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# THE SINGING CARAVAN

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# THE SINGING CARAVAN

A SUFI TALE

BY

ROBERT VANSITTART

Each man is many as a caravan;  
His straggling selves collect in tales like these.  
Only the love of one can make him one.  
Who takes the Sufi Way—the Way of Peace?

NEW YORK  
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY  
1919

*Printed in Great Britain*

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**IN MEMORIAM****MY BROTHER ARNOLD**

2ND LIEUTENANT, 11TH HUSSARS  
KILLED IN ACTION NEAR YPRES  
MAY 1915

*In twenty years of lands and seas and cities  
I had small joy and sought for it the more,  
Thinking: "If ever I am πολύμητις,  
'Tis yours to draw upon the hard-won store."*

*I had some bouts from Samarkand to Paris,  
And took some falls 'twixt Sweden and Sudan.  
If I was slow and patient learning parries,  
I hoped to teach you when you were a man.*

*I cannot fall to whining round the threshold  
Where Death awaited you. I lack the skill  
Of hands for ever working out a fresh hold  
On life. In mystic ways I serve you still.*

*The age of miracles is not yet ended.  
As on the humble feast of Galilee  
Surely a touch of heaven has descended  
On the cheap earthen vessel, even on me,*

*Whose weak content—the soul I travail under—  
Unstable as water, to myself untrue,  
God's mercy makes an everlasting wonder,  
Stronger than life or death, my love of you.*

---



I am indebted to Mr. Arthur Humphreys, Mr. John Murray, and the Editor of the *Spectator* for kind permission to reproduce a few of the shorter poems in this tale of Persian mystics. I have included them, firstly, because I wished otherwise new work, being a memorial, to include such fragments of the past as might be worth preserving; secondly, because decreasing leisure inspires a diffidence in the future that may justify me in asking a reader or a friend to judge or remember me only by "Foolery" and "The Singing Caravan." [Pg viii]

R. V.

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The sun smote Elburz like a gong.  
 Slow down the mountain's molten face  
 Zigzagged the caravan of song.  
 Time was its slave and went its pace.

It bore a white Transcaspian Queen  
 Whose barque had touched at Enzeli.  
 Splendid in jewelled palanquin  
 She cleft Iran from sea to sea,

Bound for the Persian Gulf of Pearls,  
 Where demons sail for drifting isles  
 With bodyguards of dancing girls  
 And four tamed winds for music, smiles

For passports. Thus the caravan,  
 Singing from chief to *charvadar*,  
 Reached the great gate of screened Tehran.  
 The burrows of the dim bazaar

Swarmed thick to see the vision pass  
 On brodered camels like a fleet  
 Of swaying silence. One there was  
 Who joined the strangers in the street.

[Pg 2]

They called him Dreamer-of-the-Age,  
 The least of Allah's *Muslimeen*  
 Who knew the joys of pilgrimage  
 And wore the sign of sacred green,

A poet, poor and wistful-eyed.  
 Him all the beauty and the song  
 Drew by swift magic to her side,  
 And in a trance he went along

Past friends who questioned of his goal:  
 "The Brazen Cliffs? The Realms of Musk?  
 Goes he to Mecca for his soul?..."  
 The town-light dwindled in the dusk

Behind. Ahead Misr? El Katif?  
 The moon far up a brine-green sky  
 Made Demavend a huge pale reef  
 Set in an ocean long gone dry.

Bleached mosques like dwarf cave-stalagmites,  
 Smooth silver-bouldered *biyaban*  
 And sevenfold velvet of white nights  
 Vied with the singing caravan

To make her pathway plain.  
 Then one  
 Beside the poet murmured low:  
 "I plod behind, sun after sun,  
 O master, whither do we go?"

[Pg 3]

"Are we for some palmed port of Fars,  
 Or tombed Kerbela, or Baghdad  
 The Town-of-Knowledge-of-the-Stars?  
 Is worship wise or are we mad?"

Answered the poet: "Do we ask  
 Allah to buy each Friday's throng?  
 None to whom worship is a task  
 Should join the caravan of song.

"With heart and eyes unquestioning, friend,  
 We follow love from sea to sea,  
 And Love and Prayer have common end:  
 'May God be merciful to me!'"

So fared they, camped from noon to even,  
 Till dawn, quick-groping through the gloom,  
 Pounced on quilt planets low in heaven.



Thus they beheld the domes of Kum.

And onward nightly. Though the dust  
Swirled in dread shapes of desert *Jinn*,  
Ever the footsore poet's trust  
Soared to the jewelled palanquin,

Parched, but still singing: "God, being great,  
Lent me a star from sea to sea,  
The drop in his hand-hollow, Fate.  
He holds it high, and signs to me

"Although She—She may not ..."

"For thirst  
My songs and dreams like mirage fail.  
Yea, mad"—his fellow pilgrim cursed—  
"I was. The Queen lifts not her veil."

"Put no conditions to her glance,  
O happy desert, where the guide  
Is Love's own self, Life's only chance ..."  
He saw not where the other died,

But pressed on strongly, loth to halt  
At Persia's pride, Rose-Ispahan,  
Whose hawks are bathed in pure cobalt.  
To meet the singing caravan

Came henna-bearded prince and sage  
With henna-fingered *houris*, who  
Strove to retard the pilgrimage,  
Saying: "Our streets are fair and you

"A poet. Sing of us instead.  
God may be good, but life is short.  
Yon are the mountains of the dead.  
Here are clean robes to wear at court."

He said: "I seek a bliss beyond  
The range of your *muezzin*-call.  
Do birds cease song till heaven respond?  
The road is naught. The Hope is all."

"You know not this Transcaspian Queen,  
Or what the journey's end may be.  
Fool among Allah's *Musliméen*,  
You chase a myth from sea to sea."

"Because I bargain not nor guess  
If Waste or Garden wait for me,  
Love gives me inner loveliness.  
I hold to her from sea to sea."

So he was gone, nor seemed to care  
For beckoning shade, or boasting brook,  
Or human alabaster-ware  
Flaunted before him in the *suk*,

Nor paused at sunburnt far Shiraz,  
The home of sinful yellow wine,  
Where morning mists, like violet gauze,  
Deck the bare hills, and blossoms twine

In seething coloured foam around  
The lighthouse minarets.  
And sheer—  
A thin cascade bereft of sound—  
The track falls down to dank Bushír.

The caravan slipped to the plain.  
Its song rose through the rising damp,  
Till, through the grey stockade of rain,  
The Gulf of Pearls shone like a lamp.

Here waiting rode a giant *dhow*,  
Each hand a captive *Roumi* lord,  
Who rose despite his chains to bow

[Pg 4]

[Pg 5]

[Pg 6]

As straight her beauty went aboard,  
Sailed. For the Tableland of Rhyme?  
The Crystal Archipelago?  
Who knows! This happened on a time  
Among the times of long ago.

He only, Dreamer-of-the-Age,  
Was left alone upon the sands,  
The goal of his long pilgrimage,  
The soil of all the promised lands,

Watching the *dhow* cut like a sword  
The leaden waves. Yet, ere she sailed,  
God poured on broken eyes reward  
Out of Heaven's heart.  
The Queen unveiled.

There for a space fulfilment shone,  
While worship had his soul for priest  
And altar. Then the light was gone,  
And on the sea the singing ceased.

---

And is this all my story? Yes,  
Save that the *Sufi's* dream is true.  
Dearest, in its deep lowliness  
This tale is told of me and you.

O love of mine, while I have breath,  
Whatever my last fate shall be,  
I seek you, you alone, till death  
With all my life—from sea to sea.  
And God be merciful to me.

---



# I THE VIEW OF THE WATCHMEN

The pilgrims from the north  
 Beat on the southern gate  
 All eager to set forth,  
 In little mood to wait  
 While watchman Abdelal  
 Expounded the Koran  
 To that wise seneschal,  
 His mate, Ghaffír Sultan.

At length Ghaffír: "Enough!"  
 Even watchmen's heads may nod.  
 "Asrãil is not rough  
 If we have faith in God."  
 His fellow tapped the book:  
 The *Darawish* discuss  
 The point you overlook:  
 Has Allah faith in us?

Know, then, that Allah, fresh  
 And splendid as a boy  
 Who thinks no ill of flesh,  
 Had one desire: a toy.  
 And so he took for site  
 To build his perfect plan  
 The Earth, where His delight  
 Was manufactured: Man.

[Pg 10]

Ah, had we ever seen  
 The draft, our Maker's spit,  
 I think we must have been  
 Drawn to live up to it.  
 God was so pure and kind  
 He showed Shaitan the lease  
 Of earth that He had signed  
 For us, His masterpiece.

The pilgrims cried: "You flout  
 Our calm. Beware. It flags.  
 Unbar and let us out,  
 Sons of a thousand rags."  
 And Abdelal said: "Hark!  
 Methought I heard a din."  
 Said Ghaffír: "After dark  
 I let no devils in.

"Proceed." He sucked his pipe:  
 God in His happiest mood  
 Laid down our prototype,  
 And saw that man was good.  
 Aglow with generous pride:  
 "Shaitan the son of Jann,  
 This is my crown," He cried.  
 "Bow down and worship man."

[Pg 11]

Said Evil with a smirk—  
 He was too sly to hiss—  
 "I cannot praise your work.  
 I could have bettered this."  
 God said: "I could have sown  
 The soil my puppet delves,  
 Yet rather gave my own  
 Power to perfect themselves."

Still the fiend stiffened. "I  
 Bow not." Our prophet saith  
 That he would not comply  
 Because he had no faith  
 In us. He only saw  
 The worst of Allah's toy,  
 The springs, some surface flaw,  
 The strengthening alloy.

Said God: "The faults are mine.  
I gave him hope and doubt,  
The mind that my design  
Shall have to work Me out.  
What though he fall! Is love  
So faint that I should grieve?  
How else, friend, should I prove  
To him that I believe?

"And how else should he rise?  
Lo, I, that made the night,  
Have given his conscience eyes  
Therein to find the Right.  
I have stretched out his hand,  
Oh, not to grasp but feel,  
Have taught his aims to land,  
But tipped the aims with steel;

[Pg 12]

"Have given him iron resolve  
And one great master-key,  
Courage, to bid revolve  
The hinge of destiny,  
And beams from heaven to build  
The road to Otherwise,  
With broken gloom to gild  
The causeway of his sighs

"Whereby I watch him come  
At last to judge of Me,  
Beyond the thunder's drum,  
The cymbals of the sea.  
Aye, Shaitan, plumb the Space  
And Time that planets buoy,  
And you shall know the place  
Appointed for my toy.

"I could not give him rest,  
And see him satiate  
At once, or make the zest  
Of life an opiate.  
I might have been his lord,  
I had not been his friend  
To sheathe his spirit's sword  
And start him at the end.

[Pg 13]

"I would not make him old,  
That he might see his port  
Fling its nocturne of gold  
And cheerfulness athwart  
The dusk. I planned the wave,  
And wealth of wind and star.  
Could one be gay and brave  
Who never saw afar

"The cause that he outlives  
Only because he fought,  
The peaks to which he strives,  
The ranges of his thought,  
Until the dawn to be  
Relieve his watchfires dim,  
Not by his faith in Me  
But by my faith in him!

"I also have my dreams,  
And through my darkest cloud  
His climbing phalanx gleams  
To my salute, and, proud  
Of him even in defeat,  
My light upon his brow,  
My roughness at his feet,  
I triumph. Shaitan, bow!"

[Pg 14]

But Shaitan like an ass  
Jibbed and would not give ear.  
Just so it came to pass,  
Declares our Book. Ghaffir.

...  
We know that in the heat  
Of disputation—well,  
Allah shot out his feet,  
And Shaitan went to hell.

Thus Abdelal. The gate  
Shook to the pilgrims' cry:  
"When will you cease to prate,  
Beards of calamity!"  
The poet: "Allah's bliss  
Fall on his watchmen! Thus  
Our journey's password is  
That God has faith in us."

---



## II THE JOY OF THE WORDS

The Sufis trembled: "Open, open wide,  
Dismiss us to illuminate the East."  
Old Ghaffir fumbled the reluctant bolts,  
Lifting his hands and eyes as for a feast.  
And this was their viaticum. His words  
Were mingled with their eagerness like yeast:

Go forth, poor words!  
If truly you are free,  
Simple, direct, you shall be winged like birds,  
Voiced like the sea.

Walk humbly clad!  
Be sure those words are lame  
That ride a-clatter, or that deck and pad  
A puny frame.

As in your dress,  
So in your speech be plain!  
Be not deceived; the Mighty Meaningless  
Are loud in vain.

Be not puffed up,  
Nor drunk with your own sound!  
Shall men drink deeply when an empty cup  
Is handed round?

Shout not at heaven!  
Say what I bade you say.  
Simplicity is beauty dwelling even  
In yea or nay.

Be this your goal.  
Beauty within man's reach  
Is poetry. You cannot touch man's soul  
Save with man's speech.

Therefore go straight.  
You shall not turn aside  
To vain display; for yonder lies the gate  
Where gods abide

Your coming. Go!  
The way was never hard.  
What would you more than common flowers or snow?  
For your reward,

Be understood,  
And thus shall you be sung.  
Aye, you who think to show us any good,  
Speak in our tongue.

---





### III

## THE DEPTH OF THE NIGHT

The watchman finished, as the southern gate  
 Clanged, and the breathless city lay behind.  
 The Dreamer's shadows shrank against the wall,  
 As though the desert called and none replied,  
 Till the young pilot, standing out to night,  
 Swung clear these lines to sound the depths of her:

"Blue Persian night,  
 Soft, voiceless as the summer sea!  
 Flooding the bouldered desert sand, submerge  
 This cypress'd isle  
 And Demavend's snow-spire—a sunken rock  
 On your hushed floor, where I the diver stand  
 Beyond the reach of day.  
 And though, up through your overwhelming peace,  
 I see your surface, heaven,  
 I would not rise there, being drowned in you,  
 Blue Persian night.

"Blue Persian night,  
 O consolation of the East!  
 In your clear breathless oceanic sheen  
 My heart's an isle,  
 From whose innumerable caves and coigns—  
 When dusk awakes the city of my mind—  
 Exploring boats set forth,  
 Bound for the harbour-lights of God knows where,  
 Full, full of God knows what;  
 It must be love of Him, or Her, or You,  
 Blue Persian night."

[Pg 18]

Her signal answered; for a slender wand  
 Of moonbeam touched the Dreamer on the mouth.  
 The caravan looked upward with a shout  
 And set its camels rolling to the south,  
 Murmuring: "Blue Persian night, none ever saw  
 You through your own sheer purity before us.  
 Rise up our songs as bubbles from the sand ..."  
 Somewhere among the camels rose this chorus:

Dong! Dong!  
 Lurching along  
 Out of the dusk  
 Into the night.  
 Noiseless and lusty,  
 Dreamy and dusty,  
 Looms the long caravan-line into sight.

Dong! Dong!  
 Never a song,  
 Never a footfall  
 A breath or a sigh.  
 Ghostly and stolid,  
 Stately and squalid,  
 Creeps the monotonous caravan by.

[Pg 19]

Dong! Dong!  
 Fugitive throng.  
 Out of the dark  
 Into the night,  
 Silent and lonely,  
 Gone!... the bells only  
 Tells us a caravan once was in sight.

---



## IV THE INWARDNESS OF THE MERCHANT

Moussa, the son of the Crypto-Jew,  
Had eaten his fill of yellow stew

And a bit besides (as a business man  
He was far too quick for the caravan,

Who loved him not, though it feared his guile).  
Moussa then: "I shall walk awhile

"To ease my soul of its heavy load."  
His pious friends: "May you find a road,"

And winked. "His soul has begun to feel  
There's nothing left but a march to steal."

But one from the village, decoying quail  
For the governor's pot, came back with a tale

Of a lean arm shaken against the sky  
Like a stunted thorn, and this piteous cry:

"As sound within an ice-bound desert mewed  
Drags out existence at the very core  
Of isolation, as breakers slip ashore  
In vainly eternal whispers to the nude  
Reef-coral, where no human feet intrude  
Upon the purity of stillness; or  
As, far from life, unmated eagles soar  
Above the hilltops' breathless solitude,

"So moves my love, like these a thing apart,  
Fierce, in the ruined temple of my heart,  
Shy as a shooting star that peers new-risen  
Mid strangers. Even so. Pent in the prison  
Of space my soul, a lonely planet, wheels ...  
Men call the sum of loneliness 'Ideals.'"

This is the plaint that the cross-road heard  
Where it strikes from Kashan to Burujird.

The townsmen, met by the sun-dried stream,  
Caught a voice high up like an angel's scream

Or a teaspoon tapping the bowl of heaven,  
And they cried: "*Ajab!* May we be forgiven,

"But it sounds a soul of the rarer sort  
Whose wings are set for no earthly port."

And the answer came, as they cried: "Who's that?"  
"One that sells short weight in mutton fat."

---



## THE LESSON OF THE CAMEL

Light was not. All was still. The caravan  
 Had ceased its song and motion by the bed  
 Wherein the hill-stream tosses sleeplessly,  
 The only sound, save one staccato note  
 Interminably piped by tiny owls.  
 The camp lay balmed in slumber, as the dead  
 Are straitened in white trappings. Then a voice,  
 Deeper than any dead black mountain pool  
 Or blacker well where devils cool by day,  
 Seemed to commune with Dreamer-of-the-Age,  
 Who, peering through the cloak about his head,  
 Challenged: "Who speaks?" The voice replied: "A friend  
 Unknown to you." ... It was old Peacock Tous,  
 The great grey camel with the crimson tail  
 On whom the queen was wont to ride. He said:

"Sheikh, I was born among the Bakhtiari,  
 The shelter of their hawthorn vales was mine;  
 For me, unbroken to the loads men carry,  
 The breeze that crowns their uplands glowed as wine  
 To drink. I, Tous, the Peacock, whom men call so  
 Because I ever moved as one above  
 The common herd, was mad and merry. Also  
 I knew not yet the prickled herb of Love.

