Bird Parliament

by

Farid ud-Din Attar

Translated by Edward FitzGerald

first published in

Letters and Literary Remains of Edward FitzGerald

(William Aldis Wright, ed.)

London and New York: Macmillan and Co.

[1889]

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Introduction

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This celebrated Sufi poem, also known as Conference of the Birds, by the 12th century Persian poet Farid ud-Din Attar, is a tale of a journey of a group of thirty birds to the summit of the world mountain, Qaf. An allegory of the Sufi journey to realization of the nature of God, each bird has a particular signficance, a special fault, and a tale to tell.

In spite of its significance for world literature and the study of religion, Attar's poem was not translated in its entirety until the mid-twentieth century, and the standard English translations are hence not in the public domain. However Edward FitzGerald, best known as the translator of [The Rubayyat of Omar Khayyam](http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/khayyam.txt) worked on this abridged translation of the Bird Parliament through 1857. It is little known today, primarily because it was only published posthumously (FitzGerald died in 1883), in Letters and Literary Remains, edited by William Aldis Wright, in 1889. This is the first time an etext of FitzGerald's translation of this work has been posted on the Internet.

John B. Hare, April 12, 2007

Bird Parliament

Once on a time from all the Circles seven 1

Between the stedfast Earth and rolling Heaven

THE BIRDS, of all Note, Plumage, and Degree,

That float in Air, and roost upon the Tree;

And they that from the Waters snatch their Meat,

And they that scour the Desert with long Feet;

Birds of all Natures, known or not to Man,

Flock'd from all Quarters into full Divan,

On no less solemn business than to find

Or choose, a Sultan Khalif of their kind, 10

For whom, if never theirs, or lost, they pined.

The Snake had his, 'twas said; and so the Beast

His Lion-lord: and Man had his, at least:

And that the Birds, who nearest were the Skies,

And went apparell'd in its Angel Dyes.

Should be without-under no better Law

Than that which lost all other in the Maw-

Disperst without a Bond of Union-nay,

Or meeting to make each the other's Prey-

This was the Grievance-this the solemn Thing 20

On which the scatter'd Commonwealth of Wing,

From all the four Winds, flying like to Cloud

That met and blacken'd Heav'n, and Thunder-loud

With Sound of whirring Wings and Beaks that clash'd

Down like a Torrent on the Desert dash'd:

Till by Degrees, the Hubbub and Pell-mell

Into some Order and Precedence fell,

And, Proclamation made of Silence, each

In special Accent, but in general Speech

That all should understand, as seem'd him best, 30

The Congregation of all Wings addrest.

And first, with Heart so full as from his Eyes

Ran weeping, up rose Tajidar the Wise;

The mystic Mark upon whose Bosom show'd

That He alone of all the Birds THE ROAD

Had travell'd: and the Crown upon his Head

Had reach'd the Goal; and He stood forth and said:

'O Birds, by what Authority divine

I speak you know by His authentic Sign,

And Name, emblazon'd on my Breast and Bill: 40

Whose Counsel I assist at, and fulfil:

At His Behest I measured as he plann'd

The Spaces of the Air and Sea and Land;

I gauged the secret sources of the Springs

From Cloud to Fish: the Shadow of my Wings

Dream'd over sleeping Deluge: piloted

The Blast that bore Sulayman's Throne: and led

The Cloud of Birds that canopied his Head;

Whose Word I brought to Balkis: and I shared

The Counsel that with Asaf he prepared. 50

And now you want a Khalif: and I know

Him, and his whereabout, and How to go:

And go alone I could, and plead your cause

Alone for all: but, by the eternal laws,

Yourselves by Toil and Travel of your own

Must for your old Delinquency atone.

Were you indeed not blinded by the Curse

Of Self-exile, that still grows worse and worse,

Yourselves would know that, though you see him not,

He is with you this Moment, on this Spot, 60

Your Lord through all Forgetfulness and Crime,

Here, There, and Everywhere, and through all Time.

But as a Father, whom some wayward Child

By sinful Self-will has unreconciled,

Waits till the sullen Reprobate at cost

Of long Repentance should regain the Lost;

Therefore, yourselves to see as you are seen,

Yourselves must bridge the Gulf you made between

By such a Search and Travel to be gone

Up to the mighty mountain Kaf, whereon 70

Hinges the World, and round about whose Knees

Into one Ocean mingle the Sev'n Seas;

In whose impenetrable Forest-folds

Of Light and Dark "Symurgh" his Presence holds;

Not to be reach'd, if to be reach'd at all

But by a Road the stoutest might apal;

Of Travel not of Days or Months, but Years-

Life-long perhaps: of Dangers, Doubts, and Fears

As yet unheard of: Sweat of Blood and Brain

Interminable-often all in vain-80

And, if successful, no Return again:

A Road whose very Preparation scared

The Traveller who yet must be prepared.

