
OF
OMAR CAYENNE

[Pg 5]

I

Wake! For the Hack can scatter into flight
Shakespere and Dante in a single Night!
The Penny-a-liner is Abroad, and strikes
Our Modern Literature with blithering Blight.

II

Before Historical Romances died,
Methought a Voice from Art's Olympus cried,
"When all Dumas and Scott is still for Sale,
Why nod o'er drowsy Tales, by Tyros tried?"

III

A cock-sure Crew with Names ne'er heard
before
Greedily shouted—"Open then the Door!
You know how little Stuff is going to live,
But where it came from there is plenty More."

[Pg 6]

IV

Now the New Year reviving old Desires,
The Artist poor to Calendars aspires,
But of the Stuff the Publisher puts out
Most in the Paper Basket soon suspire.

V

Harum indeed is gone, and Lady Rose,
And Janice Meredith, where no one knows;
But still the Author gushes overtime,

And many a Poet babbles on in Prose.

VI

Aldrich's lips are lock'd; but people buy
High-piping Authoresses, boomed sky-high.
"How Fine!"—the Publisher cries to the Mob,
That monumental Cheek to justify.

VII

Come, fill the Purse, to Publishers, this Spring,
Your Manuscripts of paltry Passion bring:
The New York Times has oft a little Way
Of praising—let The Times your praises sing.

VIII

Whether by Century or Doubleday,
Whether Macmillan or the Harpers pay,
The Publisher prints new books every Year;
The Critics will keep Busy, anyway!

IX

Each Morn a thousand Volumes brings, you say;
Yes, but who reads the Books of Yesterday?
And this first Autumn List that brings the New
Shall take The Pit and Mrs. Wiggs away.

X

Well, let it take them! What, are we not through
With Richard Calmady and Emmy Lou?
Let Ade and Dooley guy us as they will,
Or Ella Wheeler Wilcox—heed not you.

XI

With me despise this kind of Fiction rude
That just divides the Rotten from the Good,
Where names of Poe and Dickens are forgot—
And Peace to Thackeray with his giant Brood!

XII

A Book of Limericks—Nonsense, anyhow—
Alice in Wonderland, the Purple Cow
Beside me singing on Fifth Avenue—
Ah, this were Modern Literature enow!

XIII

Some for the stories of The World; and some
Sigh for the Boston Transcript till it come;
Ah, take The Sun, and let The Herald go,
Nor heed the Yellow Journalistic scum!

XIV

Look to the blowing Advertiser—"Lo,
Booming's the way," he says, "to make Books go!
I advertise until I've drained my Purse,
And huge Editions on the Market throw."

XV

And those who made a Mint off Miss MacLane,
And those who shuddered at her Jest's profane,
Alike consigned her to Oblivion,
And buried once, would not dig up again.

XVI

[Pg 7]

[Pg 8]

[Pg 9]

Anthony Hope men set their hearts upon—
Like Conan Doyle he prospered; and anon,
Remained unopened on the dusty Shelf,
Delighting us an Hour—and then was gone.

XVII

Think, in this gaudy monthly Magazine
Whose Covers are Soapette and Breakfastine,
How Author after Author with his Tale
Fills his fool Pages, and no more is seen.

XVIII

They say that now Miss Myra Kelly reaps
Rewards that Howells used to have for Keeps:
And Seton, that great Hunter of Wild Beasts
Has Coin ahead; Cash comes to him in Heaps!

XIX

[Pg 10]

I sometimes think that never Prose is read
So good as that by Advertising bred,
And every Verse Sapolian poets sing
Brings laurel wreaths once twin'd for Spenser's
head.

XX

And this audacious Author, young and green
In Smart Set—surely you know whom I mean—
Ah, look upon him lightly! for who knows
But once in Lippincott's he wrote unseen!

XXI

Ah, my Belovèd, write the Book that clears
TO-DAY of dreary Debt and sad Arrears;
To-morrow!—Why, To-morrow I may see
My Nonsense popular as Edward Lear's.