[Pg 23]

"Spring tricked the desert out with flowered patterns  
 For me to tread like flowered carpets wrought  
 In patience by my master's painted slatterns—  
 He said that only Persian *women* fought.  
 Ah, youth is free and silken-haired and leggy!  
 No camel knows why Allah makes it end,  
 But He is wiser. Me the tribe's Il-Beggi  
 Spied out and sent as tribute to a friend,

"A dweller in black tents, a nomad chieftain  
 Of Khamseh Arabs or unruled Kashgai,  
 Whose cattle-raids and rapines past belief stain  
 The furthest page of camel-history.  
 And shamefully the ragged sutlers thwacked us,  
 Until I learned, as to this manner born,  
 That pride must find a mother in the cactus  
 And hope the milk of kindness in the thorn.

"O Sheikh, I found. A milk-white *nakeh* followed  
 The drove of males, and I would lag behind  
 With her, no matter how the drivers holloa'ed—  
 Man never doubts that all but he are blind.  
 At nightfall, when our champing echoed surly  
 Beyond the cheerful circle of the fire,  
 Something within me whispered, and thus early  
 I bore the burden of the world's desire.

[Pg 24]

"But I was saddled with the will of Allah,  
 Since one there was more fleet of foot than I,  
 The chosen of the chief of the Mehallah,  
 Whose nostrils quivered as he passed me by.  
 To her, beside his paces and his frothing,  
 My steadfastness was common as the air,  
 My passion and my patience were as nothing,  
 Because fate chose to make my rival fair.

"I suffered and was silent—some said lazy—  
 Until the seasons drove us to the plain.  
 The nomads sold me then to a Shirazi.  
 I never met my happiness again,  
 But trod the same old measure back and forward,  
 And passed a friend as seldom as a tree.  
 Oh, heaviness of ever going shoreward,  
 Of bringing all fruition to the sea!

"For I have fared from sea to sea like you, sirs,

And with your like, not once but many times.  
Your path acclaims me eldest of its users,  
It tells my step as I foresee your rhymes.  
I know by heart a heartache's thousandth chapter  
As you have read the preface of delight.  
The silence you shall enter, I have mapped her.  
O singing caravan, I was To-night

[Pg 25]

"Long ere you dreamed. I dreaming of my lady  
Became the cargo-bearer we call Self.  
Two hundredweight of flesh that spouted Sa'di,  
A restless bag of bones intent on pelf,  
Have straddled me in turn.... Hashish and spices,  
Wheat, poisons, satins, brass, and graven stone,  
I, Tous, have borne all human needs and vices  
As solemnly as had they been my own.

"Moon-faced sultanas blue with kohl a-pillion,  
Grey ambergris, pink damask-roses' oil,  
Deep murex purple, beards or lips vermilion  
As Abu Musa's flaming scarlet soil  
I have borne—and dung and lacquer. I have flooded  
Bazaars with poppy-seed and filigree.  
Men little guess the stuff that I have studied,  
Or what their vaunted traffic seems to me.

"I am hardened to all wonderments and stories—  
My ears have borne the hardest of my task—  
I have carried pearls from Lingah up to Tauris,  
And Russian Jews from Lenkoran to Jask.  
I have watched fat vessels crammed by sweating coolies  
With all the rubbish that the rich devise,  
And often I have wondered who the fool is  
That takes it all, and whom the fool supplies.

[Pg 26]

"Yet ran my thoughts on her, though cedar rafters  
Were laid on me, or mottled silk and plush,  
Although the tinkling scales of varied laughters  
Rode me from Bandar Abbas to Barfrush,  
Or broken hearts from Astara to Gwetter.  
All ironies have made their moving house  
Of me. I smile to think how many a letter  
Has passed from loved to lover thanks to Tous

"The loveless. Think you men alone are lonely,  
My masters? I have also worshipped one,  
Have built my days of faith and service only,  
And while I worshipped all my life was gone.  
I spent the funds of life in growing older,  
In heaping fuel on a smothered fire.  
See how my tale is rounded! On my shoulder  
I bear the burden of *your* world's desire.

"Yet keep that inner smile; and never show it  
Though the Account be nothing—shorn of her.  
Be wise, O Sheikh. Pray God to be a poet  
Lest life should make you a philosopher,  
Or lest the dreams of which you had the making  
Should prove to be such stuff as still I trail,  
And bring your heart, my withers, nigh to breaking  
When at the last the Bearer eyes the Bale,

"As you shall penetrate this day or morrow  
The miracle of willing servitude,  
And yet believe therein. It is the sorrow  
And not the love that asks to be subdued;  
It is the mirage not the truth that trammels  
The travelling feet. Ah, if men only knew  
How their brief frenzies move the mirth of camels,  
Our rests were longer and our journeys few.

[Pg 27]

"Old Tous is up. The camp is struck and ready  
For fresh emprise. Dawn sifts the clay-blue sky  
For gold. Now see how dominant and steady  
I prose along that have no mind to fly.  
This is my lesson: over sand or shingle,  
Blow hot, blow cold, by mountain, plain and khor

BLOW HOT, BLOW COLD, BY MOUNTAIN, PLAIN AND KNOL,  
Coming and going, I must set a-jingle  
My own deep bell.... And you must ask for more!"

He ceased. White on the mirror of the air  
His breath made patterns. In a ruined farm  
Red cocks blared out and shouted down the owls.  
The drivers rubbed their eyes. Another day  
Among the days was starting on its march....  
Above the pilgrims fallen to their prayers  
Old Tous stood upright, blinking at the sun.

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## VI THE BOASTING OF YOUTH

The soldier-lad from Kerman,  
 The sailor-lad from Jask  
 Knew naught that should deter man  
 From finishing the cask.  
 "Wine sets the Faithful jibbing  
 Like mules before an inn,  
 But we sit bravely bibbing,  
 And hold our own with sin."

Said the stout-hearted wonder  
 Of Jask: "Wine frights not me.  
 I fear no foe but thunder  
 And winds that sting the sea."  
 "And I," said he of Kerman,  
 "Fear nothing but the night,  
 Or some imperious *firman*  
 That bids the Faithful fight."

"They say some lads fear ladies  
 And truckle to them." "Who  
 Could be so weak? The *Cadis*  
 Rise up for me and you."  
 "But doctors, nay and princes,  
 Have troubles of their own,  
 Save those whom fire convinces....  
 I leave the stuff alone."

[Pg 29]

"And I...." Then both bethought them  
 That, howso strong and wise,  
 Their principles had caught them  
 On this mad enterprise.  
 "'Tis time to act with daring,  
 And rest," said he of Jask,  
 And swore a mighty swearing,  
 (And drained another flask).

"If I go on, attendant  
 Upon this woman's way,  
 May I become dependant  
 On your arrears of pay!"  
 "If I," said Captain Kerman,  
 "Should knuckle to my mate,  
 May I become a merman  
 And live on maggot-bait!"

"Then since we have discovered  
 That women need our strength"—  
 (The tavern-houris hovered)  
 "To hold them at arm's length,  
 Sit down in this rest-house, and  
 Tell me a tale among  
 The tales, one in your thousand!"  
 This was the story sung:

[Pg 30]

"I threw my love about you like fine raiment;  
 I let you kill my pride.  
 You passed me by, but smiled at me in payment,  
 And I was satisfied.

"I made my mind a plaything for your leisure,  
 Content to be ignored.  
 Body and soul I waited on your pleasure,  
 Waited—without reward.

"I have no faint repinings that we met, dear,  
 Or that I left you cold.  
 I rub my hands. You will be colder yet, dear,  
 Some day when you are old."

"Forbidden wine is mellow.  
 The sun has set. Of whom  
 Sing you this song, Brave Fellow?"

Sing you this song, Brave Fellow:  
Night is the ante-room  
Breeze-sprinkled to keep cooler  
The feasting-halls behind."  
"She might have been my ruler  
But for my *Strength of Mind*."

"That was the tune to whistle!  
How have I longed to learn  
The deeds of men of gristle  
Like mine!..." "Tell me in turn  
Some of your lore of women,  
Whose wiles are deep as *bhang*.  
Your strength shall teach to swim men  
Who fall in love...." He sang:

[Pg 31]

"You came to me, and well you chose your quarry.  
You told your tale, and well you played your rôle.  
You spoke of suffering, and I was sorry  
With all my heart, with all my soul.  
'Out of the deep,' you said. I thought to save you,  
And stunned myself upon the covered shoal.  
Yet, poor deceptive shallows, I forgave you  
With all my heart, with all my soul.  
You sought whatever evil had not sought you.  
In vain I strove to make your nature whole.  
I did not know the market that had bought you  
With all your heart, with all your soul.  
If man had one pure impulse you would smudge it.  
You had one gift, my pity, which you stole.  
Now I will only tell you that I grudge it  
With all my heart, with all my soul."

"Of whom this song, Brave Fellow?  
The stars in heaven's black soil  
Fold up their petalled yellow  
That pays the angels' toil."  
The lamp had burned its wick dim,  
The pair had drunk their fill....  
"I might have been her victim  
But for my *Strength of Will*."

Then one said to the other:  
"Such strength as yours and mine  
Must put its foot down, brother,  
And stay here—pass the wine—  
Till, for the world's salvation,  
Shall radiate from this den  
The Great Confederation  
Of Independent Men."

[Pg 32]

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The last sour mule was saddled,  
On went the caravan.  
These twain turned on the raddled  
Handmaidens of the *han*,  
Blinked, cast them forth with loathing  
Because the queen was fair,  
And lest their lack of clothing  
Should lay man's weakness bare.

White as a cloud in summer,  
Slender as sun-shot rain—  
Earth knows what moods become her—  
The queen passed....  
In her train  
The Great Confederation  
Trode with such wealth of *Will*  
That, in its trepidation,  
It never paid its bill.

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## VII THE HEART OF THE SLAVE

But as they fared slave Obeidullah failed.  
 Devouring fever shook him like a rat,  
 And ere they reached Kashan his course was run.  
 Then freedom came towards him, and he spoke:  
 "Here is an eye of water, mulberry-trees,  
 A rest-house, and to me a stranger thing,  
 Rest. Caravan be strong, fare on with blessings  
 Whence you must forge your happiness—but I,  
 Possessed of peace, shall never see the end.  
 The heart within me has been fire so long  
 That now my body is smoke. I watch it drift  
 Life leaves me gently as a mistress goes  
 Before her time to meet the uncoloured days,  
 Saying: 'I have lived. Plead not. 'Twill be in vain.  
 You were the end of summer. I have passed  
 Out of the garden with fresh scents and dews  
 Upon me, out ere sunset with cool hands,  
 The supple tread of youth and glorying limbs  
 Firm as resolve, unblemished as my pride;  
 Passed ere a leaf be fallen, or losing fights  
 Begin, that smirch the memory of love....'  
 Sweet is the shade, and death's cool lips are welcome  
 After the burning kisses of the sun,  
 The strained embraces of my owner, Toil.  
 I shall remember her with gratitude  
 But no regret, as I lie here. The dawn  
 Biting the desert-edge shall not disturb me,  
 Nor green oases zigzagged through the heat  
 Like stepping-stones. The many-coloured hills,  
 Heaven's mutable emotions, these are past.  
 Beyond them I shall find security  
 Of tenure in the outstretched hands of God."  
 Thereat his fellows made lament, and urged:  
 "Sleep on and take your rest, but not for ever.  
 Time adds to strength, and you shall rise with us  
 Who wait. Already we foresee the coast.  
 A little while...." Slave Obeidullah raised  
 Himself and looked ahead with shining eyes:

[Pg 34]

"The moon is faint. A dust-cloud swirls.  
 Therein I see dim marching hosts:  
 Strange embassies and dancing girls,  
 Spice-caravans and pilgrims. Ghosts  
 Rise thick from this else fruitless plain,  
 A waste that every season chars.  
 Yet teeming centuries lie slain  
 And trodden in the road to Fars.

"The still, white, creeping road slips on,  
 Marked by the bones of man and beast.  
 What comeliness and might have gone  
 To pad the highway of the East!  
 Long dynasties of fallen rose,  
 The glories of a thousand wars,  
 A million lovers' hearts compose  
 The dust upon the road to Fars.

[Pg 35]

"No tears have ever served to hold  
 This shifting velvet, fathom-deep,  
 Though vain and ceaseless winds have rolled  
 Its pile wherein the ages sleep.  
 Between your fingers you may sift  
 Kings, poets, priests and *charvadars*.  
 Heaven knows how many make a drift  
 Of dust upon the road to Fars.

"The wraiths subside. And, One with All,  
 Soon, in the brevity of length,  
 Our lives shall hear the voiceless call  
 That builds this earth of love and strength.  
 Eternal. breathless. we shall wait.

Till, last of all the Avatars,  
God finds us in his first estate:  
The dust upon the road to Fars."

So still he lay, so still the pilgrims deemed  
He was no longer there. The deepening shade  
Covered him softly. With his latest breath  
Slave Obeidullah looked upon the Queen:

"You whom I loved so steadfastly,  
If all the blest should ask to see  
The cause for which my spirit came  
Among them with so little claim  
To peace, this book should speak for me.

[Pg 36]

"I strove and only asked in fee  
Hope of your immortality  
Not mine—I had no other aim  
You whom I loved.

"The Judge will bend to hear my plea,  
And take my songs upon his knee.  
Perhaps His hand will make the lame  
Worthy to worship you, the same  
As here they vainly tried to be,  
You whom I loved."

Then, turned towards her, Obeidullah slept.

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## VIII THE TALE OF THE CHEAPJACK

Among the fruit-trees still he slumbers. All  
Mourned for their brother with one heavy heart.  
Even Tous drooped, swaying weakly in his stride;  
Until Farid Bahadur, cheapjack, spoke,  
One bootlessly afoot whose years had brought  
For profit this, to see existence clear  
And empty as a solid ball of glass.

Erstwhile, he said, my peddling carried me  
Clean through two empires like a paper hoop,  
Setting me down upon the olive slopes  
Where Smyrna nestles back to mother earth,  
And so lures in the ocean. I filled my pack  
With kerchiefs, beads, dross, chaffering with a Greek,  
Although he vowed a much-loved partner's death  
Left him no heart for it. He blew his nose,  
Asking strange prices as a man distraught.  
I had no heart to bargain while he crooned:

"Our loves were woven of one splendid thread,  
But not our lives, though we had been, we twain,  
Linked as in worship at the Spartan fane  
Of him who brought his brother from the dead.  
Ah, would our God were like his gods that said:  
Such love as this shall not have flowered in vain,  
And let the younger Castor live again  
The space that Pollux lay with Death instead.  
Dear, I had lain so gladly in the grave  
Not for a part of time but for God's whole  
Eternity, had died, yea oft, to save  
Not half your life, but one short hour. Your soul  
Was all too pure; mine had no right to ask  
From heaven such mercy as a saviour's task.

[Pg 38]

"They say the Olympian grace was not content  
With housing Death, but giving Love the key.  
It set the troths that guided you and me  
Among the jewels of the firmament;  
And there they dwell for ever and assent  
To each propitious ploughing of the sea.  
The coasting-pilots of Infinity  
Well know The Brothers. So your sails were bent,  
Young fathomer of the blue. I linger here  
With following gaze that tugs my heart-strings taut  
All day; but every night an Argonaut  
Slips through the streets and darkness, seaward, far  
Beyond the limitations of his sphere  
Into the vacant place beside a star."

So crooned he desolate in his dim shop,  
Till I became all ears and had no eyes.  
The fellow cheated me of three *dinars*.

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## IX THE EXPERIENCE OF THE DOOR

Slow into Kum the Glaring trailed  
 The caravan. Its courage failed  
 A moment. Only dust-clouds veiled  
     The sun, that overhead  
 From fields The Plough had turned to grain,  
 Star-honey laden on The Wain  
 And spices from the wind-domain,  
     Was baking angel-bread.  
 (Astronomers in Baghdad say  
 That Allah gave the Milky Way  
     To feed his guests, the dead.)

Even as the dead the pilgrims lay  
 Until the sun received his pay—  
 Man counts in gold, but he in grey—  
     Then, whining as one daft,  
 A voice crept to each sleeper's ear,  
 And one by one sat up to hear  
 It souging like a Seistan mere  
     Where nothing ever laughed.  
 A blur at elbow on the floor  
 Cried: "Sleep! 'Tis but the tavern door  
     Amoaning in the draught."

[Pg 40]

"Ay," said the master of the inn,  
 "A black-faced gaper that lets in  
 The dark, my creditors, and kin!  
     Last month it strained my wrist, did  
 The lout, so hard it slams. This week  
 Claims it for fuel. See the leak  
 Of air it springs! Its hinges creak,  
     Its wood is warped and twisted.  
 'Tis heavy-hearted as a man,  
 Stark, crazy thing!... It feels uncann...."  
     The wheezing voice persisted.

"Earth bare me in Mazanderan,  
 Where, breaking her dead level plan,  
 Steep foliage opens like a fan  
     To hide her virgin blush;  
 And singing, caravan, like you  
 Brooks dance towards the Caspian blue  
 Past coolth wherein mauve turtles coo  
     To panthers in the rush,  
 That turn hill-pools to amethyst.  
 Here bucks drink deep and tigers tryst  
     Neck-deep in grasses lush.

"And there the stainless peaks are kissed  
 By heaven whose crowning mercy, mist,  
 With cloud-lands white as Allah's fist  
     Anoints their heads with rain.  
 We never dreamed, where nature pours,  
 That life could run as thin as yours—  
 A waif thirst-stricken to all fours—  
     Or verdure, but a vein  
 In sandscapes wincing from the sun  
 That burns your flesh and visions dun,  
     Crawl throbbing through the plain.