Who then this Travel to Result would bring

Needs both a Lion's Heart beneath the Wing,

And even more, a Spirit purified

Of Worldly Passion, Malice, Lust, and Pride:

Yea, ev'n of Worldly Wisdom, which grows dim

And dark, the nearer it approaches Him,

Who to the Spirit's Eye alone reveal'd, 90

By sacrifice of Wisdom's self unseal'd;

Without which none who reach the Place could bear

To look upon the Glory dwelling there.'

One Night from out the swarming City Gate

Stept holy Bajazyd, to meditate

Alone amid the breathing Fields that lay

In solitary Silence leagues away,

Beneath a Moon and Stars as bright as Day.

And the Saint wondering such a Temple were,

And so lit up, and scarce one worshipper, 100

A voice from Heav'n amid the stillness said:

'The Royal Road is not for all to tread,

Nor is the Royal Palace for the Rout,

Who, even if they reach it, are shut out.

The Blaze that from my Harim window breaks

With fright the Rabble of the Roadside takes;

And ev'n of those that at my Portal din,

Thousands may knock for one that enters in.'

Thus spoke the Tajidar: and the wing'd Crowd,

That underneath his Word in Silence bow'd, 110

Clapp'd Acclamation: and their Hearts and Eyes

Were kindled by the Firebrand of the Wise.

They felt their Degradation: they believed

The word that told them how to be retrieved,

And in that glorious Consummation won

Forgot the Cost at which it must be done.

'They only long'd to follow: they would go

Whither he led, through Flood, or Fire, or Snow'-

So cried the Multitude. But some there were

Who listen'd with a cold disdainful air, 120

Content with what they were, or grudging Cost

Of Time or Travel that might all be lost;

These, one by one, came forward, and preferr'd

Unwise Objection: which the wiser Word

Shot with direct Reproof, or subtly round

With Argument and Allegory wound.

The Pheasant first would know by what pretence

The Tajidar to that pre-eminence

Was raised-a Bird, but for his lofty Crest

(And such the Pheasant had) like all the Rest-130

Who answer'd-'By no Virtue of my own

Sulayman chose me, but by His alone:

Not by the Gold and Silver of my Sighs

Made mine, but the free Largess of his Eyes.

Behold the Grace of Allah comes and goes

As to Itself is good: and no one knows

Which way it turns: in that mysterious Court

Not he most finds who furthest travels for't.

For one may crawl upon his knees Life-long,

And yet may never reach, or all go wrong: 140

Another just arriving at the Place

He toil'd for, and-the Door shut in his Face:

Whereas Another, scarcely gone a Stride,

And suddenly-Behold he is Inside!-

But though the Runner win not, he that stands,

No Thorn will turn to Roses in his Hands:

Each one must do his best and all endure,

And all endeavour, hoping but not sure.

Heav'n its own Umpire is; its Bidding do,

And Thou perchance shalt be Sulayman's too.' 150

One day Shah Mahmud, riding with the Wind

A-hunting, left his Retinue behind,

And coming to a River, whose swift Course

Doubled back Game and Dog, and Man and Horse,

Beheld upon the Shore a little Lad

A-fishing, very poor, and Tatter-clad

He was, and weeping as his Heart would break.

So the Great Sultan, for good humour's sake

Pull'd in his Horse a moment, and drew nigh,

And after making his Salam, ask'd why 160

He wept-weeping, the Sultan said, so sore

As he had never seen one weep before.

The Boy look'd up, and 'O Amir,' he said,

'Sev'n of us are at home, and Father dead,

And Mother left with scarce a Bit of Bread:

And now since Sunrise have I fish'd-and see!

Caught nothing for our Supper-Woe is Me!'

The Sultan lighted from his horse. 'Behold,'

Said he, 'Good Fortune will not be controll'd:

And, since Today yours seems to turn from you, 170

Suppose we try for once what mine will do,

And we will share alike in all I win.'

So the Shah took, and flung his Fortune in,

The Net; which, cast by the Great Mahmud's Hand,

A hundred glittering Fishes brought to Land.

The Lad look'd up in Wonder-Mahmud smiled

And vaulted into Saddle. But the Child

Ran after-'Nay, Amir, but half the Haul

Is yours by Bargain'-'Nay, Today take all,'

The Sultan cried, and shook his Bridle free-180

'But mind-Tomorrow All belongs to Me-'

And so rode off. Next morning at Divan

The Sultan's Mind upon his Bargain ran,

And being somewhat in a mind for sport

Sent for the Lad: who, carried up to Court,

And marching into Royalty's full Blaze

With such a Catch of Fish as yesterday's,

The Sultan call'd and set him by his side,

And asking him, 'What Luck?' The Boy replied,

'This is the Luck that follows every Cast, 190

Since o'er my Net the Sultan's Shadow pass'd.'

Then came The Nightingale, from such a Draught

Of Ecstasy that from the Rose he quaff'd

Reeling as drunk, and ever did distil

In exquisite divisions from his Bill

To inflame the Hearts of Men-and thus sang He-

'To me alone, alone, is giv'n the Key

Of Love; of whose whole Mystery possesst,

When I reveal a little to the Rest,

Forthwith Creation listening forsakes 200

The Reins of Reason, and my Frenzy takes:

Yea, whosoever once has quaint this wine

He leaves unlisten'd David's Song for mine.