XXII

For some we've read, the month's Six Selling
Best
The Bookman scored with elephantine Jest,
Have sold a half a Million in a Year,
Yet no one ever heard of them, out West!

XXIII

[Pg 11]

And we, that now within the Editor's Room
Make merry while we have our little Boom,
Ourselves must we give way to next month's
Set—
Girls with Three Names, who know not Who
from Whom!

XXIV

Ah, make the most of what we yet may do,
Before our Royalties have vanish'd, too,
Book after Book, and under Book to lie,
Sans Page, sans Cover, Reader—or Review!

XXV

Alike for those who for TO-DAY have Shame,
And those who strive for some TO-MORROW'S
Fame,
A Critic from anonymous Darkness cries,
"Fools, your Reward will fool you, just the
Same!"

XXVI

Why, e'en Marie Corelli, who discuss'd
Of the Two Worlds so learnedly, is thrust
Like Elbert Hubbard forth; her Words to Scorn
Are scatter'd, and her Books by Critics cussed.

XXVII

[Pg 12]

Myself when young did eagerly peruse
James, Meredith and Hardy—but to lose
My Reason, trying to make Head or Tail;
The more I read, the more did they confuse.

XXVIII

With them the Germs of Madness did I sow,
And with "Two Magics" sought to make it grow;
Yet this was all the Answer that I found—
"What it is all about, I do not know!"

XXIX

Into the Library, and *Why* not knowing,
Nor *What I Want*, I find myself a-going;
And out of it, with Nothing fit to Read—
Such is the Catalogue's anæmic Showing.

XXX

What, without asking, to be hypnotized
Into a Sale of Stevenson disguised?
Oh, many a page of Bernard Shaw's last Play
Must drown the thought of Novels Dramatized!

XXXI

[Pg 13]

Up from the Country, into gay Broadway
I came, and bought a Scribner's, yesterday,
And many a Tale I read and understood,
But not the master-tale of Kipling's "They."

XXXII

There was a Plot to which I found no Key;
And Others seem to be as Dull as Me;
Some little talk there was of Ghosts, and Such,
Then Mrs. Bathurst left me more at Sea!

XXXIII

Kim could not answer—Sherlock Holmes would
fail—
The most enlightened Browningite turn pale
In futile Wonder and in blank Dismay;
Say, is there ANY Meaning to that Tale?

XXXIV

Then of the Critic, he who works behind
The Author's back, I tried the Clue to find;
But he, too, was in Darkness; and I heard
A Literary Agent say—"THEY ALL ARE BLIND!"

XXXV

[Pg 14]

Then, from the lips of Editor, I learn,
"This Story is the Kind for which I Yearn;
Its Advertising brought us such Renown,
We jumped Three Hundred Thousand, on that
Turn!"

XXXVI

I think the man exaggerated some
His increased Circulation,—but, I vum!
If I could get Two Thousand for one Tale,
I'd write him Something that would simply Hum!

XXXVII

For I remember, shopping by the way,
I saw a Novel writ by Bertha Clay;
And there was scrawled across its Title-Page,
"This is the Stuff that Sells—so People say!"

XXXVIII

Listen—a moment listen!—Of the same
Wood-pulp on which is printed Hewlett's Name,
The "Duchess" Books are made—in fifty years
They both will rot asunder—who's to Blame?"

XXXIX

[Pg 15]

And not a Book that from our Shelves we throw
To the Salvation Army, but shall go
To vitiate the Taste of some poor Soul
Who can get nothing else to read—go Slow!

XL

As then the Poet for his morning Sup
Fills with a Metaphor his mental Cup,
Do you devoutly read your Manuscripts
That Someone may, before you burn them up!

XLI

Perplex'd no more with editorial "Nay"
To-morrow's Reputation cast away,
And lose your College Education in
The flippant, foolish Fiction of To-day.