[Pg 41]

"I grew. My shadow weighed a ton;  
 I held a countless garrison;  
 My boughs were roads for apes to run  
     Around the white owl's niche.  
 The hum of bees, the blue jay's scream....  
 The forest came to love and teem  
 In me beside the vivid stream  
     Shot through with speckled fish;  
 Till, weary of my sheltered glen,  
 I craved a human denizen  
     Fate granted me my wish.

"Yea, I had longed (if slope and fen  
Can love like this, the love of men  
Must live above our nature's ken)  
To see and shade the room,  
To shield far-leaning the abode,  
Wherein the souls of lovers glowed  
To songs that dimmed the bulbul's ode ...  
And man became my doom.  
He dragged me through the dew-drenched brake,  
And took the heart of me to make  
A tavern-door at Kum."

[Pg 42]

The pilgrims sat erect, engrossed,  
Or searched the crannies for a ghost.  
"Ah, heed it not," implored the host;  
"This hell-burnt father's son  
Moans ever like a soul oppressed,  
And takes the fancy of a guest,  
And makes my house no house of rest:  
I would its voice were gone.  
Yet be indulgent, sirs! 'Tis old.  
Next week it shall be burnt or sold.  
A new—" The voice went on:

"Here have I stood while life unrolled  
But not the tale my breezes told.  
Moonlight alone conceals the cold  
Drab city's lack of heart.  
Here have I watched an hundred years  
Bespatter me with blood and tears,  
Yet leave man ever in arrears  
Of where my monkeys start.  
No more, dog-rose and meadow-sweet!  
The harlot's musk and rotten meat  
Blow at me from the mart.

"No more, clear streams and fairy feet!  
But through my mouth the striving street  
Drains in brown spate the men who eat  
And drink and curse and die;  
And out of me the whole night long  
Reel revellers—O God, their song!...  
Are there no mortals clean and strong,  
Or do they pass me by?  
I little thought that I should leave  
For this the groves where turtles grieve  
Far closer to the sky.

[Pg 43]

"Instead of every song-bird's note  
I know the scales a merchant's throat  
Can compass. I have learned by rote  
The tricks of Copt and Jew;  
Can tell if Lur or Afghan brawls,  
The Armenian way of selling shawls  
Softly, and how an Arab bawls  
To rouse the raider's crew,  
Lest ululating strings of slaves  
Should take the kennel for their graves....  
Raids! I have seen a few,

"Or wars, occasion dubs them—waves  
Of Mongol sultans, Kurdish braves.  
They—Find me words! the Simûn *raves*—  
They worked ... 'tis called their will,  
Battered me in—behold the dint—  
With all their hearts that felt like flint,  
Besmeared the city with the tint  
Of sunset on my hill.  
My leopards stalk my bucks at eve—  
I shivered as I heard them heave—  
At least they ate their kill.

[Pg 44]

"I followed that.... But men who weave  
Such flowing robes of make-believe,  
I think the flood was wept by Eve—

Some sportsman shot the dove—  
These puzzled me, for God is good  
And man His image—not of wood,  
Thank God!—At last I understood  
All ... all except their love.  
I grew so hard that I could trace  
His hand's chief glory in their race.  
Perhaps He wore a glove."

Then one without made haste to smite  
The malcontent. It opened. Night  
Stood on the threshold dressed in white,  
And myriad-eyed and blind.  
The ostler murmured: "Some *Afrit*  
Or bitter worm has entered it;  
Nor jamb nor lintel seems to fit.  
I know its frame of mind."  
"Air stirs the dust upon the floor,"  
The landlord cried. "Fool! Shut that door  
A moaning in the wind."

"My glade was deep, a lichened well  
Of ether, limpid as a bell  
Buoyed on the manifold ground-swell  
Whose distance changed attires  
As sun-stroked plush, a roundelay  
Of all red-blue and purple grey,  
And, at each rise and fall of day,  
Snows dyed like altar fires  
Licked through those loud green sheaves of copse,  
Bent hyphens 'twixt the mountain-tops,  
Mosques of my motley choirs.

[Pg 45]

"And I, who gave them bed and bower  
For nights enduring but an hour  
Mid blaring miles of trumpet-flower,  
Leagues of liana-wreath,  
I saw the rocks through leaves and lings,  
Could blink the fangs and feel the wings,  
Thrill with the elemental things  
Of life and love and death.  
The purity of air and brook  
And song helped me to overlook  
The rapine underneath.

"But you—no! one dream more: an elf,  
Askip on ochre mountain-shelf,  
Who once had seen a man himself.  
I used his wand to gauge  
The sheen of moths and peacocks' whir,  
To plumb the jungle-aisles, to stir  
The drifts of frankincense and myrrh,  
And amorous lithe shapes that purr....  
'Tis finished. Turn the page  
To where man cased his bones in fat.  
His mate moved like a tiger-cat  
Until he built her cage.

[Pg 46]

"You, I have watched you all who sat  
Successive round the food-stained mat,  
And reckoned many who lived for that  
Alone; have seen the mark  
Of that last state the Thinking Beast  
Peep through the foliage of the feast,  
And crown its poet's flight with greased  
Fingers that grope the dark;  
Have heard a cleaner bosom catch  
Her breath, and fumble with my latch  
Irresolute. The lark

"My inmates never feared to match  
Bespoke the end. I belched the batch,  
Rolling them down the street, a patch  
Of dirt against the dawn.  
Then in its stead there came a saint,  
Inventor of a soul-complaint,

Who gave men's faith a coat of paint  
Like mine, and made me yawn  
With furtive wenching. Here have sighed  
Exultant groom and weeping bride  
Led like a captive fawn.

"This way passed those who marry lean  
Girl-chattels ere their times of teen.  
I knew a like but milder scene:  
A hawk, small birds that cower.  
How soon the chosen was brought back dead—  
Poisoned, the *hakim* always said—  
The husband groaned beside the bed,  
Arose, and kept the dower,  
But swept his conscience out with prayer.  
Man took the angels unaware  
When he became a power.

[Pg 47]

"And what of woman? On my stair  
The merchants spread their gaudiest ware,  
For which fools bought a love affair  
That ended in a jerk.  
Enough! To round the *tamasha*  
A bloated thing came by, the Shah;  
It grinned, and viziers fawned 'Ha! ha!'  
Curs, brainless as a Turk.  
And all the women in his train  
Beheld him once and ne'er again,  
And called his love their work.

"You see, my friends, I tired of this  
Wild doubling in the chase of bliss.  
Pards miss their spring as men their kiss,  
And yet the quarry dies.  
I learned the world's least mortal god,  
Whose epitaph is Ichabod,  
May sport till noon, but if he nod  
Shall never more arise.  
Then, caravan, you passed, and I  
Have solved my riddle with a cry:  
The sad are never wise.

[Pg 48]

"Your song was all that I had heard  
In dreams beyond the wildest bird,  
That rose above my yellow-furred  
Basses that bell and roar.  
It took the heart of me in tow  
To heights that I had longed to know,  
To the great deeps where lovers go  
And find—and want—no shore.  
In these alone is man fulfilled;  
And gleaming in the air I build  
My hope of him once more.

"For all the few that see truth whole,  
And take its endlessness for goal,  
And steer by stars as if no shoal  
Could mar their firmament,  
For all the few that sing and sail  
Knowing their quest of small avail,  
Thank God who gave them strength to fail  
In finding what He meant...."  
"Poets!" the landlord groaned, "and poor!  
This house is cursed." He banged the door  
Behind them as they went.

And distance placed soft hands upon their mouths.

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# X THE SONG OF THE SELVES

## DREAMER-OF-THE-AGE

'Twas in old Tehran City,  
 Hard by the old bazaar,  
 I heard a restless ditty  
 That pushed my door ajar;

A song nor great nor witty,  
 It spoke of my own mind.  
 I looked on Tehran City,  
 And knew I had been blind,

Or else the streets were altered  
 As by a peri's wand.  
 "Who are you, friends?" I faltered.  
 "The Pilgrims of Beyond,"

They said. I kissed the tatters  
 That wiser heads contemn.  
 I saw the Thing-that-matters,  
 And took the road with them.

I seek. Bestow no pity  
 On Failure's courtier. Say:  
 "'Twas well to find the city,  
 But that was yesterday."

[Pg 50]

## THE PILGRIMS

Athirst as the Hadramut,  
 Our spirits correspond  
 With God by all the gamut  
 Of harmony, too fond  
 Of Him for prayer that rifles  
 His treasury for trifles.  
 No load of blessing stifles  
 The Pilgrims of Beyond.

## DREAMER-OF-THE-AGE

And yet the empty-handed  
Hold richer merchandise  
Than ever fable landed  
From Dreamland's argosies,

Since we, the symbol-merchants,  
Are partners with Bulbul.  
The silversmith of her chants  
Knows how our chests are full.

[Pg 51]

In marts, where echoes answer  
And only they, we trade.  
But join our caravan, sir,  
And count your fortune made.

Dawn brings us dazzling offers  
With fingers gemmed and pearled,  
And evening fills our coffers  
As we explain the world,

Green fields and seas that curtsey  
To us and mock Despair;  
For blossoms in the dirt see  
Their spirit in the air.

And Ecstasy our servant  
Demands no other wage  
But that we be observant  
To joy in pilgrimage.

### **THE MERCHANTS**

We do not bid our master  
Declare His word His bond,  
Or make His payments faster—  
As though He would abscond!  
We ask Him for too little  
To strain at jot or tittle.  
We know our lives are brittle,  
We Pilgrims of Beyond.

### **DREAMER-OF-THE-AGE**

[Pg 52]

We come from everlasting  
Towards eternity,  
Ho! not in dirge and fasting  
But lapped in jollity.

Though sackcloth be our clothing  
We bear no ash but fire.  
We have no sickly loathing  
Of youth and youth's desire.

We prize no consummation  
Of one peculiar creed.  
We travel for a nation,  
The one that feels our need.

Our tongue conceals no message,  
But leaves you free to find,  
And vaunts itself the presage  
Of those that come behind.

### **THE CAMELMEN**



Here is no patch of shade. A  
Fierce wilderness and blonde  
Links Delhi to Hodeidah,  
Tashkent to Trebizond.  
The cargo is our brother's,  
We march and moil for others,  
Until the desert smothers  
The Pilgrims of Beyond.

[Pg 53]

### **DREAMER-OF-THE-AGE**

Hark how our camels grumble  
At morn! Would you permit  
The stone on which you stumble  
To make you carry it?

And if at last your burden  
Be cheapened in a shop,  
Seraglio or Lur den,  
Should lack of humour stop

The game at its beginning?  
We lug the stuff of dreams.  
Earth does her best by spinning,  
She cannot help the seams;

But you can help to monger  
The broidery. She may  
Have made you richer, stronger,  
To give her best away.

I own no musk or camphor,  
I have no truck with care,  
Nor change the thing I am for  
The things men only wear.

[Pg 54]

### **THE SOLDIERS**

First cousin of a sieve is  
The uniform we donned.  
We slop along on *ghivehs*,  
In rags caparisonned.  
No Shah has ever paid us.  
All brigands mock and raid us,  
And misery has made us  
The Pilgrims of Beyond.

### **DREAMER-OF-THE-AGE**

What then! Would you be willing  
To quit the caravan,  
And fall again to drilling,  
Pent in the walled *meidan*,

When history flings open  
Blank scrolls for you to write  
Such victories as no pen  
Has ever brought to light?

[Pg 55]

You shall not burn as Jengiz,  
Nor rage like Timur Lang.  
Your foemen are *ferengis*  
Of whom no epic sang.

The housed that blame the tented,  
Or comfort those that think,  
The flocks that die contented  
With settling down to blink

The sun we keep our eyes on,  
That bow their heads too far  
To face their own horizon,  
On these be war on war.

Cursed by the bonds you sever,  
The bondsmen you release,  
Go, seek the Land of Fever  
And find the Land of Ease.

## THE CARAVAN

Lift up your hearts, ye singers!  
We lift them up in song.  
Behold, the sunset lingers.  
No less shall night be long.  
We meet her unaffrighted,  
Though never bourne be sighted.  
We *meant* to be benighted  
Still moving fleet and strong.

[Pg 56]

We smooth the stony places  
For those that else despond.  
We pass, and leave no traces  
Save this, a broken frond,  
And this, that hands once craven  
Take hardship for the haven  
Upon whose rocks is graven:  
"The Pilgrims of Beyond."

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# XI

## THE STORY OF THE SUTLER

And so the song was finished. Then they called  
 To Kizzil Bash, the Sutler of Dilman,  
 "Take up the tale, for you have wandered far  
 Behind strange masters...." Once, he said, I served  
 One of the Roumi lordlings, silver-faced,  
 Who to forget some sorrow or lost love—  
 Such is their way—came with an embassy  
 To cringe before the Caliph in Stamboul  
 For something sordid, trade.... He mouthed our verse  
 To please his guests, and I corrected him.  
 The man was cypress-sad and lone, but he  
 Could not be silent as the great should be,  
 Because he neither knew his place nor me.  
 The boatman marvelled at his lack of dignity.  
 They knew the currents. He was bent on steering,  
 And spoke of God in terms wellnigh endearing.  
 I see him still, sharp beard, black velvet mantle, ear-ring.  
 He dug with slaves for Greekling manuscript,  
 Danced like a slave-girl when he found, and shipped  
 Westward cracked heads and friezes we had chipped.  
 I saw him kiss a statue, murmuring eager-lipped:

[Pg 58]

"Fear was born when the woods were young.  
 Chance had gathered an heap of sods,  
 Where the slip of a tree-man's tongue  
 Throned the dam of the elder gods.  
     Twilight, a rustled leaf,  
     Started the first belief  
     In some unearthly Chief  
     Latent behind  
     Cover of aspen shade.  
     Skirting the haunted glade  
     Some one found speech, and prayed.  
     Was it the wind  
 Sniffing his cavern or the demon's laughter?  
 Here from the night he conjured up Hereafter,  
     Quarried the river-mists to house the unseen.  
 Only the woodpecker had found life hollow,  
 And gods went whither none was fain to follow,  
     Because the earth was green  
     And Afterwards was black.

"Man, the child of a tale of rape,  
 Drew the seas with his hunting ships,  
 Cut their prows to a giant's shape,  
 Fitted names to their snarling lips:  
     Gods in his image born,  
     Singing, fierce-eyed, unshorn,  
     Lords of a drinking-horn  
     Five fathoms deep;  
     Holding the one reward  
     Carved by a dripping sword,  
     Feasts, and above them stored  
     Ceiling-high sleep.

[Pg 59]

Save to the conqueror Life was put-off Dying,  
 And Death brought nothing but the irk of lying—  
     How long—with over-restful hosts abed.  
 The rough immortals, whom he met unshrinking,  
 Spared him from nothing but the pain of thinking.  
     And so the earth was red  
     While Afterwards was grey.

"Jungles thinned, and the clearings merged  
 Where the wandering clans drew breath.  
 Druids rose and the people surged.  
 Then the blessing of Nazareth  
     Fell on them mad and mild,  
     Boasting itself a child.  
     Smite it! And yet it smiled.  
     There, as it kneeled,  
     Lowliness rose to might

Lowliness rose to might,  
Deeming our days a night,  
Bodily joy a plight  
Soon to be healed;  
Gave to one god all credit for creation,  
But, lest the Path should seem the Destination,  
Strove to attune man's heartstrings to a rack,  
Until the soul was fortified to change hells,  
While saints and poets chanted songs of angels,  
Confessing earth was black  
But Afterwards was gold.

[Pg 60]

"Faith was raised to the power of millions,  
Went as wine to a single head,  
Took its chiefs for the sun's postillions,  
Claimed to speak in its founder's stead;  
Till in the western skies  
Reason's epiphanies  
Beckoned the other-wise  
Men to rebirth.  
Doubt, that makes spirits lithe,  
Woke and began to writhe,  
Burst through the osier withe,  
Freed the old earth.  
Nature cried out again for recognition,  
Claiming that flesh is more than mere transition,  
That mouths were made for sweeter things than prayer.  
Yea, she, that first revealed the superhuman,  
Out of the depths in us shall bring the new man  
Who knows that earth is fair,  
And Afterwards—who knows!"

We knew his childish searching meant no harm,  
But his own people somehow took alarm;  
For when his heart was healed, and he returned  
With songs, 'tis said that he and they were burned.  
Only this one survived. I put it by  
Lest one who lived so much should wholly die.  
He tried to spend far more than every day,  
And never asked what he would have to pay.  
To him a pint of music was a potion  
That set him dabbling in some small emotion.  
Wherever he could drown he marked an ocean  
He got no pleasure but the pains he took  
To bring himself to death by one small book  
Filled with what he had heard, the babble of a brook.

[Pg 61]

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## XII THE LEGEND OF THE PEASANT

They passed a field of purple *badinjan*.  
A peasant raised his head to hear the tune,  
And, seeking some excuse for holiday,  
He followed humming ballads, this the first:

"It happened say a century ago,  
Somewhere between Mazanderan and Fars,  
A Frank was in the picture—that I know—  
Mud-walls and roses, cypresses and stars,  
White dust and shadows black.

"It happened She was loved by more than One,  
Though no one now recalls the name and rank  
Of even One, whose heart was like the stone  
That framed the water of the garden tank  
Long gone to utter wrack.

"It happened that one night She had a mind  
To roam her garden. Youth was hidden there,  
It happened One was watching from behind  
A Judas-tree, though neither of the pair  
Heard the twigs sigh and crack.

[Pg 63]

"It happened that next night She wandered out  
Once more, and Youth was hiding there again.  
And One sprang forth upon them with a shout,  
And fanatics and *seyids* in his train  
Streamed in a wolfish pack.