In vain do Men for my Divisions strive,

And die themselves making dead Lutes alive:

I hang the Stars with Meshes for Men's Souls:

The Garden underneath my Music rolls.

The long, long Morns that mourn the Rose away

I sit in silence, and on Anguish prey:

But the first Air which the New Year shall breathe 210

Up to my Boughs of Message from beneath

That in her green Harim my Bride unveils,

My Throat bursts silence and her Advent hails,

Who in her crimson Volume registers

The Notes of Him whose Life is lost in hers.

The Rose I love and worship now is here;

If dying, yet reviving, Year by Year;

But that you tell of, all my Life why waste

In vainly searching; or, if found, not taste?'

So with Division infinite and Trill 220

On would the Nightingale have warbled still,

And all the World have listen'd; but a Note

Of sterner Import check'd the lovesick Throat.

'O watering with thy melodious Tears

Love's Garden, and who dost indeed the Ears

Of men with thy melodious Fingers mould

As David's Finger Iron did of old:

Why not, like David, dedicate thy Dower

Of Song to something better than a Flower?

Empress indeed of Beauty, so they say, 230

But one whose Empire hardly lasts a Day,

By Insurrection of the Morning's Breath

That made her hurried to Decay and Death:

And while she lasts contented to be seen,

And worshipt, for the Garden's only Queen,

Leaving thee singing on thy Bough forlorn,

Or if she smile on Thee, perhaps in Scorn.'

Like that fond Dervish waiting in the throng

When some World-famous Beauty went along,

Who smiling on the Antic as she pass'd-240

Forthwith Staff, Bead and Scrip away he cast,

And grovelling in the Kennel, took to whine

Before her Door among the Dogs and Swine.

Which when she often went unheeding by,

But one day quite as heedless ask'd him-'Why?'-

He told of that one Smile, which, all the Rest

Passing, had kindled Hope within his Breast-

Again she smiled and said, 'O self-beguiled

Poor Wretch, at whom and not on whom I smiled.'

Then came the subtle Parrot in a coat 250

Greener than Greensward, and about his Throat

A Collar ran of sub-sulphureous Gold;

And in his Beak a Sugar-plum he troll'd,

That all his Words with luscious Lisping ran,

And to this Tune-'O cruel Cage, and Man

More iron still who did confine me there,

Who else with him whose Livery I wear

Ere this to his Eternal Fount had been,

And drunk what should have kept me ever-green.

But now I know the Place, and I am free 260

To go, and all the Wise will follow Me.

Some'-and upon the Nightingale one Eye

He leer'd-'for nothing but the Blossom sigh:

But I am for the luscious Pulp that grows

Where, and for which the Blossom only blows:

And which so long as the Green Tree provides

What better grows along Kaf's dreary Sides?

And what more needful Prophet there than He

Who gives me Life to nip it from the Tree?'

To whom the Tajidar-'O thou whose Best 270

In the green leaf of Paradise is drest,

But whose Neck kindles with a lower Fire-

O slip the collar off of base Desire,

And stand apparell'd in Heav'n's Woof entire!

This Life that hangs so sweet about your Lips

But, spite of all your Khizar, slips and slips,

What is it but itself the coarser Rind

Of the True Life withinside and behind,

Which he shall never never reach unto

Till the gross Shell of Carcase he break through?' 280

For what said He, that dying Hermit, whom

Your Prophet came to, trailing through the Gloom

His Emerald Vest, and tempted-'Come with Me,

And Live.' The Hermit answered-'Not with Thee.

Two Worlds there are, and This was thy Design,

And thou hast got it; but The Next is mine;

Whose Fount is this life's Death, and to whose Side

Ev'n now I find my Way without a Guide.'

Then like a Sultan glittering in all Rays

Of Jewelry, and deckt with his own Blaze, 290

The glorious Peacock swept into the Ring:

And, turning slowly that the glorious Thing

Might fill all Eyes with wonder, thus said He.

'Behold, the Secret Artist, making me,

With no one Colour of the skies bedeckt,

But from its Angel's Feathers did select

To make up mine withal, the Gabriel

Of all the Birds: though from my Place I fell

In Eden, when Acquaintance I did make

In those blest days with that Sev'n-headed Snake, 300

And thence with him, my perfect Beauty marr'd

With these ill Feet, was thrust out and debarr'd.

Little I care for Worldly Fruit or Flower,

Would you restore me to lost Eden's Bower,

But first my Beauty making all complete

With reparation of these ugly Feet.'

'Were it,' 'twas answer'd, 'only to return

To that lost Eden, better far to burn

In Self-abasement up thy pluméd Pride,

And ev'n with lamer feet to creep inside-310

But all mistaken you and all like you

That long for that lost Eden as the true;

Fair as it was, still nothing but the shade

And Out-court of the Majesty that made.