XLII

And if the Bosh you write, the Trash you read,
End in the Garbage Barrel—take no Heed;
Think that you are no worse than other
Scribes,
Who scribble Stuff to meet the Public Need.

XLIII

[Pg 16]

So, when WHO'S-WHO records your silly Name,
You'll think that you have found the Road to
Fame;
And though ten thousand other Names are
there,
You'll fancy you're a Genius, just the Same!

XLIV

Why, if an Author can fling Art aside,
And in a Book of Balderdash take Pride,
Wer't not a Shame—wer't not a Shame for him
A Conscientious Novel to have tried?

XLV

Writing's a Trade where Newspapers pay best;
LeGallienne this Verity confess'd;
So join the Union, like the rest of us—
Who strikes for Art is looked at as a Jest.

XLVI

And fear not, if the Editor refuse
Your work, he has no more from which to
choose;
The Literary Microbe shall bring forth
Millions of Manuscripts too bad to use.

XLVII

[Pg 17]

When Fitch's Comedies have all gone past,
Oh, the long Time Pinero's plays shall last,
Which of Belasco's little Triumphs heed
As Frohman's Self should heed a Bowery Cast!

XLVIII

A Moment's Halt—Pray see this charming,
chaste
Ladies' Home Journal—"On the New Shirt
Waist"—
"Advice to Girls," and so forth—here is reach'd
The Nothing women yearn for, undebased!

XLIX

Would you a hurried Lunch Hour wish to spend
About THE SECRET—hearken to me, Friend!
The Editors themselves must guess their Way
—
And on their Wives' and Sisters' Hints depend!

L

A Hair perhaps divides the Good from Bad;
And Bok himself a Lot of Trouble had
Before he found Stenographers were Wise—
Then, as they laughed or wept, his Soul was
glad.

LI

[Pg 18]

The Woman's Touch runs through our
Magazines;
For her the Home-and-Mother Tale, and Scenes
Of Love-and-Action, Happy at the End—
The same old Plots, the same old Ways and
Means.

LII

The Theme once guess'd, the Tale's as good as
told,
Though Dialect and Local Color mould;
This Style will last throughout Eternity,
While Women buy our Books—if Books are sold.

LIII

But if, in spite of this, you build a Plot
Which these immortal Elements has not,
You gaze TO-DAY upon a Slip, which reads:
"The Editor Regrets"—and such-like Rot.

LIV

Waste not your Ink, and don't attempt to use
That Subtle Touch which Editors refuse;
Better be jocund at two cents a word
Than, starving, court an ill-requited Muse!

LV

[Pg 19]

You know, my Friends, I've done with Purple
Cows,

And long to sober Fiction paid my Vows;
Spontaneous Glee is mighty hard to Sell—
'Twas Carolyn Wells that shot across *my* Bows.

LVI

For Stuff and Nonsense being in my Line,
As Nonsense modern Fiction I define;
But of the sort that one would care for, I
Can find but Little—and that Little's mine!

LVII

Ah, but this wholesale Satire, you may say,
Makes me pretend to be a Critic—Nay!
Rather be roasted than to roast, say I;
And I have been well roasted, by the way!

LVIII

And lately, in a Studio, a Miss
Sat smiling o'er a Book—and it was this:
"The Pipes of Pan"—she showed it me, and
read,
Bidding me pay attention—it was Bliss!

LIX

[Pg 20]

Bliss Carman, who with genius absolute,
My poor satiric Logic can confute;
The only Poet who, in modern Days,
His Poems can to clinking Gold transmute!

LX

The vagrant Singer, how does he, good Lord,
Compete with such a money-making Horde
Of tinsel rhymesters that infest the Shops?
They say he makes enough to pay his Board!

LXI

Why, be our Talent truly Art, how dare
Refuse our Lucubrations everywhere?
And if it's Rot, as our Rejections hint,
God knows the things they print are Rot, for
Fair!