"It happened that the sun found something red  
Among the Judas-blossoms where Youth lay  
Upon his face; a crow was on his head,  
And desert dogs began to sniff and bay  
At something in his back.

"It happened that none ever knew Her fate—  
Except that She was never heard of more—  
Save One, and two that through a secret gate—  
Perhaps they knew—a struggling burden bore.  
I think it was a sack."

Some one applauded; then the humming drone  
Was stung to louder efforts, and went on:

"They staggered down the stiff black avenue,  
Hiding the sack's convulsions from the moon,  
To drown its cries they feigned the shrill *iouiou*  
Of owls, then dropped it in the swift Karûn,  
Paused, and admired the view.

"The ripples took her, trying not to leap,  
But, copying the uneventful sky,  
Serenely burnished where the stream grows deep  
They smoothened their staccato lullaby.  
And so she fell asleep

[Pg 64]

"Where no sharp rock disturbs the river bed,  
A moving peace, whose eddies turn half-fain  
Towards their youth's tumultuous watershed,  
And slow blank scutcheons widen like a stain  
Portending Sound is dead.

"No herd or village fouls the shining tide,  
Till ocean lays a suzerain's armistice  
On brawling tributaries. Like a bride  
Greeting her lord it laved her with a kiss,  
And left her purified.

"But the sea-*Jinn*, who dwell and dress in mauve,  
And hunt blind monsters down the corridors  
Between sunk vessels—fishers know the drove,  
Their horns and conches and the quarry's roars

In autumn—hold that love

"Should meet with more than pardon. So the pack  
Spliced up a wand of all the spillikin spars  
Flagged with the purple fantasies of wrack,  
Composed a spell not one of them could parse,  
And tried it on the sack.

"'Twas filled with pearls! Each *Jinni* dipped his hand,  
And scattered trails through labyrinths of ooze,  
Or sowed gems thick upon the golden sand,  
Festooned a bed from Bahrein to Ormuz,  
Muscat to Ras Naband....

"*Hajji*, a deeper meaning than appears  
Beneath the surface of my song may lurk  
Like *Jinn*. How oft the crown of gathered years,  
The dazzling things for which men thank their work,  
Are made by Woman's tears."

Tous shook his head and grunted, ceaselessly  
The caravan limped onward to the Gulf.

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### XIII

## THE PROMOTION OF THE SOLDIER

Serdar-i-Jang, the Wazir of the west,  
Of all mankind had served his country best  
By weeding it. The terror of his name  
Lapped up the barren Pusht-i-kuh like flame,  
Till the Shah smiled: "My other lords of war lose  
Battles, but he wrings love from my Baharlus."

He smote them hip and thigh. The man was brave.  
Having four wives, he needs must take for slave  
Whatever captive baggage crossed his path,  
And never feared love for its aftermath.  
Thus fared the Wazir while his locks were blue.  
The silver in them found him captive too.

The singing caravan in chorus flowed  
Past the clay porticoes of his abode.  
She came, he saw, was conquered—like a puppet  
Drawn to the window, to the street and up it,  
Forth to the desert, leaving in the lurch  
His pleasant wars and policies to search

For what? He knew not. Haply for the truth  
Whose home is open eyes, not dreams or youth.  
But this he dimly knew, that something strange,  
Beauty, had come within his vision's range;  
And a new splendour, running through the world,  
Drummed at the postern of his senses, hurled

[Pg 67]

Him forth, this warrior proud and taciturn,  
Footsore upon a pilgrimage to learn  
Humility.... These beggars, in whose wake  
He toiled, ne'er paused for him to overtake  
Their echoes. When at dusk he joined their ring  
None rose or bowed. All watched him. Could he sing?

And he could not, for never had he thrown  
His days away on verse! He sat alone,  
So that his silence stamped him with the badge  
Of hanger-on or menial of this *haj*.  
Thrust as he would with much unseemly din,  
He found no place beside the palanquin,

Till Seyid Rida, scholar of Nejaf,  
Took pity on him, saying: "You shall laugh  
At these black days when, having served your time,  
You share the sovereignty of Persian rhyme.  
Be patient, pray to Allah, O my son,  
For power of worship. It shall come anon...."

Seyid Rida spoke in vain. The Wazir's place  
So far behind the Queen, her perfect face  
But half-divined, as Sight denied to Faith,  
A doubt lest love itself should be a wraith  
Dazzling but mocking him, these stirred his passion  
To sworn defiance, to his last Circassian

[Pg 68]

And thoughts of many a woman taken by force,  
Restive and then submissive as a horse.  
And now.... He followed in the wake of vision  
Lofty and pure as Elburz snows. Derision  
Would follow him in turn!... He shook his fist  
Toward the feet his soul would fain have kissed:

"Oh, I was born for women, women, women.  
Through my still boyhood rang the first alarm;  
And since that terror ever fresh invaders  
Have occupied and sacked me to their harm.  
I am the cockpit where endemic fever  
Holds the low country in a broken lease  
From waves that ruined dykes appear to welcome.  
Only one great emotion spares me—Peace!

"I have grown up for women, women, women;  
And suffering has had her fill of me.  
My ears still echo with receding laughter,  
As shells retain the voices of the sea.  
I am the gateway only, not the garden,  
That opens from a crowded thoroughfare.  
I stand ajar to every passing fancy,  
And all have knocked, but none have rested there.

[Pg 69]

"And I shall die for women, women, women,  
But not for love of them. Adventure calls  
Or waits with old romance to disappoint me  
Behind the promise of surrendered walls.  
I am the vessel of some mad explorer,  
That sails to seek for treasure in strange lands  
Without a steersman in a crew of gallants,  
And, finding fortune, ends with empty hands."

A deathly silence fell. Green-turbaned men  
Fell noiselessly to sharpening their knives  
On their bare hardened feet. Seyid Rida sighed:  
"Alas, your heart is set upon reward  
For gifts of self. You cannot understand  
Love loves for nothing, brother. Those who serve  
God the most purely cannot count that He  
Will love them in return...."

The Wazir scowled.

But Dreamer-of-the-Age took him aside,  
"I would unfold a story like a carpet.  
The camel Tous told it to me last night:

"King Suleiman's wives were as jewels, his jewels as stones of the desert  
In number. His concubines herded as desert-gazelles in their grace,  
That answered his bidding as meekly as all his wild animal kingdom,  
The beasts and the birds and the fishes. Yet the world was as pitch on his face.

[Pg 70]

"Now it chanced that the ruler of Saba had news by a merchant of peacocks  
From this king like a hawk-god of Egypt, whose beak was set deep in the gloom  
Of his grape-purple beard, and she said: 'We shall see how his vanities stead him  
When from under the arch of his eyebrows he sees my feet enter his room.'

"For her feet were far whiter than manna. Her body was white as the cry  
Of a child when the chords of hosanna draw the beauty of holiness nigh.  
The droop of her eyelids would fan a revolt from Baghdad to Lake Tsana,  
Her fingers were veined alabaster. The sprites of her escort would sigh,

"As they bathed her with sun set in amber and cooled in the snow of a cloudlet,  
And taught her chief eunuch to clamber up moonbeams as fleet as a ghost:  
These, lavish of reed-pipe and tamburine, slaves of the Son of Daoud, let  
Her palanquin down into Zeila—gambouge and magenta, the coast!"

And the Wazir cried, "Ha!" to the rhymes.

[Pg 71]

"Round the harbour a hoopoe was strutting, for Suleiman's Seal had appointed  
Him messenger-bird, and he thought: 'If I bring the good news of this beauty,  
This Sovereign of Silkiness, I shall harvest great thanks and promotion.'  
So he flew to the Presence and twittered a text on the pleasure of Duty.

"Fulfiller of faint Superstition, whose hand rolls the eyeballs of Thunder,  
And lightens forked tongues on a mission of menace to bat or to eagle!  
There comes to your portal a vision whose light shall make Israel wonder.  
Immortal her beauty and mortal her glance that is soft as a seagull."

And the Wazir cried, "Hey!" to the rhymes.

"But Suleiman, sated with women and governance, lifted his beak  
From his beard. Naught escaped the magician, not a thought, not a tone. Ah, he knew  
All! He said: 'I have measured your mind as my pity has measured my people.  
We shall speak of reward when she comes; I may live to regret it—and you!

[Pg 72]

"Lo, I am the servant of God, whom I serve as you serve me, not asking  
For pay by each day or each act, but just for the general sum.  
The work of the world must be done without wage to be done to our credit.  
We shall profit in claiming our guerdon not by what we are but become.'

"So the Queen came to Kuddus. Mashallah! Shall a picture be limned of her coming!  
Flushed dancers and lutists athrumming light-limbed as Daoud round the Ark!

Crushed roadway and crowd-applause rumbled, loud music, hushed barbarous mumming!

To the cry, 'On to Sion' above her, this lover rode straight at her mark!"

And the Wazir cried, "Ho!" to the rhymes.

"She had but to flatter the wizard to win him. He said to the hoopoe:  
'I will haggle no more. You shall learn to your cost what the bargainer buys,  
Whose faith levies toll upon duty, whose trust will not serve me on trust,  
Or love for Love. On your head be it.' The hoopoe said: '*Cheshm*—on my eyes!"

[Pg 73]

"All other birds fainted with envy, as Suleiman lifted a digit.  
Thereon was the Ring-of-most-Magic. Then he spat on the dust from his bed,  
And the miracle came! for the hoopoe went swaggering out of the presence  
(So he struts in his walking to-day) with a crown of pure gold on his head.

"But the Jews thus learnt avarice. Some one spread news of the bird-coronation  
To the ends of the kingdom. The tribes ran out as one man armed with lime,  
Bows, nets, slings—and slew the hoopoes for the sake of their crowns. There was profit  
In sport then; none other has liked them so well since King Suleiman's time.

"They divided the spoil till in Israel only our messenger-bird  
Survived with two fellows.... He fled to Suleiman's closet for *bast*,  
Sobbing, 'Spare us, O king! Make a sign with the ring that men sing of! We fare as  
Amalekites. If I have sinned, I am punished. We three are the last

"Of our race. In your grace turn your face to our case. We place hope in your favour!  
My brood is a Yahudi's food. Israel—who disputes it—insane  
For gain. We are slain all day long by the strong sons of Cain. Let us waive our  
Gold bane for plain down, lest we drown in our own blood! Discrown us again!"

[Pg 74]

And the Wazir cried, "Hi!" to the rhymes.

"The King made reply. He was sadder than rain in the willows of Jordan.  
'We are God's passing thoughts. They alone that await their fulfilment are wise.  
You shall be for a warning, O hoopoe. I had given you more than gold-wages  
If you had believed we not only had ears, I and Allah, but eyes!

"Yet giving is fraught with forgiveness. Now therefore the crown you did covet  
Is gone. You are healed of your pride; you shall live till the Angel of Death errs  
From Allah's command. By my Ring-of-most-Magic the gold is transmuted.  
Go forth! He has set for a sign on your brow a tiara of feathers.'

"So the hoopoe went forth in the glory of plumes that he won in this wise  
And wears. Then the hunters, assembled from the uttermost quarters of Sham, should  
Have shot, but did not, for they said: 'What a head! We will not waste an arrow  
On sport of this sort. We are sold! We were told it was gold and....'"

[Pg 75]

Tamam Shud

And the Wazir shrieked "Halt!" at the rhymes.

But as he slept that night the Dreamer prayed  
That understanding might bedew his head.  
And so it was. The fountain of the Dawn  
Rose in the whiteness of the month *Rajab*,  
Washing the desert stones, and made each body  
Shine as the sun-swift chariot of a soul.

While the last swimmer in the sea of slumber,  
Out of the deep, its jungled bottom, its ghosts,  
Its weight and wonders, rises to the surface  
In final breaths of sleep, the Wazir stirred  
And flung out joyful arms. Not otherwise  
The groping diver in the Gulf of Pearls,  
Having achieved adventure, comes to light  
And grasps the painted gunwale—with his prize.

"For every hour and day  
Of youth that spelled delay  
In finding you, I pray  
To life for pardon,  
I that long since have faced  
My task in patient haste:  
Out of my former waste  
To make your garden.

[Pg 76]

"With these soiled hands I made

My Self (man's hardest trade).  
The sun was *you*: the shade  
My toil, my seed did.  
I drove my strong soul through  
Years in the thought of you,  
For whom my garden grew,  
And grew unheeded;

"For you, an episode  
That lay beside your road,  
For me, my long abode,  
My will's whole centre.  
Lo now my task fulfilled,  
Yet not the hope that thrilled  
The stubborn realm I tilled  
For you to enter.

"Ah, must all sacrifice  
Be weighed with balance nice!  
To ask the gods our price  
Makes all creeds shoddy.  
Then should I bargain now—  
Troubling my worship—how  
You will reward my vow  
Of soul and body?

"I have not striven in vain,  
Though all my poor domain  
Cries daily for your reign.  
I hold its treasure,  
A source of splendour, known  
Haply to me alone,  
A boundless love—my own.  
Had you but leisure

"To pause beside this spring  
A moment, harkening  
How through my silence sing  
The dreams that here rest,  
I yet might make you see  
Some of the You in Me.  
This song not I but we  
Have written, dearest."

Long ropes of stillness joined the caravan  
Closer together; no man spoke a word,  
Till Dreamer-of-the-Age: "Friend, go up higher  
At the Queen's right hand." Seyid Rida smiled:  
"I knew you would outrun us." The Wazir  
Heard neither fame nor blame, and so was blest  
Because he sought praise only of the Queen.

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## XIV THE MORAL OF THE SCHOLAR

At Ispahan the notables were met  
In conclave. Seyid Rida, scholar scamp—  
As Dawlatshah records—perched in the porch:

"Round the table sit the sages—  
Different views and different ages—  
Secretaries scribble pages,  
Taking down each 'er' and 'hem,'  
Taking down each word they utter  
Like the solemn measured sputter  
Of fat raindrops from a gutter.  
I speak last of them.

"Outside in the summer weather  
Birds are talking all together,  
While a tiny pecked-out feather  
Flutters past the pane.  
Dare you own: The work before us  
Seems at moments like their chorus,  
Just a little more sonorous,  
Similar in strain?

[Pg 79]

"Have a care! The bird that chatters  
Is the only bird that matters,  
Heedless of the hand that scatters  
Grains of sense or chaff  
Mid your Barmecides and Cleons.  
I have listened here for æons  
To these rooster-flights and pæans.  
No one heard me laugh.

"Parrot, jackdaw, jay, and pigeon,  
Prose would be the whole religion  
Of the Nephelococcygian  
State to which you steer.  
If the earth remains a youngster  
With some waywardness amongst her  
Virtues, I should thank the songster  
Whom you cannot hear.

"Tits that swing upon a thistle,  
Wrens and chats that pipe and whistle,  
Join their notes to our epistle,  
Where the bee-fraught lime  
Orchestrates the lark's espousal  
Not of causes but carousal:  
Owl, we hear you charge the ouzel  
With a waste of time!

"Princeling, a fantastic prophet  
Tweaks your robe and bids you doff it,  
Offers you escape from Tophet  
On the wings of words.  
Spread them bravely, fly the town, sell  
All you have for this one counsel:  
Sing and never mind the groundsel!  
Come, we too are birds."

[Pg 80]

Thereat the conclave fluttered and flew out,  
And I have heard them on the Persian roads,  
In half-dead cities. History repeats  
Nothing except the rose. But Persians say  
This was the last they heard of government.

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## XV

## THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE SHEIKH

Alas! 'Twas time to go—"Conceal the wine,  
The purple and the yellow infidel!"—  
Rice cooked in saffron, honey-cakes, and *mast*  
With many-coloured *shirini* were all  
Packed up in paunches capon-lined....

The Queen

Sailed through the city, mounted high on Tous,  
Full in the moonlight, purer than the moon,  
Whose beauty, being weighed with hers, the scale  
Sent up to heaven and left the Queen on earth....

Followed quick tumbles to the lambent street,  
Graspings of shoes, and search for garments lost,  
With tunes that mounted all awry as flame  
Draught-blown, short breaths and straggling feet.

The Dreamer

Reddened and drooped his head; for at the Gate  
Sat a portentous Sheikh, thrice great in girth,  
Ali-el-Kerbelai, Known-of-Men,  
To whom—he slept all day—his nightly school  
Resorted in the porch. He saw, and shrugged  
His shoulders, rounded in glory like the hills  
That drift and clash about the Gulf of Pearls—  
Bahreinis tell the tale lest rival *dhow*s  
Should venture into trade—and thus held forth:

"Gossips, I have watched fools wander through this gate  
In generations. Never have I seen  
Men so bewitched by one closed palanquin,  
So little fain to chatter with the great,  
So blind, or single-eyed, they did not see  
Ali-el-Kerbelai, even me.

"Poor souls! Dusk swamps our wriggling thoroughfares  
Like trenches; and I rub my hands to think  
How I to-night in coolth shall sleep and drink,  
While sunrise takes these vagrants unawares.  
Madmen set out each day to beard the sun,  
And seventy years ago Your Slave was one.

"When all the world was young, that is when *I*  
Was young, I promised Allah to be wise,  
And started on the road of enterprise  
That leads towards the snow-capped hills of Why,  
Passing my hand across my shaven brow  
Heavy with all the lower lore of How."

Ali-el-Kerbelai sighed his soul  
Out of his nostrils pious and serene,  
For the swift curtain of the night had slid  
Along the rings of stillness, as he peered  
Into the plain. The singing caravan  
Had dwindled slowly to a speck of white.  
Then said the sage: "Behold they go to nothing,  
These lovers, these far-eyed. To think they passed  
Within a foot of wisdom and my robe!  
Alas, they passed and knew not. 'Tis the risk  
Of all such noisy dreamers. Ah, my head  
Pities.... Well, God is great. And God made me.