That which I point you tow'rd, and which the King

I tell you of broods over with his Wing,

With no deciduous leaf, but with the Rose

Of Spiritual Beauty, smells and glows:

No plot of Earthly Pleasance, but the whole

True Garden of the Universal Soul.' 320

For so Creation's Master-Jewel fell

From that same Eden: loving which too well,

The Work before the Artist did prefer,

And in the Garden lost the Gardener.

Wherefore one Day about the Garden went

A voice that found him in his false Content,

And like a bitter Sarsar of the North

Shrivell'd the Garden up, and drove him forth

Into the Wilderness: and so the Eye

Of Eden closed on him till by and by. 330

Then from a Ruin where conceal'd he lay

Watching his buried Gold, and hating Day,

Hooted The Owl.-'I tell you, my Delight

Is in the Ruin and the Dead of Night

Where I was born, and where I love to wone

All my Life long, sitting on some cold stone

Away from all your roystering Companies,

In some dark Corner where a Treasure lies;

That, buried by some Miser in the Dark,

Speaks up to me at Midnight like a Spark; 340

And o'er it like a Talisman I brood,

Companion of the Serpent and the Toad.

What need of other Sovereign, having found,

And keeping as in Prison underground,

One before whom all other Kings bow down,

And with his glittering Heel their Foreheads crown?'

'He that a Miser lives and Miser dies,

At the Last Day what Figure shall he rise?'

A Fellow all his life lived hoarding Gold,

And, dying, hoarded left it. And behold, 350

One Night his Son saw peering through the House

A Man, with yet the semblance of a Mouse,

Watching a crevice in the Wall-and cried

'My Father?'-'Yes,' the Musulman replied,

'Thy Father!'-'But why watching thus?'-'For fear

Lest any smell my Treasure buried here.'

'But wherefore, Sir, so metamousified?'

'Because, my Son, such is the true outside

Of the inner Soul by which I lived and died.'

'Aye,' said The Partridge, with his Foot and Bill 360

Crimson with raking Rubies from the Hill,

And clattering his Spurs-'Wherewith the Ground

I stab,' said he, 'for Rubies, that, when found

I swallow; which, as soon as swallow'd, turn

To Sparks which though my beak and eyes do burn.

Gold, as you say, is but dull Metal dead,

And hanging on the Hoarder's Soul like Lead:

But Rubies that have Blood within, and grown

And nourisht in the Mountain Heart of Stone,

Burn with an inward Light, which they inspire, 370

And make their Owners Lords of their Desire.'

To whom the Tajidar-'As idly sold

To the quick Pebble as the drowsy Gold,

As dead when sleeping in their mountain mine

As dangerous to Him who makes them shine:

Slavish indeed to do their Lord's Commands,

And slave-like aptest to escape his Hands,

And serve a second Master like the first,

And working all their wonders for the worst.'

Never was Jewel after or before 380

Like that Sulayman for a Signet wore:

Whereby one Ruby, weighing scarce a grain

Did Sea and Land and all therein constrain,

Yea, ev'n the Winds of Heav'n-made the fierce East

Bear his League-wide Pavilion like a Beast,

Whither he would: yea, the Good Angel held

His subject, and the lower Fiend compell'd.

Till, looking round about him in his pride,

He overtax'd the Fountain that supplied,

Praying that after him no Son of Clay 390

Should ever touch his Glory. And one Day

Almighty God his Jewel stole away,

And gave it to the Div, who with the Ring

Wore also the Resemblance of the King,

And so for forty days play'd such a Game

As blots Sulayman's forty years with Shame.

Then The Shah-Falcon, tossing up his Head

Blink-hooded as it was-'Behold,' he said,

'I am the chosen Comrade of the King,

And perch upon the Fist that wears the Ring; 400

Born, bred, and nourisht, in the Royal Court,

I take the Royal Name and make the Sport.

And if strict Discipline I undergo

And half my Life am blinded-be it so;

Because the Shah's Companion ill may brook

On aught save Royal Company to look.

And why am Ito leave my King, and fare

With all these Rabble Wings I know not where?'-

'O blind indeed'-the Answer was, 'and dark

To any but a vulgar Mortal Mark, 410

And drunk with Pride of Vassalage to those

Whose Humour like their Kingdom comes and goes;

All Mutability: who one Day please

To give: and next Day what they gave not seize:

Like to the Fire: a dangerous Friend at best,

Which who keeps farthest from does wiseliest.

A certain Shah there was in Days foregone

Who had a lovely Slave he doted on,

And cherish'd as the Apple of his Eye,

Clad gloriously, fed sumptuously, set high, 420

And never was at Ease were He not by,

Who yet, for all this Sunshine, Day by Day

Was seen to wither like a Flower away.

Which, when observing, one without the Veil

Of Favour ask'd the Favourite-'Why so pale

And sad?' thus sadly answer'd the poor Thing-

'No Sun that rises sets until the King,

Whose Archery is famous among Men,

Aims at an Apple on my Head. and when

The stricken Apple splits. and those who stand 430

Around cry "Lo! the Shah's unerring Hand!"