LXII

I must abjure Dramatic Force, I must
Take the Sub-Editor's decree on Trust,
Or, lured by hope of selling something Good,
Write out my Heart—then burn it in Disgust!

LXIII

[Pg 21]

Oh, threats of Failure, hopes of Royalties!
One thing at least I've sold—these Parodies;
One thing is certain, Satire always sells;
The Roast is read, no matter where it is.

LXIV

Strange, is it not? that of the Authors who
Publish in England, such a mighty Few
Make a Success, though here they score a Hit?
The British Public knows a Thing or Two!

LXV

By Revelations of the Past we've learn'd
The Yankee Author usually is burn'd;

All of our Story Writers say the Same;
The London Critic all their Books have spurn'd.

LXVI

I sent my Agent where the Buyers dwell,
Some clever Stories of my own to sell:
And by and by the Agent said to me,
"One thing I sold—that's doing Mighty Well!"

LXVII

So Heaven seems tame indeed when I behold
Editions of Five Hundred Thousand sold;
When Clippings show how Critics scorch me,
then
Hell's Roasting seems comparatively Cold!

LXVIII

We are no other than a passing Show
Of clumsy Mountebanks that come and go
To please the General Public; now, who gave
To IT the right to judge, I'd like to know?

LXIX

Impotent Writers bound to feed ITS taste
For Literature and Poetry debased;
Hither and thither pandering we strive,
And one by one our Talents are disgraced.

LXX

The Scribe no question makes of Verse or Prose,
But what the Editor demands he shows;
And he who buys three thousand words of
Drule,
He knows what People want—you Bet *He* knows!

LXXI

The facile Scribbler writes; and, having writ,
No Rules of Rhetoric bother him a Bit,
Or lure him back to cancel half a Line,
Nor Grammar's protests change a Word of it.

LXXII

And though you wring your Hands and wonder
Why
Such slipshod Work the Magazines will buy,
Don't grumble at the Editor, for he
Must serve the Public, e'en as You and I.

LXXIII

With Puck's first joke, they did the last Life feed,
And there of Judge's Stories sowed the Seed:
And the first jokelet that Joe Miller wrote
The Sunday Comic-Section readers read.

LXXIV

YESTERDAY *This* Day's popular Song supplants;
TO-MORROW'S will be even worse, perchance:
Drink! For the latest Coon-Song's floating by:
Drink! Now the music is an Indian Dance!

LXXV

I tell you this—When, started from the Goal,
The first Plantation Ditty 'gan to roll

[Pg 22]

[Pg 23]

[Pg 24]

Through Minstrel Troupes and Negro
Baritones
In its predestined race from Pole to Pole,

LXXVI

The Song had caught a Rag-Time girls could
shout
And Piano-Organs make a Din about;
But syncopated Melodies at last
Will pass away, and more shall come, no doubt.

LXXVII

And this I know: though Vaudeville delight,
Musical Comedy can bore me quite;
One act of Ibsen from the Gallery caught,
Better than Daly for a festal Night!

LXXVIII

What! out of senseless Show-Girls to evoke
A Drama? Surely, I resent the Joke!
For me, it is not Pleasure, but a Pain—
An Everlasting Bore for decent Folk.

LXXIX

[Pg 25]

What, must the Theatre Manager be paid—
Our Gold for what his Carpenter has made—
Must we pay Stars we never did Contract,
And cannot hiss at?—Oh, the sorry trade!

LXXX

Oh Thou, who dost with cool sarcastic Grin
Scorn the poor Magazine my Story's in,
Though Thou impute to ignorance my Work,
I know how bad 't will be, ere I begin!

LXXXI

Oh Thou, whose Taste demandeth silly Tales,
Damning the Author when he Tries and Fails,
Let us toss up to see which one is Worse—
Thy Fault or mine—Which is it, Heads or Tails?