"Thus first I reached Mohammerah, whose sheikh  
In speechless gratitude besought a boon—  
To make me eunuch in his *anderûn*—  
For I had talked away his stomach-ache.  
And of this epoch I need only say  
I had fresh dates for dinner every day.

"But I was young. I spurned the unmanly job,  
For I loved conquest, and the world lay flat  
Before me like a purple praying-mat,  
And all young women made my heart *kebob*,

[Pg 82]

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Until the sheikh conceived himself disgraced.  
Then I took ship from Basra—in some haste.

"We put to sea, fair sirs, a foul-faced sea  
Puckered with viciousness and green with hate  
Of all the sons of Adam; and black fate  
Conspired with her to take account of me,  
For all the *Jinn* who lurk among the gales  
Came down to fecundate our bellied sails.

[Pg 84]

"They blew. They thrust my skull against the sky,  
The jade-backed *Jinn* disguised as ocean-swell,  
But I saw through them.... Down we went to hell,  
Where Iblis tried to teach me blasphemy  
In vain. No devil's wile could make me speak.  
Thus I learned self-control. (I was so weak.)

"We drifted past bare cliff and jungle sedge,  
Past spouting loose volcanoes known as whales,  
And sirens that blew kisses with their tails,  
Till we fell over the horizon's edge,  
Fell sheer three thousand parasangs. And there  
I first discovered that the world is square.

"We were in China, sir. The Home of Yellows,  
Soil, porcelain, manuscripts, men.... Here I spent  
Six weeks in stuffing to my heart's content  
The thought-scrapes given to these whoreson fellows  
By heaven. My zeal picked all tradition's locks,  
And knowledge opened like a lacquered box

"Wrought with strange figures.... Now I learned by heart  
Eleven score ways of dodging every sin.  
So, having sucked the marrow from Peking,  
I planned with Allah that I should depart,  
And having thus obtained a ruly wind  
I shone like lightning through the schools of Hind.

[Pg 85]

"I shall say little of Hind. Its mouth is wide  
With sacred texts and precepts packed in lyrics  
For carriage, verse unversed in our empirics.  
I grasped all Indian knowledge like a bride  
Without a dower, enjoyed and let her go,  
Giving God thanks that only Persians *know*."

The singing caravan shrank in a clear  
Green sideless tunnel of the firmament.  
Ali-el-Kerbelaï paused and watched  
Intent, even as by torchlight men spear fish,  
While searching flame-reflections brushed and lit  
The deep brown-watered caverns of his eyes,  
Where dim shapes moved profoundly in the pool.  
His listeners watched the sage in ecstasy  
Poise, concentrate his massive thought on Nothing,  
Heard his *narghilé* bubble like a brain....

"From Hind to Misr. At Cairo's El-Azhar,  
The flower of Moslem scholarship, I sat  
Among the Sunni bastards. As a cat  
Watches the sun through eyelids scarce ajar,  
From dawn till evening prayer I laboured hard,  
Lolling in ambush round the great courtyard

"To pounce on wingèd words. Athwart the arcade  
Midday in golden bars came clanging down  
Upon the anvil of each turbaned crown,  
And many minds took refuge in my shade.  
I was divinely hard to understand,  
Talking until my throat was dry as sand.

[Pg 86]

"So to the mosque well—into it they pushed  
A dog who disagreed with me—and drew  
Relief what time the pigeons ceased to coo  
Or rustle round its rainbow-juice. We hushed  
Our flights of eloquence when my *roghan*  
Sizzled complacent in the frying-pan.

"Mashallah, what a life! Yet in this scene  
I found a fleck of rust upon my tongue.  
Propelled by Fate and my own force of lung,  
I flitted with two reverend *Maghrebîn*  
Whom I had favoured, having learned the trick  
Of speaking their foul breed of Arabic.

"Immortal spirits led us, yea the chief  
*Afrit*, the crown of all the *Afarit*.  
We crossed the great Sahara like a street.  
My fame allows me licence to be brief.  
Enough. Whatever any sceptic says,  
I still maintain I spent a year at Fez.

"Here was a sect that said one God was three.  
I plied Moriscos who had tasted two  
Beliefs perforce, I even asked a Jew  
To make this strange *Tariqah* clear; but he—  
By this judge Christians—he could not explain,  
Although his father had been burnt in Spain.

"Ah, how I studied in that narrow city,  
Whose walls are changeless as a Persian law,  
And full of loopholes. To the seers I saw  
Is due the gamut of my human pity.  
We stirred the puddles of the human mind  
Till none could see the bottom but the blind.

"Now Shaitan tempted me. I fell for once,  
A venial sin.... I journeyed to Stamboul  
To plumb the errors of the *Greegi* school.  
'Twas there I read the Stagyrity, a dunce,  
The Frankish ruler of theology,  
And father of a dunce, Alfarabi.

"I laid him low and hurried home to indite  
A book, the fruit of all my Thought and Travel,  
Entitled 'Contemplation of the Navel,'  
A mystic book. (But first I learned to write.)  
Such of our doctors as can read have read it.  
But I was bent on even higher credit.

"I sought a cave whence madmen hunt wild sheep,  
And there for thirteen years I held my head,  
Until the dupes decided I was dead.  
Indeed I spent the better part in sleep,  
Lest I should be beguiled from abstract chatter  
By lust for this world's striped and dazzling matter.

"Night brought me counsel, and a pock-marked Kurd  
Or angels brought me food. Day spared my dreams  
That tilled the solitude like slow white teams  
Of oxen, till it blossomed, and I heard  
The Roc's huge pinions scour the starry cobbles;  
And so I rose above all human squabbles.

"For me the burning haze made sandhills dance,  
Till blushing shadows covered their nude breasts.  
The eternal heirs of leisure were my guests,  
And feasted on my glory in advance.  
Then on an eve among the eves.... The End!  
My soul sat by me talking as a friend.

"I bleached my beard, and came to Ispahan.  
You know the rest. To Allah's will I bowed  
In suffering the plaudits of the crowd,  
For all must listen; those must preach who can.  
I stirred the town with fingers raised to bless....  
And gauged the people by my emptiness."

The caravan was gone. Its song survived  
A little, faint, an echo, not at all.  
Then like a magic carpet warmth was drawn  
Back into heaven, and left behind a void  
Where thin-faced breezes, huddling from the hills,  
Sat down to breathe hard tales upon their hands.  
And suddenly earth looked her age. Like her

And suddenly earth looked not age. Like her  
The shapes round Ali-el-Kerbelai shivered,  
Pulling their coloured *abbas* to their ears  
And drawing in their feet. At last one spoke:  
"O master, you to whom the world is known,  
What is your thought's conclusion, what the sum  
Of added knowledge in the tome of You?"  
And Ali answered weighing out his words:

[Pg 89]

"Sir, I have seen the East and West, great peace,  
Great wars, indifferent fates that blessed or cursed  
Their builders. I have touched the best and worst  
In flesh and thought, have watched flames rise and cease,  
Consoled high hopes, deep passions, men that die  
For things beneath the earth, behind the sky,

"For god or woman. I have counted change  
For the Sarraf of Changelessness, have marked  
Kings, Wazirs, coursed by sons of dogs that barked  
And bit, the uninhabitable range  
Of power, where all that climb in others' shoes  
Are honoured and unperched like cockatoos.

"Now having known mankind in hell and bliss  
Through thrice a generation, I have formed  
From all the problems I besieged or stormed  
One firm conviction, only one! 'Tis this:  
The Faith, the Pomp, the Loves, the Lives of men  
Outshine the firefly and outcrest the wren."

He added as he rose: "But God is great."  
And bent, repassing through the city gate,  
Lest he should bump his venerable pate.

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## XVI THE ARGUMENT OF THE SCEPTIC

Beside the Sufis ran a whited wall.  
Two cypress-trees peeped over from the waist,  
Stiff, motionless as toys. Among their spires  
A lithe voice mounted and leaned down again:

"Come, for to-night the hills are all white marble  
Under a sapphire dome,  
Where bats scrawl riddles which the bulbuls garble  
For owls to answer. Come.

"The air is sick of moon-discoloured roses,  
The plain stagnates like some  
Weird archipelago of garden-closes  
And dead, bleached waters. Come.

"O night of miracles! Come, let us wander  
Over this ghostly sea  
To that dark cypress-circled island yonder,  
In whose clear centre we

"Will lie and float in phosphorescent ether.  
Thank heaven that night is cool  
As day was scorching. Let us watch together  
The lovers in the pool.

"Look in! Lie still! A jewelled ripple spangles  
The hand upon her hair;  
While, lying listless on her back, she dangles  
A finger in the air.

"How still he is. Your motionless perfection  
Absorbs him utterly.  
Doubtless you seem to him his love's reflection  
Face downwards in the sky,

"Whence I am hanging, seeing only her face,  
As he sees only yours.  
Lean down! And they shall meet us at the surface.  
O silent paramours

"We bring to you, by stealth, while men are sleeping,  
A gift. Let your domain  
Have it for ever in its steadfast keeping;  
We shall not come again.

"We bring our shadows: just the fleeting semblance  
Of human love. O might  
Your waters hold them for us in remembrance  
Of one short summer night!

"A wondrous night, when two reflections hovered,  
Dreaming of love aloud  
Here by the pool, until the moon was covered  
By an impending cloud;

"And then they lost each other. Where but lately  
The magic mirror shone,  
A wider shadow, cruelly, sedately,  
Passes ... and we are gone."

The Dreamer stayed: "Who speaks of passing here?  
The river passes, passes to the sea,  
Drawing in rills the voices of the earth  
To make its voice that merges in the swell.  
The river passes and the boatman's chant  
Is swallowed up in distance and the night.  
Or is it, friend, the boats alone that pass?  
The river, as I sometimes think, remains.  
Even so it is with lovers and with love.  
Then sing us something wise where laughter lurks,  
As underneath the desert, from the hills  
Whence cometh help, the hidden water-course

Chuckles. Upon this thread your garden hangs.  
Nay, never shake that cypress head! We need  
Not only sun but cloud and tears to build  
Laughter, the rainbow of the inner man."  
But the voice answered, or the cypress sighed:

"I am the brain of Hitherto.  
In darkness I revolve and flash.  
Books are the fortune I ran through.  
My painted pen-case, yellow hue  
And yellow sash

[Pg 93]

"Were famed from Yezd to Yezdikhast.  
I taught what space and learned what mud is.  
My metaphysics were my past.  
Alas, I left my lust till last  
Of all my studies.

"I kept my mind so clear and keen  
By grinding guesswork into saws,  
You scarce could fit a meal between  
The triumphs of my thought-machine,  
Its puissant jaws.

"The process of my intellect,  
Mazed by the clapping hands that fed it,  
Rolled on. They, founding a new sect  
On premises that I had wrecked,  
Gave me the credit.

"And so I used my fame to part  
Man from his planks to sink or swim;  
I plumbed his shallows, drew the chart....  
Illusions broke the blacksmith's heart.  
I envied him

"Suddenly, and set out to moon  
About this garden scholarwise.  
One silver laugh, two silken shoon,  
To fill my empty *anderûn*  
With splendid lies

[Pg 94]

"I ask of shadows, battering  
My bars, and wonder why I ache.  
O You who made both cage and wing,  
Let me redeem my toilsome spring  
By one mistake."

In the parched road the Dreamer took his lute  
And tossed these chords across the battlement:

"The myrtles of Damascus,  
The willows of Gilan,  
Have sent the breeze to ask us  
If aught but sceptics can  
Deny the spirit calling  
To flesh—we are the call—  
And save themselves from falling  
Behind a whited wall.

"Most pure was Abu Bakr,  
And Allah speeds the plough  
That furrows young wiseacre  
Across an open brow.  
Most fair is self-possession—  
Give me the open road—  
But Solomon in session  
Went mad and wrote an ode.

"All fields of thought are arid,  
No earthly soil is rich,  
By thirst of knowledge harried  
And those ambitions which  
The heart like Pharaoh's harden  
To let no impulse go.  
But every yard's a garden  
Through which we mystics flow.

[Pg 95]

"I conjure hawthorn blossom  
From Bakhtiari vales—  
As when one looks across some  
Choked channel where the sails  
Of anchored vessels jostle—  
I tune their rhythmic sway  
In hollows where the throstle  
Is only dumb by day.

"Red routs of rhododendron,  
That slope to Trebizond,  
Rapt round the garden's end run  
To mask the waste beyond.  
There facts are free to wonder  
Down pathways like the streak  
Of silver pavement under  
The palms of Basra creek.

"In charity of jasmin  
My poor designs are clad,  
As nature cloaked the chasm in  
The ramparts of Baghdad,  
Where passed the fabled Caliph  
With Giafar by night  
To mystify the bailiff  
At Garden-of-Delight.

"The orchard-grave of Omar,  
Neglected Nishapur,  
Where sprays of petaled foam are,  
Sighs through my garden-door  
With boughs round whose gnarled stem men  
Had never thought to twine  
Green tendrils from rich Yemen,  
The sunburnt Smyrniot vine.

"Wild lilies, whose rich red owes  
Its undertone to brown,  
From Kurd-betented meadows  
Break out in every town.  
Blind alleys' bursts of lilac,  
Where russet warblers woo,  
Are set to cover my lack  
Of vocal retinue.

"The myrtles of Damascus,  
The poppies of Shiraz,  
Have sent the breeze to ask us  
If they are dumb, because  
Wisdom and one that had her  
To wife still hug the fence,  
Where we have left a ladder  
To rescue men from sense."

The cypress swayed. Hard by another voice  
Climbed the twin tree, and thus its theme began:

"Young man, Shirín is out of date.  
We have to thank the West  
That Attar's latest is too late  
To waken Interest,  
And one of Love's great names, Majnûn,  
Is now generic for a loon.

"Our crust is cooling, and the bent  
For culture bears its fruit,  
As we that weed out sentiment  
Likewise outgrow the brute;  
While Providence matures a blend  
That pure philosophers commend

"In logic. Constancy declined  
Because we pruned our morals.  
Love practises the change of mind  
That ethics preach in quarrels...."



There cried the Dreamer: "Who are you that mock  
Exiles in search of that from which they came,  
Intent to know themselves and so the Lord  
Whose ways are as the number of men's souls?  
By these we compass our escape from Self,  
The mirage in the waste through which we pass  
Across the bridge Phantasmal to the Real;  
Until, forgetting Self, we see in All  
The Loved that leads us to the eternal beauty  
Shown in a thousand mirrors yet but one.  
These are the Sufi tenets. What of you?"  
From the first tree the quavering voice replied:

[Pg 98]

"It is my double, Peder Sag,  
The summit of the civilized  
Above such heats as woman or flag.  
It is my double, Peder Sag,  
Who bows the poet to the wag,  
The hero to the undersized.  
It is my double, Peder Sag,  
The summit of the civilized.

"His mission is to educate  
By atrophy, the cure for spasm,  
And so to serve the future state.  
His mission is to educate  
A world of fellowships that hate  
One living thing—enthusiasm.  
His mission is to educate  
By atrophy, the cure for spasm.

"He dresses us in faultless drab.  
His colour-scheme for you is tan,  
And, level as a marble slab,  
He dresses us in faultless drab.  
Him urchins call Abu Kilab:  
The Father-of-the-Modern-Man.  
He dresses us in faultless drab.  
His colour-scheme for you is tan.

"My double did a deal for truth.  
He teaches balance to the Young,  
And knows a better thing than youth.  
My double did a deal for truth,  
His emblem is the wisdom tooth,  
A flowery and fruitless tongue.  
My double did a deal for truth.  
He teaches balance to the Young."

[Pg 99]

Serdar-i-Jang impatient pulled his beard  
And growling Tous his bridle: "Let him be  
The fool I was, and so mine enemy  
From whom I part in peace." Farid Bahadur  
Shrugged that: "Our wares are not for such as these."

Once more the Brain: "I might have come with you,  
Leaving my gloomy castle in the air,  
For, overgrown with tangles, in its flank  
Lies hid the thrice-veiled door of happiness;  
Only—my double has mislaid the key."

Seyid Rida laughed and answered: "We have found it."  
The Lover knocked: "'Tis I!"  
The Loved One made reply:  
"There is no room for two  
Beyond the Gateway."  
In solitude he learned  
The Secret; so returned  
Saying: "O Love, 'tis you."  
And entered straightway.

A wicket opened gently of itself,  
And so a sceptic joined the caravan.

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## XVII THE PRIDE OF THE TAILOR

Oh, sliding down the desert from Shiraz  
 The tailor-man from Meshed tore his hose:  
 A crowning test, a broken man! "Ah, was  
 I born that fate might practise fancy-blows?"

"The road is rougher than a magnate's mirth  
 Toward the humble, long as a bad debt.  
 I cannot dream of any woman worth  
 This cloth. To me 'twas dearer than a pet."

Then Dreamer-of-the-Age cried: "Bring me thread  
 Strong as the bridge as they call Pul-i-Katûn!  
 For Meshed's champion tailor-man is dead  
 Unless his wounded pride be succoured soon."

Launched on the seaward slope the pilgrims went  
 On to the gulf, and heard, athwart the dim  
 Night echoing, a sufferer's lament  
 And Dreamer-of-the-Age consoling him:

"The night fits down on the desert, brother;  
 We are drawn there-through like a piece of thread.  
 The steepened sky and the vastness smother  
 Uneasy sleep in her league-wide bed.  
 Rocked to and fro with a camel's burden  
 On broken tracks, that are thin as scars,  
 We near the Gulf. Have we seen our guerdon?"  
 "Yea, every night we have seen the stars."

[Pg 101]

"The dust is thick, and our own feet raise it.  
 Our eyes were clear did our feet but rest.  
 We give our heart and no sign repays it.  
 What need we ever a further test!  
 We drift along with the old dumb neighbour  
 In the old blind alley we call our goal,  
 Hope: all that comes of a soul's life-labour."  
 "It was the labour that made the soul."