Then He too laughing asks me "Why so pale

And sorrow-some? as could the Sultan fail,

Who such a master of the Bow confest,

And aiming by the Head that he loves best."'

Then on a sudden swoop'd The Phoenix down

As though he wore as well as gave The Crown:

And cried-'I care not, I, to wait on Kings,

Whose crowns are but the Shadow of my Wings!'

'Aye,' was the Answer-'And, pray, how has sped, 440

On which it lighted, many a mortal Head?'

A certain Sultan dying, his Vizier

In Dream beheld him, and in mortal Fear

Began-'O mighty Shah of Shahs! Thrice-blest'-

But loud the Vision shriek'd and struck its Breast,

And 'Stab me not with empty Title!' cried-

'One only Shah there is, and none beside,

Who from his Throne above for certain Ends

Awhile some Spangle of his Glory lends

To Men on Earth; but calling in again 450

Exacts a strict account of every Grain.

Sultan I lived, and held the World in scorn:

O better had I glean'd the Field of Corn!

O better had I been a Beggar born,

And for my Throne and Crown, down in the Dust

My living Head had laid where Dead I must!

O wither'd, wither'd, wither'd, be the Wing

Whose overcasting Shadow made me King!'

Then from a Pond, where all day long he kept,

Waddled the dapper Duck demure, adept 460

At infinite Ablution, and precise

In keeping of his Raiment clean and nice.

And 'Sure of all the Race of Birds,' said He,

'None for Religious Purity like Me,

Beyond what strictest Rituals prescribe-

Methinks I am the Saint of all our Tribe,

To whom, by Miracle, the Water, that

I wash in, also makes my Praying-Mat.'

To whom, more angrily than all, replied

The Leader, lashing that religious Pride, 470

That under ritual Obedience

To outer Law with inner might dispense:

For, fair as all the Feather to be seen,

Could one see through, the Maw was not so clean:

But He that made both Maw and Feather too

Would take account of, seeing through and through.

A Shah returning to his Capital,

His subjects drest it forth in Festival,

Thronging with Acclamation Square and Street,

And kneeling flung before his Horse's feet 480

Jewel and Gold. All which with scarce an Eye

The Sultan superciliously rode by:

Till coming to the public Prison, They

Who dwelt within those grisly Walls, by way

Of Welcome, having neither Pearl nor Gold,

Over the wall chopt Head and Carcase roll'd,

Some almost parcht to Mummy with the Sun,

Some wet with Execution that day done.

At which grim Compliment at last the Shah

Drew Bridle: and amid a wild Hurrah 490

Of savage Recognition, smiling threw

Silver and Gold among the wretched Crew,

And so rode forward. Whereat of his Train

One wondering that, while others sued in vain

With costly gifts, which carelessly he pass'd,

But smiled at ghastly Welcome like the last;

The Shah made answer-'All that Pearl and Gold

Of ostentatious Welcome only told:

A little with great Clamour from the Store

Of hypocrites who kept at home much more. 500

But when those sever'd Heads and Trunks I saw-

Save by strict Execution of my Law

They had not parted company; not one

But told my Will not talk'd about, but done.'

Then from a Wood was heard unseen to coo

The Ring-dove-'Yúsuf! Yúsuf! Yúsuf! Yú-'

(For thus her sorrow broke her Note in twain,

And, just where broken, took it up again)

'-suf! Yúsuf! Yúsuf! Yúsuf!'-But one Note,

Which still repeating, she made hoarse her throat: 510

Till checkt-'O You, who with your idle Sighs

Block up the Road of better Enterprise;

Sham Sorrow all, or bad as sham if true,

When once the better thing is come to do;

Beware lest wailing thus you meet his Doom

Who all too long his Darling wept, from whom

You draw the very Name you hold so dear,

And which the World is somewhat tired to hear.'

When Yusuf from his Father's Home was torn,

The Patriarch's Heart was utterly forlorn, 520

And, like a Pipe with but one stop, his Tongue

With nothing but the name of 'Yusuf' rung.

Then down from Heaven's Branches flew the Bird

Of Heav'n and said 'God wearies of that word:

Hast thou not else to do and else to say?'

So Jacob's lips were sealéd from that Day.

But one Night in a Vision, far away

His darling in some alien Field he saw

Binding the Sheaf; and what between the Awe

Of God's Displeasure and the bitter Pass 530

Of passionate Affection, sigh'd 'Alas-'

And stopp'd-But with the morning Sword of Flame

That oped his Eyes the sterner Angel's came

'For the forbidden Word not utter'd by

Thy Lips was yet sequester'd in that Sigh.'

And the right Passion whose Excess was wrong

Blinded the aged Eyes that wept too long.

And after these came others-arguing,

Enquiring and excusing-some one Thing,

And some another-endless to repeat, 540

But, in the Main, Sloth, Folly, or Deceit.