* * * * *

LXXXII

[Pg 26]

As, for his Luncheon Hour, away had slipp'd
The Editor, his Office-Boy I tipp'd,
And once again before the Sacred Desk
I stood, surrounded by much Manuscript.

LXXXIII

Manuscripts of all Sizes, great and small,
Upon that Desk, in Numbers to appall!
And Some looked very interesting; some
I saw no Sign of Merit in, at all.

LXXXIV

Said one among them—"Surely not in vain
My Author has exhausted all his Brain
In writing me, to be rejected here—
I'd hate to have to be sent back again!"

LXXXV

Then said a Second—"Ne'er a Girl or Boy

Such Stuff as I am really could enjoy:
Yet He who wrote me, when I am return'd,
Will me with Curse and bitter Wrath destroy!"

LXXXVI

[Pg 27]

After a literary Silence spake
A Manuscript of Henry James's make;
"They sneer at me for being so occult:
But Kipling's found such Stuff is going to Take!"

LXXXVII

Whereat some one of the typewritten Lot—
I think it was Cy Brady's—waxing hot—
"All this of Shop and Patter—Tell me then,
Who buys—Who reads—the Stuff that boils *my*
Pot?"

LXXXVIII

"Why," said another, "Some there are who tell
Of one who threatens he will toss to Hell
The luckless Tales he marr'd in making—Pish!
He's a blamed Fool, Any Old Thing will sell!"

LXXXIX

"Well," murmur'd one, "Let whoso write or buy,
My words with long Oblivion are gone dry:
But bind me new, let Christy illustrate,
Methinks I'd sell at Christmas time; I'll try!"

XC

[Pg 28]

So while the Manuscripts were wisely speaking,
The Editor came in whom I was seeking:
And then they signall'd to me, "Brother!
Brother!
Yours is rejected! You had best be sneaking!"

* * * * *

XCI

Though Carnegie for Literature provide,
He tombs a Body whence the Life has died,
And no one seems to turn a single leaf
Upon the unfrequented Classic side,

XCII

Unless to see some First Edition rare,
Or curious styles of Binding to compare;
Art's True Believers know their Aldus well,
But of the Author bound, are unaware!

XCIII

[Pg 29]

Indeed, Rare Books that they have yearn'd for
long
Have done their Literary Taste much wrong:
Reprints of Burton will not sell to-day
(I mean the stupid Burton) for a Song!

XCIV

Indeed, such First Editions oft before
I envied, but they proved to be a Bore.
Why, are not Tenth Editions still more rare?
Mine are! Why are they not worth even more?

XCV

And much as Art has play'd the Infidel
And robb'd me of my Royalties—Ah, well,
I often wonder what the Women read
One half as clever as the Stuff I sell!

XCVI

Yet Ah, that Spring should come to bring our
Woes!
That Christmas Season's Sales should ever
close!
The Book whose praises loud the Critic sang,
Is not the one that sells the most, God knows!

XCVII

Would but these Book Reviewers ever yield
One glimpse—if dimly, yet indeed, reveal'd
Of what the fainting Traveller can read
Worth reading—but the Critic's eyes are seal'd.

[Pg 30]

XCVIII

Would but some wingèd Angel bring the News
Of Critic who *reads* Books that he Reviews!
And make the stern Reviewer do as well
Himself, before he Meed of Praise refuse!

XCIX

Ah, Love! could you and I perchance succeed
In boiling down the Million Books we read
Into One Book, and edit that a Bit—
There'd be a WORLD'S BEST LITERATURE, indeed!

* * * * *

C

Oh, rising Author, read Me once again
Before my Memory gradually wane!
How oft hereafter you may look for me
In this same Library—and look in vain!

CI

And when, dear Reader, *you* shall chance to
spend
A night within The Hall of Fame—attend!
If, in that blissful call, you find the Spot
Where I broke in—don't turn me down, my
friend!

[Pg 31]

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE RUBAIYAT OF OMAR CAYENNE ***

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