"We stride ahead, but in every village  
 A brother faints and a weakness falls.  
 The tribes that till and the tribes that pillage  
 Are reconciled with the life that palls.  
 Oh, townsmen tread to a fixed thanksgiving,  
 But what of us, if these pitying throngs  
 Should ask the end of our harder living?"  
 "God knows the answer. They know our songs,

"The coloured patch on the background, Silence,  
 The gleaming thought that is Love's to wear  
 Undimmed through space to a myriad-while hence.  
 Could the hands be worthy that knew not care  
 To weave Love's garb? Though we needs must suffer,  
 Shall we sing the worse that we sing in vain?  
 Our songs shall rise as the road grows rougher.  
 In the breathless hills, in the fevered plain,

[Pg 102]

"They mount as sparks from the night's oases,  
 And fall far short of the idol's feet.  
 They are stored by God in his secret places,  
 The least-lit stars of his darkest street.  
 Yet ten worlds hence they shall dance, my brother,  
 To travelling winds.... If our songs were worth  
 One gleam of light to the Way of Another,  
 We bless the sorrow that gave them birth."

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## XVIII THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

[Pg 103]

So to the journey's end. The Gulf was there  
Steaming and soundless, and the weary feet  
Were stayed at last from following the Queen.  
The great *dhow* nosed the creek; slow water lapped  
About her burnished; burnished in her sat  
Unmoving bronze, her oarsmen. Then they rose:  
"Hail, Bringers of the Queen!" "Hail, ship! you bear  
What cargo hence?" "We carry on your charge."  
"But leave us nothing—nothing in exchange?"  
"Only the ancient story of a slave.  
There lies a secret buried none too deep."

Thus the chief rower. This the far-off tale.

I dwelled beside the impulsive Rhone, a child that loved to be alone.  
The forest was my nursery. My happiness was all my own.

I knew by name each cloud that lowers the sunshine through in liquid showers.  
Deep in the tangled undergrowth I caught the singing of the flowers.

[Pg 104]

Our minstrels sang of rape and arson, all the joys of private wars.  
The forest wall was calm and tall. My tutor laughed, and drank to Mars.

Bald, vulture-like upon its perch, our crag-born castle seemed to search  
The gorge for prey, its shade to still the bells a-twitter in the church

Where, cheek by jowl with fearsome fowl and gargoyle, ghostly men, in foul  
Incense that tried to stifle me, recited magic formulæ.

At home clanked metal psalm and spur; but, oh the woods ...! I tried to tame  
A wolf-cub that the gardener called Life. He knew. The preacher came.

I see him yet, his visage wet with hot emotion, tears, and sweat.  
Contorted in the market-place he shrieked that all must pay a debt

To one Jehovah and His Son, by bursting eastward as the Hun  
Had scourged the West. In unison we all replied 'twere nobly done,

[Pg 105]

For he explained that heaven was gained more featly—wrenching Saint Jerome—  
From Palestine than Christendom. That night no peasant durst go home.

His words were like a wind that fanned a grass-fire: God would lend His hand  
To purge away the infidel whose breath profaned the Holy Land.

He showered indulgences, and kissed the brows of those who would enlist  
To take a chance of martyrdom or give the devil's tail a twist.

He promised we should see the light, that cursèd Arabs could not fight,  
Counted them dead since we were "led by General Jesus," said the pope.

Moreover we must win and use Christ, His true Cross, the Widow's cruse,  
All talismans that found no scope for miracles among the Jews.

Upon the walls the veriest dolt and clown, arow like birds that moult,  
Chattered with one accord—or some small priestly prompting:—"Diex el volt."

[Pg 106]

No wonder that our heartstrings glowed within us like a smelted lode  
Whence Kobolds welded Durandal; and like one man we ran or rode

Forth. Were we not enchanted? This was first among God's certainties.  
Even our steeds were like Shabdíz, the pride of King Khusraw Parvíz.

We saw our path made plain, the hills removed by faith, whose foaming course  
Flooded the continents like flats. We saw the world made one—by force.

In ecstasy our spirits soared. With beatific face toward  
My cloudland all the crowd shed tears, and vowed to serve and save the Lord.

But cloudland, seeming to disdain such warmth, replied with slapping rain.  
Conjuring such black augury the monks recited formulæ.

Besides, lest women, priests and traders should tempt the appetite of raiders,  
The Church proclaimed the Truce of God. Not all our barons were crusaders.

Those who were frightened not to go sold all they had to make a show,  
Land, tool and ware to pay a fare. The panic made sly kings its heir.

So much was sold by young and old, by fond, ambitious, hot and cold,  
That steel took sudden silver wings, then flew beyond the reach of gold.

In such a gust my tender age availed not with the preaching sage,  
For I was born of fighting men; and one of them took me for page,

Though I was loth to go, and prayed for mercy and a little maid  
Whose hair was shining sunflower brown. I thought of all the games we played

All day with hay and idle mowers. She dubbed me knight in pixy bowers,  
Where in the hindering undergrowth I caught the singing of the flowers,

Ah me, how distant!... I was blest in my young lord who shared the test,  
Being sent upon this pilgrimage, his snow-white love still unpossessed.

He, too, was paler than a ghost, as though already all were lost.  
She dreamed of empery for him. He taught me this to show the cost:

*My heart was mine,  
Ambition kept it whole,  
I gained the world,  
And so I lost my soul.*

*Then you were mine,  
But only mine in part.  
You loved the world,  
And so I lost my heart.*

Only my tutor lay abed, calling us savages, and read  
His pagan books. The fever would abate, he sneered, when we were bled.

He chilled me. His head was like a block of ice, so clear. He tried to shock  
Me with his whispered flings that saints and monarchs came of laughing-stock,

Or boasted some loud organ, Reason, which doctors had confused with treason,  
Looked round lest walls should hear, then wept that he was one born out of season.

Our preaching-man pronounced a ban upon him, cried good riddance: he  
Was like to lead young men astray because he knew geography,

(And sciences, as medicine, reduce the value of a shrine).  
My tutor passed for riding gnomes through space upon a pack of tomes.

But at the water-parting I waved to the castle green and dun,  
A tapestry where liquid sun—or tears—had made the colours run.

I looked my last on every stone and tree to whom my face was known.  
The warriors smiled and called me child. They had not understood the Rhone,

Nor that I *loved* the birchwood's skin, the pansy's face, the sheep-dog's grin,  
That sleep with Nature in a field was sweet to me as mortal sin.

For love so fierce I stole: I gave my summer holidays to save  
Lambs from the butcher, built for them sanctuary at my wolf-cub's grave.

I stroked the landscape like a lute. No scentless words, no colours mute,  
Could paint its music. Henceforth I had only heaven for substitute.

Sling, crossbow, bludgeon, axe and spud, cilice and vials of sacred blood,  
On such equipment we relied. Our foes were misery and mud.

Each Norman keep, each Frankish hold, each corner of the Christian fold  
Sent forth its sheep to sound of bells. Our prophets might have had them tolled.

Prince, abbot, squire, felt the desire of bliss that swept stews, taverns, farms.  
Soft damosels ploughed through the mire with babe at breast and men-at-arms;

And, since this journey was the price of entrance into Paradise,  
The gaols belched out their criminals and beggars all alive with lice.

We took no food, for God is good; besides we heard that convents strewed  
Converted Hungary for us. We never dared mistrust His mood.

Heading the mass far up the pass, that led us straight to Calvary,  
The preaching-man upon an ass recited magic formulæ.

Soon we were joined by northern lords; no few among their folk had swords.  
(Walter the Pennyless his rout had gone before and died in hordes,

While Gotschalk's dupes, with geese and goats upon their flags, had found the boats  
To pass beyond the Bosphorus, where Kilidj Arslan cut their throats.)

Our force could not await the Turk, but in its ardour got to work  
That was not mentioned in the breves. It murdered all the Jews in Treves.

And I was sad a Christian lad should march with myrmidons so mad.  
They made our Holy War appear too near a Musulman Jihad.

We plodded on for many weeks through mazes where the Austrian ekes  
A bare existence on the slips of alp below the granite peaks,

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And all those weeks did naught betide us palmers save that many died.  
Our gaol-birds eyed the preaching-man, and scholars spoke of vaticide;

But I was happy when our stout commander sent me on to scout.  
I cried for little Sunflower-tress, and made strange faces at the trout.

Because I was a fighting-man I trained myself to nettle-stings,  
And copied oaths and made up things my tutor would have tried to scan:

*Briar and bramble,  
Don't be so dense.  
You scratch and you scramble  
Like things without sense.  
Why grudge me a ramble?  
You can't want my hose,  
White-coated bramble,  
Pink briar-rose.*

*Bramble and briar,  
Leave me alone.  
Cling to the friar,  
Make him your own.  
Kiss him, the liar  
Who brought us all here,  
Gentle sweet-briar,  
Bramble my dear.*

[Pg 113]

Thus through the months of slapping rain we plunged into the Hungarian plain,  
And paid its mounted bowmen dear for wretched stocks of fruit and grain,

Or shelter in a reed-built town. They asked for hostages. We gave  
Our leaders to these dirty-brown mongrels, who brought us to the Save

With loss. My tutor's Damocles perhaps had lived in times like these;  
For whoso straggled from the main body was never seen again.

Ere this my rhyme had spread, and swelled into a marching-song. I blushed  
To witness how the spearmen held their sides with laughter, as they yelled

"Bramble and briar." 'Twas the first faint mutiny. These men of Gaul  
Bantered the sterner pilgrims so I wondered why they came at all.

[Pg 114]

Yea, often now that I am old and hear how zealous scribes have told  
The zeal that made the first crusade, well—history is eaten cold.

My lord could think of nothing but the lady who had bidden him cut  
His way to her by such detours. Aye, this was true romance—the slut.

We called her secretly The Burr—whereof was plenty in our beds—  
For night by night he crooned of her, nor even named the Sepulchre:

*I waited, and the hours were loth to close.  
They scarcely stirred till evening leapt to sight  
Between the shadows that all substance throws  
As bridges for its passage to the night.*

*You never came. Life dozes at the touch  
Of those not wholly resolute to live,  
Who let themselves mistrust her overmuch  
To take the only thing she has to give.*

Amid the rags there caracoled fop-penitents whose panders lolled  
With human baggage in the rear, and hound and hawk. So chaos rolled

Adown the Danube rolling east. Beyond Semlin the pinewoods filled  
With Celt and Saxon, man and beast inspired to leave the west untilled.

The locust-swarms were better drilled than we, the owls were not so blind.  
At every stage we left behind poor simpletons that moaned and shrilled,

Thinking each swamp Gethsemane. It seemed that at their agony  
The doctors scoffed with cross aloft, reciting magic formulæ.

Alone the princes lightly pranced, as if the pilgrimage enhanced  
Their right to weigh upon the world thereafter. So the doom advanced

To dervish cries and jester's japes. Hermit and boor and jackanapes,  
I and my ghost-pale master threw a trail of shadows, motley shapes,

Where Rhodopé's wine-purples mix snow with the moonlight. Oh, 'twas gall  
Amid the horror of it all that Bulgars thought us lunatics,

Or worse; for ever at our flank a stream, that in my nostrils stank,  
Seethed; and amid the best of her the scum of Europe wenched and drank.

At last we halted where Constantinople's grandeur puts to scorn  
The villaged west, and challenges the Orient on her Golden Horn.

Ah, brazen, were your heart as strong as looked your square-chinned ramparts.... Long  
We waited at the gates in dust knee-deep. The Emperor did not trust

The help that he had craved. He swore he had not asked so many ... more  
Would ruin him.... He let the heat suck out our strength at every pore.

But we were told great noblemen, Godfrey of Bouillon in Ardennes,  
Robert of Flanders, "Sword and Lance of Christians," all the flower of France

Were on our side, Hugh Vermandois, Stephen of Chartres and Troyes and Blois,  
Baldwin and Raymond of Toulouse. The preacher said we could not lose.

Moreover he had spoken with angel-reserves behind us, sith  
They sent assurance (Saracens we mocked, but had our own *Hadith*)

That we should root the heathen out, and blight as with a ten years' drought  
Their fields. Jehovah willed that we should leave no seed of theirs to sprout.

Our mates streamed in from lands beyond the Adriatic, Bohemond  
With Tancred; strait Dalmatian bays, Epirus, Scodra, devious ways

Bore them with boastful tales of sport and plunder, and a vague report  
That this was nothing to the spoil that beckoned from the Moslem court.

Henceforth impatient ups and downs possessed us. Asiatic towns  
Flamed to the general vision. We heard less perhaps of heavenly crowns

Than flowers and peacocks made of gems, the Caliph's crusted diadems  
That crushed the head like Guthlac's bell, and trees with solid emerald stems.

And I confess Christ counted less to us than tales of leash and gess,  
Or Hárún-el-Rashíd's largesse that sent the clock to Charlemagne.

We practised sums, and tried to train our cavalry in loss and gain.  
Upon the misty wizard-world rose like a star the money-brain.

Even monks planned theft of saintly scalps; stray hairs and chips of nail and chine,  
Divinely shielded through the Alps, would make the fortune of the Rhine.

I often tried to hide myself from this besetting spook of pelf.  
In olive-groves I called in vain to simple faun and acorn-elf.

I pictured kine that kissed their own reflections on the impulsive Rhone,  
A little maid with sunflower hair, a nest we found ... the birds had flown.

I think Alexius was wise to keep us out. Our hungry eyes  
Fixed on his capital. Why go farther when here were rich supplies?

The Pope that cursed our tastes had laid the hand of blessing on this raid.  
Blest chance indeed—as though a man should drink his fill and then be paid!

Each set to whet his falchion-pet that only friends had tasted yet.  
We dressed our hopes in purple silk, wallowed in dreamland's wine and milk.



Yet more than any Sultan's spoil fair women should repay our toil.  
Already some were filled with thoughts that our red cross was meant to foil.

The notion twinged us. We compared our prospects with the way we fared  
On these lean suburbs and the flats about Barbyses. We were snared!

The very Greeks, whose prayers had lured us into this adventure, lodged  
Their saviours in a baited trap. Lord, how these foxes turned and dodged.

There lay our army like a log; our camp, our tenets, turned to bog.  
We sank. Disorder brought disease that stalked us spectral through the fog.

[Pg 120]

The Greeks we came to bolster up against their weakness filled our cup  
With turpitude; the Byzantine put Circe's poison in our wine.

Our aspirations all became mean as our hosts; the inner flame  
Went out. From many a starting-point we found a common ground in shame;

For here no soul can keep its health, but cat-like honour creeps by stealth  
Down side streets where the children breathe an atmosphere of rotting wealth.

Between our fellow-churches rose the hate that heaven had meant for foes....  
The infidel might well have laughed. Perhaps he did. We came to blows.

And I was sad that Christians had nothing in common, saving bad  
Blood, that our highest dizziest heads could all divide but none could add.

But when spring lit the Judas-trees our chieftains kissed the Emperor's knees.  
We crossed to Asia sick at heart. Alexius kept us well apart,

[Pg 121]

Shuffling us o'er the Bosphorus. The number and the rank of us  
Exceeded those who went to Troy for Helen the Adulterous.

On the Bithynian plain our force drew up: an hundred thousand horse  
With foot and monks and womankind in crowds that none can call to mind.

Fear stuffed the empty space ahead with devils and the shapes of dread  
That decked our church. A ghastly rush of loneliness made every head

Feel like a pinpoint. Discontent ran through the score of nations blent  
In cries. Their ribald spokesman forced a drunkard's way to Godfrey's tent:

*You that have led us through the many tests  
Of Hungary, King Caloman, and Thrace,  
Who think of kingdoms as of palimpsests  
And human nature as a carapace,  
Go up and prosper in your lofty chase!  
We cannot live on barren mountain-crests.  
Our wildest dreams are prisoners that pace  
The little space between a woman's breasts.*

[Pg 122]

*Here lies the stronghold that our zeal invests,  
This infidel alone we long to face.  
This hollow, where our constant fancy nests,  
Is more to us than pedestal and dais.  
Nay, we will go no farther in the race  
For gain, respond no more to mean behests.  
We know our cause, and reverently embrace  
The little space between a woman's breasts.*

*It is our holy land, and we, the guests  
Of passion, brand all other hosts as base.  
The bees have led us to their treasure-chests,  
A foxglove-sceptre and an hyacinth-mace,  
The meadow's fleeting broidery and lace.  
Their heaven like ours is nigh to vulgar jests.  
A blossom's goal and glory is to grace  
The little space between a woman's breasts.*

*Prince, be content and choose your resting-place,  
Ere we be all forgotten with our quests,  
And this thin earth go crumbling into space,  
The little space between a woman's breasts.*

Thereat was scandal, and a priest exclaimed that man was half a beast.  
I could have told him that before. Man was the half I like the least.

[Pg 123]

To obviate a sinful fate the monks laid on us many weeks

Of penance, wasting us the more with these inventions of the Greeks.

Some paid in cash, some chose the lash—their backs were pitiful to see—  
While Bishop Adhémar of Puy recited magic formulæ

That lurched us forward to our doom. We cleft the sultanate of Roum,  
Calling for bread. The peasants fled. We swept the country like a broom.

Our armed migration choked the road. It ran ahead, a stream that flowed  
Uphill to glory, so it seemed; and so imagination strode—

O Jack o' lantern!—into the unknown. The Virgin on a silver throne,  
Our leaders swore, went on before us. I saw nothing but the Rhone,

The impulsive Rhone that tumbles down, and breaks clean through the grey-walled  
town.

I heard it rustle in its bed where others heard the Virgin's gown.