Their Souls were to the vulgar Figure cast

Of earthly Victual not of Heavenly Fast.

At last one smaller Bird, of a rare kind,

Of modest Plume and unpresumptuous Mind,

Whisper'd 'O Tajidar, we know indeed

How Thou both knowest, and would'st help our Need;

For thou art wise and holy, and hast been

Behind the Veil, and there The Presence seen.

But we are weak and vain, with little care 550

Beyond our yearly Nests and daily Fare-

How should we reach the Mountain? and if there

How get so great a Prince to hear our Prayer?

For there, you say, dwells The Symurgh alone

In Glory, like Sulayman on his Throne,

And we but Pismires at his feet: can He

Such puny Creatures stoop to hear, or see;

Or hearing, seeing, own us-unakin

As He to Folly, Woe, and Death, and Sin?'-

To whom the Tajidar, whose Voice for those 560

Bewilder'd ones to full Compassion rose

'O lost so long in exile, you disclaim

The very Fount of Being whence you came,

Cannot be parted from, and, will or no,

Whether for Good or Evil must re-flow!

For look-the Shadows into which the Light

Of his pure Essence down by infinite

Gradation dwindles, which at random play

Through Space in Shape indefinite-one Ray

Of his Creative Will into defined 570

Creation quickens: We that swim the Wind,

And they the Flood below, and Man and Beast

That walk between, from Lion to the least

Pismire that creeps along Sulayman's Wall-

Yea, that in which they swim, fly, walk, and crawl-

However near the Fountain Light, or far

Removed, yet His authentic Shadows are;

Dead Matter's Self but the dark Residue

Exterminating Glory dwindles to.

A Mystery too fearful in the Crowd 580

To utter-scarcely to Thyself aloud-

But when in solitary Watch and Prayer

Consider'd: and religiously beware

Lest Thou the Copy with the Type confound;

And Deity, with Deity indrown'd,-

For as pure Water into purer Wine

Incorporating shall itself reline

While the dull Drug lies half-resolved below,

With Him and with his Shadows is it so:

The baser Forms, to whatsoever Change 590

Subject, still vary through their lower Range:

To which the higher even shall decay,

That, letting ooze their better Part away

For Things of Sense and Matter, in the End

Shall merge into the Clay to which they tend.

Unlike to him, who straining through the Bond

Of outward Being for a Life beyond,

While the gross Worldling to his Centre clings,

That draws him deeper in, exulting springs

To merge him in the central Soul of Things. 600

And shall not he pass home with other Zest

Who, with full Knowledge, yearns for such a Rest,

Than he, who with his better self at strife,

Drags on the weary Exile call'd This Life?-

One, like a child with outstretcht Arms and Face

Upturn'd, anticipates his Sire's Embrace;

The other crouching like a guilty Slave

Till flogg'd to Punishment across the Grave.

And, knowing that His glory ill can bear

The unpurged Eye; do thou Thy Breast prepare: 610

And the mysterious Mirror He set there,

To temper his reflected Image in,

Clear of Distortion, Doubleness, and Sin:

And in thy Conscience understanding this,

The Double only seems, but The One is,

Thyself to Self-annihilation give

That this false Two in that true One may live.

For this I say: if, looking in thy Heart,

Thou for Self-whole mistake thy Shadow-part,

That Shadow-part indeed into The Sun 620

Shall melt, but senseless of its Union:

But in that Mirror if with purged eyes

Thy Shadow Thou for Shadow recognise,

Then shalt Thou back into thy Centre fall

A conscious Ray of that eternal All.'

He ceased, and for awhile Amazement quell'd

The Host, and in the Chain of Silence held:

A Mystery so awful who would dare-

So glorious who would not wish-to share?

So Silence brooded on the feather'd Folk, 630

Till here and there a timid Murmur broke

From some too poor in honest Confidence,

And then from others of too much Pretence;

Whom both, as each unduly hoped or fear'd,

The Tajidar in answer check'd or cheer'd.

Some said their Hearts were good indeed to go

The Way he pointed out: but they were slow

Of Comprehension, and scarce understood

Their present Evil or the promised Good:

And so, tho' willing to do all they could, 640

Must not they fall short, or go wholly wrong,

On such mysterious Errand, and so long?

Whom the wise Leader bid but Do their Best

In Hope and Faith, and leave to Him the rest,

For He who fix'd the Race, and knew its Length

And Danger, also knew the Runner's Strength.

Shah Mahmud, absent on an Enterprise,

Ayas, the very Darling of his eyes,

At home under an Evil Eye fell sick,

Then cried the Sultan to a soldier 'Quick! 650

To Horse! to Horse! without a Moment's Stay,-

The shortest Road with all the Speed you may,-

Or, by the Lord, your Head shall pay for it!'-

Off went the Soldier, plying Spur and Bit-

Over the sandy Desert, over green

Valley, and Mountain, and the Stream between,

Without a Moment's Stop for rest or bait,

Up to the City-to the Palace Gate-

Up to the Presence-Chamber at a Stride-

And Lo! The Sultan at his Darling's side!-660

Then thought the Soldier-'I have done my Best,

And yet shall die for it.' The Sultan guess'd

His Thought and smiled. 'Indeed your Best you did,

The nearest Road you knew, and well you rid:

And if I knew a shorter, my Excess

Of Knowledge does but justify thy Less.'

And then, with drooping Crest and Feather, came

Others, bow'd down with Penitence and Shame.

They long'd indeed to go; 'but how begin,

Mesh'd and entangled as they were in Sin 670

Which often-times Repentance of past Wrong

As often broken had but knit more strong?'

Whom the wise Leader bid be of good cheer,

And, conscious of the Fault, dismiss the Fear,

Nor at the very Entrance of the Fray

Their Weapon, ev'n if broken, fling away:

Since Mercy on the broken Branch anew

Would blossom were but each Repentance true.

For did not God his Prophet take to Task?

'Sev'n-times of Thee did Karun Pardon ask; 680

Which, hadst thou been like Me his Maker-yea,

But present at the Kneading of his Clay

With those twain Elements of Hell and Heav'n,-

One prayer had won what Thou deny'st to Sev'n.'

For like a Child sent with a fluttering Light

To feel his way along a gusty Night

Man walks the World: again and yet again

The Lamp shall be by Fits of Passion slain:

But shall not He who sent him from the Door

Relight the Lamp once more, and yet once more? 690

When the rebellious Host from Death shall wake

Black with Despair of Judgment, God shall take

Ages of holy Merit from the Count

Of Angels to make up Man's short Amount,

And bid the murmuring Angel gladly spare

Of that which, undiminishing his Share,

Of Bliss, shall rescue Thousands from the Cost

Of Bankruptcy within the Prison lost.

Another Story told how in the Scale

Good Will beyond mere Knowledge would prevail. 700

In Paradise the Angel Gabriel heard

The Lips of Allah trembling with the Word

Of perfect Acceptation: and he thought

'Some perfect Faith such perfect Answer wrought,

But whose?'-And therewith slipping from the Crypt

Of Sidra, through the Angel-ranks he slipt

Watching what Lip yet trembled with the Shot

That so had hit the Mark-but found it not.

Then, in a Glance to Earth, he threaded through

Mosque, Palace, Cell and Cottage of the True 710

Belief-in vain; so back to Heaven went

And-Allah's Lips still trembling with assent!

Then the tenacious Angel once again

Threaded the Ranks of Heav'n and Earth-in vain-

Till, once again return'd to Paradise,

There, looking into God's, the Angel's Eyes

Beheld the Prayer that brought that Benison

Rising like Incense from the Lips of one

Who to an Idol bowed-as best he knew

Under that False God worshipping the True. 720

And then came others whom the summons found

Not wholly sick indeed, but far from sound:

Whose light inconstant Soul alternate flew

From Saint to Sinner, and to both untrue;

Who like a niggard Tailor, tried to match

Truth's single Garment with a worldly Patch.

A dangerous Game; for, striving to adjust

The hesitating Scale of either Lust,

That which had least within it upward flew,

And still the weightier to the Earth down drew, 730

And, while suspended between Rise and Fall,

Apt with a shaking Hand to forfeit all.

There was a Queen of Egypt like the Bride

Of Night, Full-moon-faced and Canopus-eyed,

Whom one among the meanest of her Crowd

Loved-and she knew it (for he loved aloud),

And sent for him, and said 'Thou lov'st thy Queen:

Now therefore Thou hast this to choose between:

Fly for thy Life: or for this one night Wed

Thy Queen, and with the Sunrise lose thy Head.' 740

He paused-he turn'd to fly-she struck him dead.

'For had he truly loved his Queen,' said She,

'He would at once have giv'n his Life for me,

And Life and Wife had carried: but he lied;

And loving only Life, has justly died.'

And then came one who having clear'd his Throat

With sanctimonious Sweetness in his Note

Thus lisp'd-'Behold I languish from the first

With passionate and unrequited Thirst

Of Love for more than any mortal Bird. 750

Therefore have I withdrawn me from the Herd

To pine in Solitude. But Thou at last

Hast drawn a line across the dreary Past,

And sure I am by Foretaste that the Wine

I long'd for, and Thou tell'st of, shall be mine.'

But he was sternly checkt. 'I tell thee this:

Such Boast is no Assurance of such Bliss:

Thou canst not even fill the sail of Prayer

Unless from Him breathe that authentic Air

That shall lift up the Curtain that divides 760

His Lover from the Harim where He hides-

And the Fulfilment of thy Vows must be,

Not from thy Love for Him, but His for Thee.'

The third night after Bajazyd had died,

One saw him, in a dream, at his Bedside,

And said, 'Thou Bajazyd? Tell me O Pyr,

How fared it there with Munkar and Nakyr?'