[Pg 124]

I blamed the foeman for my thirst, for sandstorm, flies, heat, scurvy—cursed  
Them. Piles of grievance fumed until the red fire kindled. Madness burst

All bounds, and capered in the glare that wrapped us round like Nessus' shirt.  
Each day 'twas there with yards to spare, and would not tear. How blue can hurt!

In my delirium I smelt a mirage, heard the swallows skim  
Above the reeds where angels knelt with envious eyes to watch me swim.

The preacher said Jehovah's cloud and pillar would go with us. Yea,  
The sky was on our heads alway. The sun rose up and cried aloud,

And stood immobilized at noon. We wondered if at Ajalon  
The Jews thanked Joshua for the boon of this divine phenomenon.

We came to Nice and formed a siege with tortoise, belfry, catapult,  
And curse that brought even less result. Each lordling quarrelled with his liege,

[Pg 125]

Layman with priest, until the place surrendered, and again we lurched  
Forward. I heard our name was made. I only saw how it was smirched.

My master clasped a small, soiled glove, and promised deeds for love's sweet sake  
That took my breath, as though his death would please The Burr. I lay awake

All night afraid to cry for fright. I tried my best to be full-grown,  
A child now loth to be alone. My misery was all my own.

I well recall our knights' first charge. It was as though a loaded barge  
Should seek to crush a dancing skiff. The foe was small, the plain was large.

Our men returned with horses spent. It seemed the Turkish cowards meant  
To harry, not oppose. Sometimes we caught them full, and down they went.

Strange that within so short a space I felt the strong effects of grace!  
The preaching man upon his ass called it a miracle. It was.

[Pg 126]

I, polishing my master's helmet, also longed to overwhelm  
The miscreants, to hew in bits the devil and his earthly realm.

A boy's high spirits, weariness, a heart impulsive as the Rhone,  
The wish to get this business done, the thought of little Sunflower-tress—

A flower beside The Burr, and "Why, if knights sing rubbish, should not I?"—  
The preaching man's persistence, these stirred me to action by degrees.

We had our fill at Dorylæum. Our rogues were Paladins. We won,  
And weighed our booty by the ton. That night we chanted a Te Deum,

A myriad voices in the dark; they rose like one colossal lark  
Ere dawn. My soul flew up with them to see the new Jerusalem

And spite my tutor. I was mad to be a fighting-man, would pad  
My arms like muscles. So my lord took me to foray. I was glad.

[Pg 127]

I had one thought: my hands were wet. That angered me: my mouth was dry.  
I had one fear: I might forget my master's silly battle-cry.

Belike 'twas well no foe would stand—our cavaliers were out of hand—  
So I was balked. With scarce a blow we filed across the wasted land

For leagues, till Baldwin turned aside, and out of Peradventure carved

His slice, Edessa. We were pined to march on Antioch half-starved.

For seven months sheer courage toiled to take the town. Its ramparts foiled  
Our engines. Sulkiness sat down within us, and temptation coiled

Tight round our bodies; every vice was lurking like a cockatrice.  
Ah, flesh can never quite repel the sinuous things which thoughts entice.

You honey-coloured Syrian girls, whose voices turned our knights to thirls,  
I looked away and stopped my ears by thinking of the glossier merles

[Pg 128]

At home. The arm upheld by Hur had not sufficed him to deter  
The dissipation of our force, alas. My lord deceived The Burr.

'Twas worse when treachery let us in. Blood, lechery, pillage, fire and din  
Burned an impression on my mind: the sexual ugliness of sin.

Cool Bohemond called Antioch his. Ere we had killed our mutineers,  
We the besiegers were besieged by Kurbugha and his Amírs.

Alternate famine and carouse brought plague; but doubtless God allows  
Expensive trials of faith that we might learn the magic formulæ.

We melted, melted; kites were fed upon us, dogs ran dripping red  
From piles of nameless carrion, the race that Europe might have bred.

Throughout our ranks desertion raged by daily sermons unassuaged.  
The preaching man was first in this "rope-dancing." Disillusion aged

[Pg 129]

My youth by years. My master stayed. If he had erred he promptly paid.  
The pestilence ran after him. Despite the fervour I displayed

He died of sores, this prince of tilt, though guarded by ten hallowed charms,  
This subject of all *trouvère*-lilt, lord in an hundred ladies' arms.

Oh, how I struggled to be brave when the Pope's legate, grey and grim,  
Said simply this beside the grave: "Christ died for you. You died for Him."

Only his jester seemed to care, and ceased awhile to swear and daff.  
"Who," he repeated in despair, "will pay me for his epitaph?"

*Poor friend, this alien hungry land  
Has closed her lips upon her prey.  
The tree is spoiled into her hand;  
She sucks the brook's thin veins away.*

*A sterner voice than bade you come  
To reap the tears that exiles sow  
Has called you to her longer home,  
That neither bids nor lets you go.*

[Pg 130]

*Seven times you baulked her lawless laws,  
And foiled the customs of the year;  
But Death defends the tyrant's cause,  
And makes the silent court his lair.*

*The lease of life, that none can own,  
Is written on her agent's roll;  
And from the desert and the sown  
He takes a harsh and equal toll,*

*High-handed, scorning code or text.  
No hope the debtor's gaol unlocks.  
A friend appeals? He is the next  
To occupy the narrow box.*

*The witness cowers, pale with fear,  
When Death the stalker passes by;  
And only prays he may not hear  
That ugly sound—a victim's cry.*

*One weeps; his eyes are wet as long  
As on Death's hand the blood is wet.  
He says: "The King can do no wrong!"  
And craves permission to forget.*

*How briefly to an echo clings  
The memory of these solemn days,  
The thought of those tremendous things*

*The thought of those tremendous things  
That Death implies but never says.*

[Pg 131]

*An hour ago we laid you down.  
The tender, tardy autumn rain  
Is dried within the dusty town,  
And we are at our rounds again.*

With every round our spirits sank in bodies lean and members lank.  
I saw the soul of man, a cave, a wick that smouldered and smelled rank.

Men's fluid facts may wash the grime from pictures of a distant time,  
But I can paint the truth in one small touch: our poets ceased to rhyme.

Such was the army's hopelessness. I understood, who once had seen  
Our fading gardener rouse himself to kick and curse the wolf-cub, Life.

I would not let my feet desert, but oh the woods—the woods of home  
That bent and beckoned in the damp zephyr in vain! I could not stoop

To play false in an enterprise however mad, if once begun.  
Besides another miracle was wrought in me. I was in love.

[Pg 132]

I was enamoured of dear Christ; His utter beauty struck me dumb,  
His face alone could compensate for scenes that almost made me long

For blindness. Yea, to Him I turned from all this heartache, nightly kissed  
His hand with passion. I at least would not betray the children's Friend.

Haply His strength has always lain in contrast. I found strength to press  
Toward the mark. Not so the host: we could not kick it to its feet.

Then heaven inspired us to devise a pious fraud—The Holy Lance.  
We hid it in Saint Peter's crypt, and dug it up. The people wept

With rapture at this talisman, and sang the Psalm "Let God arise."  
Also our chiefs—they knew my zeal—bade me complete the heartening sign.

White-plumed, white-horsed, with golden shield and halo, I contrived to appear  
On the horizon, waved my sword while Adhémar proclaimed Saint George.

[Pg 133]

Our men responded with a shout. Through the five gates they tumbled out,  
An headlong torrent. In a trice the infidel was put to rout,

And I joined in to hack and prod. Pure Tancred praised me with a nod.  
Ascetic Godfrey even spoke to me: "Lad, you belong to God."

I won my spurs. They *made* me proud. Before my sword the wizards bowed,  
Though me they washed. In vigil and fast I joined the perfect order, vowed

To hold my manhood chaste, to gird on might with right and courtesy,  
To speak the truth, and so to be at variance with the common herd.

Such loftiness a man can feel once in a flash: strong arms, clean hands  
That forged us into iron bands to unify the world with steel.

But as I left the altar daft with the ambition I had quaffed—  
A word can kill a century—one of my perfect brothers laughed:

[Pg 134]

*I took the vow of virtue  
As others take to vice.  
I could not break my heart of you.  
Men call that sacrifice.*

*The priests applauded nature.  
Poor devil, she was loth  
Enough. The love of God and you  
Has made me hate you both.*

And I was sad that Christians, clad in robes so dazzling, were not glad  
To keep them spotless from the world, and give the Virgin all they had.

Yet I was racked by continence of all we rightly rank as sense.  
I hungered for the Sunflower-tress that now my lips would never press.

I wrenched and wrestled to believe that God had sent us here to grieve  
Our bodies with this fruitlessness, that only fakirs could achieve

His purpose. Then in blind revolt my soul like an unbroken colt  
Ran round and round an empty field. The hedge was thick. I could not halt

nan found and found an empty herd. The hedge was thick. I could not do it,

[Pg 135]

Though one poor knight on stiffened knee revealed beneath his breath to me  
His thoughts on women while the monks recited magic formulæ.

I sought for solace in renown. Men watched me swagger through the town  
The youngest knight in Christendom. When women passed I tried to frown.

A year I suffered in this way before the wreck of our array  
Would undertake the final march. My soul was saved by movement. May

Was with us, when my tutor closed his wintry Juvenal and posed  
Mid nightingales to quote and kiss the *Pervigilium Veneris*.

I drove his authors from my head, and read Augustin hard instead;  
But sap was mounting in my veins and western groves where finches wed.

To these no sound of sapphire seas, no stunted firs of Lebanon,  
Not Tyrian dyes nor Tripoli's loud yellows deafened. We ran on

[Pg 136]

Through landmarks famed in Holy Writ, Emmaus, Bethlehem ... at last  
We saw the walls of Zion lit blood-red by sunset and the past.

The conquest of another world unfurled beneath our feet, the land  
Of miracle and mystery lay as a bauble in our hand.

Men flung their caps up, feigned a swoon. With prostrate lines of us the moon  
Drew silver circles round the site. A cock crowed—many hours too soon.

We thought to prise the gates ajar. My tutor wrote their private Lar  
Or else—with Tacitus—their folk designed them for eternal war.

The moat was wide; we feebly tried to stop its gape with pebbles, cried  
"Fall, Jericho!" The blessed wall stood firm; but Christ was on our side.

The Church had saved Him from His wan repute and thrust Him in our van,  
Bronzed, scarred. Alas, the first crusade had made Him out a fighting man!

[Pg 137]

He taught the Turks to mock Giaours!... sent timely Genoese to build  
Wheeled wooden turrets. These we filled brimful. Jerusalem was ours.

We entered reverent, barefoot; slew three livelong nights and mornings through,  
Then paused to sing a thanksgiving. We massacred the morrow too.

And I was glad a Christian lad could boast of some small suffering *ad*  
*Majorem Dei gloriam*. I only longed to burn Baghdad.

Nay, I can say I never hid to chamber as my fellows did.  
I felt my conscience clear as frost, and touched no woman—God forbid.

I set my contrite soul apart with mass, procession, penance, rites  
That took me out to see the sights, brushing ecstatic lanes athwart

The quiddering mob with tears of joy—my tutor's phrase was οἱ πολλοὶ [Greek: hoi  
polloi]—

Though few were left. Some Greeks of ours confused Jerusalem with Troy.

[Pg 138]

But most the bestial German louts made even their hardest allies sick;  
They ran to mutilate the quick and sniff the dead with joyous snouts.

Shriven, forgiven, we embraced each stone that Christ had touched, and placed  
Such relics under treble guard. One note in our rejoicings jarred.

It seemed some types of Jewish dog escaped the flaming synagogue,  
And their ingratitude was base. They joined to form a wailing-place.

I heard them as I roamed among blind alleys dark and overhung  
By one-eyed dens. With whining nose against the wall the pack gave tongue:

*Behold Thy people, Lord, a race of mourners.*  
*Through this Thy sacred dwelling-place they creep*  
*Like strangers. Hearken, Lord, in holes and corners*  
*We sit alone and weep.*

*For Thy decree, most terrible and holy,*  
*That as the fathers sow the sons shall reap,*  
*For all Thy just affliction of the lowly,*  
*We sit alone and weep.*

*For all the glory that is now departed*

[Pg 139]

*For all the glory that is now departed,  
For all the stones that Thou hast made an heap,  
Yea, for the city of the broken-hearted,  
We sit alone and weep.*

*For all the wealth wherewith Thou hadst endowed her,  
For all our shepherds gone astray like sheep,  
For all Thy temple's jewels ground to powder,  
We sit alone and weep.*

*Because our soul is chastened as with lashes,  
Because Thine anger like a stormy deep  
Goes over us, in sackcloth and in ashes  
We sit alone and weep.*

Nobody gave them heed; indeed each man was thinking how to speed  
His interests, and if the prey would satisfy ambition or need.

To honest minds with zeal imbued the Pope's indulgence, their own merit  
Bestowed some licence to be lewd, and take—their preachers said "inherit."

Even I who was in love with Christ, I with the conscience clean and cold  
That hankered not for lands or gold, was wondering how to clinch my hold

[Pg 140]

On reputation, while our chiefs, before we could consolidate,  
Rode a great wallop round the State and split it into petty fiefs.

Their overlords revolted me. Alas, for our brief unity!  
Edessa snarled at Antioch, Jerusalem at Tripoli.

Poor Godfrey, who would not accept a crown where his Redeemer wore  
Thorns, nor be strong where Jesus wept! From the beginning weakness crept

Into our councils. Worse, we watched the bulk of our brave lads disperse  
Well-pleased. At most we raised the ghost of needful power to hold their post.

Franks and Provincials, German brutes that bullied babes and prostitutes,  
Lombards and Flemings, made for home with clapping and the sound of flutes.

It flowed away, the unstable stuff, to whom a cause was but a noun.  
They stood to sea. Thank heaven 'twas rough! My place was here with my renown.

[Pg 141]

They vanished ... home ... to Sunflower-tress ... home, where a man may die obscure!  
Far off a carle of Albemarle trolled chanties like a Siren's lure.

*East, are you calling still,  
Who tried your strength of will  
For naught on brown Ulysses long ago?  
We have an island too,  
And haul away from you  
To cleaner kin that bend a stronger bow.*

*Your caravans string out  
On many a golden route  
The turbaned Magi's offerings; but we  
Steer forth on loner trails  
Through rough wind-scented vales  
To England, the oasis of the sea.*

*Child Jesus chose you, East,  
Not that He loved us least,  
But just because His Father had foreseen  
The dear and only Son  
Might dwell too long upon  
Our swinging greys and many-coloured green.*

[Pg 142]

So we were left alone. The spring broke out in buds of bickering.  
Each summer brought contentious fruit. Strife waxed with every waning king.

And I waxed also, better known, resolved to reap what I had sown.  
My childless manhood fixed my heart. The Holy Land was all my own.

I grew in grace with man—I hoped with God; from Beersheba to Dan  
I went about my Father's work. Faith could not shirk what Faith began.

Sometimes qualms came. I looked askance on Bishop Daimbert's schemes to enhance  
His seat. The native Christians sighed they missed the Caliph's tolerance.

Not that had hurt me. but the void which love will make if unemoloved.

I spent my strength to keep him quiet, and free the thoughts that he decoyed,

Till woods and Rhone were out of range. I often wondered at the change  
In nature's child, in me. The formulæ were there. "God's ways are strange."

[Pg 143]

Yet in my struggle with the powers of darkness I recalled the showers  
Of light that fought the undergrowth to catch the singing of the flowers.

Time passed, and no one seemed to reck of Zenghi, the first Atabek,  
Though every year we failed to act the Saracens grew more compact.

In vain I urged that we might fall, so slender was our human wall,  
So numberless the foe beside the Templars and the Hospital.

The answer was that dyke and fosse were useless when we had the Cross,  
With other relics by the score, to guard against defeat or loss.

My prophecies of coming ills fell on deaf ears and weakly wills.  
I did my best. You know I did, who saw me peer beyond the hills

Where Karak like a lighthouse loomed at waves of sand that never spumed,  
The tideless main, an ocean-plain bare, petrified. Its silence boomed.

[Pg 144]

I saw in all that vastitude, the one, the drab, the many-hued,  
No sign of life, no moving speck; and yet I knew that trouble brewed.

I tortured every hour to find material things to prop behind—  
Forgive me, God!—Your earthly realm. The need was great, for it was blind.

The mathematics of Abul Hassan, three hundred years at school  
In Arabic philosophy, showed that the West was still a fool.

Nay, gently, call her still a babe. How should she know that I, the Great,  
Had learned from savages to prate of compass and of astrolabe.

Our miracles were not so sure to heal as Rhazes' simplest cure.  
His friends the moon and stars obeyed the rules that Abul Wafa made.

My stolen lore raised me above my fellows. Everything but love  
Was mine, respect, authority. The jealous Churchmen dared not move.

[Pg 145]

Our infant realm could not dispense with me, its shield and main defence.  
I knew the Damascene recipe for making steel, and made it cheap.

My mind was fertile in resorts. I spent the pilgrims' fees on forts,  
And settled, for their skill in trade, Venetian slavers at our ports.

Howbeit I trembled lest our main enthusiasm should be for gain.  
I stripped myself to work against the working of the money-brain.

And I was glad I passed for mad and single-eyed as Galahad.  
I sacrificed in saving Christ the profit that I might have had.

Nothing that I could do availed. My tongue grew bitter, girded, railed.  
My labour only builded Me, but not the kingdom. So I failed.

Our Viscounts could but show their gums, while from Aleppo, Hama, Homs,  
The foe crept onward like the months, culling our conquests like ripe plums.

[Pg 146]

For all response in Chastel Blanc and towering Markab-of-the-Sea  
Some clerkly knight in red-crossed white recited magic formulæ;

Then darkly hinted science, hell and I were leagued, because their spell  
Would not or could not stave the blow that I foresaw. Edessa fell.

Curse our degenerate Poullains! The breed had need of spurs not reins.  
To stand an empty sack upright was easier than to warm their veins

Save with amours. One night I knelt to pray; but on the battlement  
Hard by a lordling twanged a harp. I smelt the bastard's eastern scent.

He thought his leman lay behind my casement, where the jasmin twined  
And almost jingled.... Oh the woods at home and whitethroats calling blind!

*Suppose you left that window and came down*

*To meet me. Do not turn away.*

*Also you need not frown.*

*I only say:*

*"Supnose."*

*Suppose—you are a woman of resource—  
The fastenings of your door undone.  
No! They are not.... Of course!  
But, just for fun,  
Suppose.*

*Suppose that—safe among the trees below  
The terraces—you chanced to find ...  
Impossible!... I know,  
But never mind.  
Suppose.*

*Suppose that—being there—an eager arm  
Drew you towards the little dell....  
Why redder? Where's the harm?  
You might as well  
Suppose....*

*Suppose that, bending over you, a man  
Breathed words of which you knew the gist.  
Suppose it!... Yes, you can....  
No, I insist....  
Suppose!*

*Suppose you shut the window? Now? Pray do,  
And take a lonely night to learn  
This tune shut in with you.  
Till I return,  
Suppose....*

[Pg 148]

Then I peeped out. Some breath divine had made his face, compared with mine,  
An angel's. Love with all its faults had set there our Creator's sign.

That shook me. One of us was wrong. Which? He or I? His soul was vexed  
Neither by this world nor the next, but floated in a bubble of song.

It haunted me, as he had said; it chimed and rhymed about my bed.  
It filled my head with Sunflower-tress; but she—I writhed—was old or dead.

Was all my suffering a waste? Had superstition wed me chaste  
To its effect? Was this my Cause? My tutor in the dark grimaced.

I saw him snug at home, and how he would have chuckled at my vow!  
Well, who laughs last.... I pictured him a dotard or in hell by now.

I prayed for help all night; and, warned by lost Edessa, Baldwin made  
Great efforts to placate our God. The answer was a fresh crusade.

[Pg 149]

This was an answer none could doubt. We heard a preacher more devout  
Than ours was quartering the west, and pulling true believers out.

He hight Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, the home of light and miracles.  
The wives and mothers trembled so before his spirit's tentacles,

They hid their males—in vain. He swept the Emperor Conrad with him, kept  
The collar of his pale adept, emasculated Louis Sept.

He cured King's Evils, raised the dead, he cast out devils by the gross.  
'Twas said he promised us twelve legions of angels.... From the darkest regions

Men flocked to Metz and Ratisbon. News came of more than half a million,  
Not counting those that rode apillion. Our battle was as good as won.

Such glorious news might well inflame our hopes. We waited. Nothing came,  
Not even light Turcopuli nor Conrad's Golden-footed Dame.

[Pg 150]

Our Poullains first began to whine; the fainthearts said the fault was mine.  
Saint Bernard was the oracle of Europe, I of Palestine.

And nothing came ... no troops.... The Greek misled, starved, poisoned, murdered them,  
Betrayed them to the Turk, whose bleak deserts went over them. Week by week

We waited. Nothing. Cadmus saw them cut to bits, Attalia's maw  
Could not be sated with their ruck. King Louis' mind had just one flaw:

He would not hear of strategy, staked all on supernatural help.  
And nothing came, and nothing came. Our half-bred curs began to yelp



"Good God, if truly God is good!" They kissed the Cross. Gems hid the wood.  
Had He forgotten? Was He deaf? Could such things be? Who understood?

Not I, though I had kept my word to save the Lamb by fire and sword.  
And after twelve long lustra spent in service this was my reward.

[Pg 151]

Louis and Conrad struggled through one day with some small retinue.  
I watched. Almost I could foretell what they and Providence would do.

And I remember, as we fared, a Sufi—so the sect is named—  
Sat by the road as though he cared no jot for us, while he declaimed:

*Her home is in the heart of spaciousness,  
In the mid-city of ideals. The site  
Is harmony, the walls are made of light.  
There with the mother-thoughts she stands to bless  
The godlike sons sent forth with her caress  
To make new worlds. I see them all unite  
Into the whole that our most starry flight  
Of worship knew far off, and strove to express.  
What can we do for her? We run to ask  
As restless children for a grown-up task,  
While wisdom in the porch, their kind old host,  
Smiles at nurse nature, and replies: The most,  
The least that we can do for Beauty is  
To love for love's sake and serve God for His.*

But Conrad drove his lance in jest right through the ragamuffin's chest,  
Because his creed was not as ours; and on we rode. I lost my zest.

[Pg 152]

To take Damascus was our plan, relying on a talisman.  
I knew that this would not suffice, for I was still a fighting man.

It ended in repulse and shame. Saint Bernard proved we were to blame  
For want of faith. Ah, some of us had had too much. We said the same

Of him. At our return thick mobs of women filled the church with bobs  
And bows, poor puppets, trying hard to sing between their stifled sobs:

*God, whose Son has fathomed sorrow,  
Give a mother strength to say:  
Mine has faced and found To-morrow.  
I will try to face To-day.*

They turned to me. They thought me wise because I had been led by lies  
To blind myself to them; and now I saw things through a woman's eyes,

And I went out. Not yet the end. Since innocence alone could save,  
Saints hit on infant infantry, and fifty thousand found the grave.

[Pg 153]

My gorge rose, yet I stopped my ears. I had no hope, but I was tarred  
With fame too much to show my fears. My duty lay in dying hard.

Oh irony! That fame increased the more its robes were patched and pieced.  
My whole ambition was fulfilled when power and confidence had ceased.

The women kissed my feet, my horse; they clung to me like my remorse.  
I that set out to make the world had made myself believe by force.

Nay, I that knew we were reprieved at best, had I in truth believed?  
My youth came back. I seemed to meet my tutor's sneer in every street.

Fate cursed us with three minor kings, a leper then. Against these Things  
Salah-ad-Din combined the entire orient. I wished our fate had wings

Instead of feet to end our dumb, keen, futile questionings, to numb  
The brain that binds us with the chain of kingdom go and kingdom come.

[Pg 154]

One of our knights for plunder's sake undid us, roused the foe who brake  
In through the pass of Banias, cutting our lands in two like cake.

The hour was here, but not the man. That murderer Guy de Lusignan  
Was sent to head our fight for life. The craven took for talisman

ME and my hundred years, alas, a relic of the man I was.  
I toiled to still our private feuds. We marched upon Tiberias,

For none would listen when I urged our leaders to await attack

For none would listen when I urged our leaders to await attack.  
We marched across the waterless inferno. Summer burnt us black.

The Moslems scorched us with Greek fire. As rain upon a funeral pyre  
Their arrows hissed in sheets upon the smoking scrub. "Go on!" "Retire!"

Our rabble cried, starting aside like broken bows; they tried to hide,  
Split, fled for refuge to a hill, did nothing while the Templars died.

[Pg 155]

When all was lost I cut my way out through the thicket of the fray,  
And galloped for Jerusalem to adjure Guy's Queen to stand at bay.

In this last desperate passage each proud noble still opposed his friend.  
A little while and we were penned, and yet a little while a breach

Was made. Jehovah's chosen seat was tottering, but no Paraclete  
Came down to comfort us. I made some sallies. Then the Queen would treat.

Perhaps in our appeal for ruth my wording stumbled on the truth,  
"One God that went by many names," or else I knew Him in my youth,

Or else that Sufi haunted me with something that I could not see,  
Something that only had not been because we would not let it be.

And when the foe marched in, I own that I was thinking of the Rhone  
Long, long ago, and wondering—a child once more—if it had grown.

[Pg 156]

Yet there remained the sharpest cup to drain: the moan of us went up,  
When from the topmost dome was hurled the Sign that should have ruled the world.

Down, down it rumbled with our grand designs. All we had built or planned,  
Toiled, bled for, crumbled at a touch, was ruined like a house of sand.

So soon we pass. The wind knows why. The efforts of a century,  
Three generations' handiwork failed in the twinkling of an eye.

And I was sad to think that shadows occupy us all. I had  
No hope of earth. What boots a toy that thinks its maker raving mad?

My soul had passed through every phase and, counting forty thousand days,  
Was farther off than at the start from comprehending heaven's ways

Or bowing to them. I came nearest when I pressed my childish ear  
Earthward through briar and bramble bowers to catch the singing of the flowers.

[Pg 157]

The last remains of faith were shaken when I, the oracle, was taken.  
My pride was made to sleep in chains. I prayed that I might never waken,

But woke. They gave me to a *rais* who wanted cattle, not advice.  
He flogged me down to Damietta. I was old and fetched no price.

Nathless my battling heart was brave enough to work me till I dropped.  
I passed for twopence to a Copt who sold me as a galley-slave

To Muscat. In the rhythmic stroke, old, undefeated, gnarled as oak  
I creaked and strained against my fate, until that Sufi-something broke.

'Twas not my heart. An inner morn put the dark age in me to scorn,  
And in the light I found myself, a child at play with worlds unborn,

For all that I had thought and read, and fought and watched the world be led  
By any who contrived to cut a knot with that blunt tool, the head.

[Pg 158]

I laughed to think how sparrows might look down upon our highest flight,  
While each succeeding age would have its oracle or stagyrite,

Would trace the good we never did, the evil that we never saw,  
And out of our blind pyramid extract a stepping-stone to Law.

Here, where ambition had to cease in servitude, I tasted peace,  
Free of illusion stretched and yawned. A fool would clamour for release.

I make the rowers' bench a throne to think, and thought implies Alone,  
Of changing woods and endless streams. My happiness is all my own.

And often, when my mates deplore a brother who shall row no more,  
I talk about my wolf-cub, Life. They think I speak in metaphor.

They gather round me all agog, they think a chronicle and log  
Of Progress lies in withered hands. Their cry is for an epilogue.

Has aught been drafted yet? A blot, an echo void and polyglot.  
Each century is written off as preface. Yes, most true.... Of what?

My gathered weight had held me bound to find for every fog a ground,  
For every riddle a reply, an end to Being that goes round.

Now I can say, I do not know if there will be a book at all,  
Or if the deepest chapters go beyond some writing on the wall,

Though wiser worlds will yet embark, sworn to eclipse our sorry trades,  
Succeed, and leave their little mark: a dynasty of thought that fades,

Fresh undergrowths of formulæ. Through these no *human* eye can see  
The open glade—the *last* crusade, in which Jerusalem might be

The symbol of all peopled space, and Time an emblem of the day  
On which the nations march as one to liberate and not to slay.

A story has no finish when it leads to nowhere out of ken?  
O friend, the lack of knowledge brings wisdom within the reach of men;

For whether hope can ever fit the future matters not a whit.  
My duty is to tug my oar—so long as I am chained to it.

---



## XIX FUSION

[Pg 161]

It was fulfilled. The giant *dhow* bestirred  
Herself, burst from her slender moorings, ran  
Exulting on her course beyond the green  
Thin shallows to the deeper violet  
Of that great gem wherein the continents  
Are flaws. With creaking oars and fluttering sails  
The wingèd ghost swept outward. On the prow  
Unveiled the Queen stood whiter than the sails,  
And save the revelation made no sign;  
And all the sound of singing was brought low.  
Then, as the vision vanished in the hushed  
Twilight that painted out the caravan,  
Leaving the pilgrims but a *burnûs*-blur  
On the drab canvas of the shore, a wail  
Rose, and to them the Dreamer's last reply:

"The aimless spindrift mingles with the scats  
Where suddenly the desert is the beach.  
A low wind whimpers up and down the flats  
Seeking some obstacle to lend it speech.

"The sky bleeds pale as from a mortal wound,  
Darkening the waters. To a treble E  
Gulls stiffly wheel their nomad escort round  
A white sail dwindling in the impassive sea.

[Pg 162]

"A last beam smites it with a benison.  
The lantern twinkles fainter at its mast.  
It bears the purpose in me that is gone,  
The only thing that cannot be, the past.

"Let there be night. Shall evensong complain?  
My love was utter. Now I seek no sign.  
Mine eyes have seen, and shall not see again.  
Out of the deep shall call no voice of mine.

"Yet I, whose happiness is hidden from view,  
Have climbed the hill and touched eternity,  
And Pisgah is a memory—of you,  
A white sail sinking in the summer sea."

The ship drove spaceward to the skyline's crater,  
The last of day flared vibrant as a cry,  
And in the Dreamer Emptiness loomed greater  
Than the unrifted pumice of the sky.

He turned to see the friends whose hope had ended  
Like his beside the gulf. He was alone.  
The singers and the glory that had blended  
With meaner notes and lowly, all were gone

Into thin air. But, patient of his tether,  
Enduring as the dream he would not break,  
Only old Tous remained. As back together  
They fared, once more it seemed the camel spake:

[Pg 163]

"Lo, these the fleeting and the true,  
The keen to sacrifice and slow,  
The plumed, the crawling, all were You  
That started hither long ago.  
For man is many when begun,  
But Love can weave his ends to one.

"The new, the ancient, song and prose,  
The lower road, the higher aim,  
The clean, the draggled, dust and snows  
Were you the striving, you the same.  
Pride and endeavour, love and loss,  
The pattern is the threads that cross.

"Tilth, waste and water, sand and sap,  
Tare, thorn and thistle, wine and oil,

Run through *your* Nature like a map,  
Are You. The ores that vein the soil  
Of time and substance manifold  
Await the hour that makes them gold,

"That found the force of you dispersed  
On all adventure save a quest,  
And part perhaps was on the worst.  
It sent you all upon the best,  
Wherein the journey is the goal.  
Now leaving you they leave you whole.

[Pg 164]

"The rabble melts, but more remains:  
The golden opportunity  
By which the choir in us attains  
Not unison but unity.  
We feel the sunbeam, not the motes.  
The Voice is made of many notes.

"Slave, merchant, scholar, fighting-man,  
The gambling, stumbling, praying kith  
We called the Singing Caravan,  
Have made their song at least no myth  
Not dawn to which yon skylark soared  
But earth is his and your reward.

"The story ends, but not the book.  
Sufi, the Queen that you ensued  
Led and shall lead you still to look  
On peace—it is not solitude.  
Through her your warring kingdoms met,  
And here is room for no regret."

So Dreamer-of-the-Age returned  
With comfort, all his being fused  
At last, and thus at night he mused  
Beside the fire that in him burned:

"Heirs of the beauty yet to be,  
Hail, from however far ahead  
Or out of sight I hear you tread  
The dust that made this tale and me.

[Pg 165]

"Each day shall raise me to rejoice  
That lovers such as we must bear  
The unbroken chain of life and share  
Its thanksgiving. Perhaps my voice

"Shall be the servant of your mind,  
Your linkman waiting in the arch  
Of phantom city-gates to march  
With you by secret ways. The wind

"Shall tell me of you, he and I  
Be keenly with you, when you go  
Forth in my footsteps and the glow  
Of movement, steadfast to deny

"Only the frailer self. My grief  
Shall answer your unspoken word  
Through blithe interpreters, a bird  
Waking, the sounds of rill and leaf.

"By many a caravanserai  
I shall not fail to watch you come,  
You of some far millennium,  
Who, listening to the bird, will say:

"I seem to know that tune of his;  
He sings what all can understand.'  
In the clear water dip your hand:  
'His deepest note was only this.'

[Pg 166]

"You shall be glad of me, the shade,  
Sighing 'O friend.' And I shall keep  
The benediction of your sleep;  
And, when the woods of darkness fade,

"Shall waken with you, I that had  
Love to the full, and praised my lot,  
Trusting in truth to be forgot  
For worthier verse. Ah, make me glad,

"You that come after me, and call  
From summits that outstrip my hopes.  
Yet I shall linger on the slopes  
And dwell with those who gave their all."

---





**XX**  
**LONG LEAVE**

[Pg 167]

I bow my head, O brother, brother, brother,  
    But may not grudge you that were All to me.  
Should any *one* lament when this our Mother  
    Mourns for so many sons on land and sea.  
God of the love that makes two lives as one  
Give also strength to see that England's will be done.

Let it be done, yea, down to the last tittle,  
    Up to the fullness of all sacrifice.  
Our dead feared this alone—to give too little.  
    Then shall the living murmur at the price?  
The hands withdrawn from ours to grasp the plough  
Would suffer only if the furrow faltered now.

Know, fellow-mourners—be our cross too grievous—  
    That One who sealed our symbol with His blood  
Vouchsafed the vision that shall never leave us,  
    Those humble crosses in the Flanders mud;  
And think there rests all-hallowed in each grave  
A life given freely for the world He died to save.

And, ages hence, dim tramping generations  
    Who never knew and cannot guess our pain—  
Though history count nothing less than nations,  
    And fame forget where grass has grown again—  
Shall yet remember that the world is free.  
It is enough. For this is immortality.

[Pg 168]

I raise my head, O brother, brother, brother.  
    The organ sobs for triumph to my heart.  
What! Who will think that ransomed earth can smother  
    Her own great soul, of which you are a part!  
The requiem music dies as if it *knew*  
The inviolate peace where 'tis already well with you.

---



## EPILOGUE

"It's not as easy as you think,"  
The nettled poet sighed.  
"It's not as good as I could wish,"  
The publisher replied.  
"It might," the kindly critic wrote,  
"Have easily been *worse*."  
"We will not read it anyhow,"  
The public said, "it's verse."

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## Transcriber's Note

All unusual, archaic and inconsistent spellings and usage have been maintained as in the original text. Here are some notes:

The Greek word in the *In Memoriam*—πολύμητις—would be transliterated "polymêtis", and the Greek phrase which appears in *The History of the Adventurer*—οἱ πολλοὶ— would be transliterated "hoi polloi."

I added the entries for "In Memoriam" and "Acknowledgements" to the Table of Contents.

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