And Bajazyd replied, 'When from the Grave

They met me rising, and "If Allah's slave"

Ask'd me, "or collar'd with the Chain of Hell?" 770

I said "Not I but God alone can tell:

My Passion for his service were but fond

Ambition had not He approved the Bond:

Had He not round my neck the Collar thrown

And told me in the Number of his own;

And that He only knew. What signifies

A hundred Years of Prayer if none replies?"'

'But,' said Another, 'then shall none the Seal

Of Acceptation on his Forehead feel

Ere the Grave yield them on the other Side 780

Where all is settled?'

                      But the Chief replied-

'Enough for us to know that who is meet

Shall enter, and with unreprovéd Feet,

(Ev'n as he might upon the Waters walk)

The Presence-room, and in the Presence talk

With such unbridled Licence as shall seem

To the Uninitiated to blaspheme.'

Just as another Holy Spirit fled,

The Skies above him burst into a Bed

Of Angels looking down and singing clear 790

'Nightingale! Nightingale! thy Rose is here!'

And yet, the Door wide open to that Bliss,

As some hot Lover slights a scanty Kiss,

The Saint cried 'All I sigh'd for come to this?

I who lifelong have struggled, Lord, to be

Not of thy Angels one, but one with Thee!'

Others were sure that all he said was true:

They were extremely wicked, that they knew:

And much they long'd to go at once-but some,

They said, so unexpectedly had come 800

Leaving their Nests half-built-in bad Repair-

With Children in-Themselves about to pair-

'Might he not choose a better Season-nay,

Better perhaps a Year or Two's Delay,

Till all was settled, and themselves more stout

And strong to carry their Repentance out-

And then'-

               'And then, the same or like Excuse,

With harden'd Heart and Resolution loose

With dallying: and old Age itself engaged

Still to shirk that which shirking we have aged: 810

And so with Self-delusion, till, too late,

Death upon all Repentance shuts the Gate;

Or some fierce blow compels the Way to choose,

And forced Repentance half its Virtue lose.'

As of an aged Indian King they tell

Who, when his Empire with his Army fell

Under young Mahmud's Sword of Wrath, was sent

At sunset to the Conqueror in his Tent;

But, ere the old King's silver head could reach

The Ground, was lifted up-with kindly Speech, 820

And with so holy Mercy reassured,

That, after due Persuasion, he abjured

His idols, sate upon Mahmud's Divan,

And took the Name and Faith of Musulman.

But when the Night fell, in his Tent alone

The poor old King was heard to weep and groan

And smite his Bosom; which, when Mahmud knew,

He went to him and said 'Lo, if Thou rue

Thy lost Dominion, Thou shalt wear the Ring

Of thrice as large a Realm.' But the dark King 830

Still wept, and Ashes on his Forehead threw

And cried 'Not for my Kingdom lost I rue:

But thinking how at the Last Day, will stand

The Prophet with The Volume in his Hand,

And ask of me "How was't that, in thy Day

Of Glory, Thou didst turn from Me and slay

My People; but soon as thy Infidel

Before my True Believers' Army fell

Like Corn before the Reaper-thou didst own

His Sword who scoutedst Me." Of seed so sown 840

What profitable Harvest should be grown?'

Then after cheering others who delay'd,

Not of the Road but of Themselves afraid,

The Tajidar the Troop of those address'd,

Whose uncomplying Attitude confess'd

Their Souls entangled in the old Deceit,

And hankering still after forbidden Meat-

    'O ye who so long feeding on the Husk

Forgo the Fruit, and doting on the Dusk

Of the false Dawn, are blinded to the True: 850

That in the Maidan of this World pursue

The Golden Ball which, driven to the Goal,

Wins the World's Game but loses your own Soul:

Or like to Children after Bubbles run

That still elude your Fingers; or, if won,

Burst in Derision at your Touch; all thin

Glitter without, and empty Wind within.

So as a prosperous Worldling on the Bed

Of Death-"Behold, I am as one," he said,

"Who all my Life long have been measuring Wind, 860

And, dying, now leave even that behind"-

This World's a Nest in which the Cockatrice

Is warm'd and hatcht of Vanity and Vice:

A false Bazaar whose Wares are all a lie,

Or never worth the Price at which you buy:

A many-headed Monster that, supplied

The faster, faster is unsatisfied;

So as one, hearing a rich Fool one day

To God for yet one other Blessing pray,

Bid him no longer bounteous Heaven tire 870

For Life to feed, but Death to quench, the Fire.

And what are all the Vanities and Wiles

In which the false World decks herself and smiles

To draw Men down into her harlot Lap?

Lusts of the Flesh that Soul and Body sap,

And, melting Soul down into carnal Lust,

Ev'n that for which 'tis sacrificed disgust:

Or Lust of worldly Glory-hollow more

Than the Drum beaten at the Sultan's Door,

And fluctuating with the Breath of Man 880

As the Vain Banner flapping in the Van.

And Lust of Gold-perhaps of Lusts the worst;

The mis-created Idol most accurst

That between Man and Him who made him stands:

The Felon that with suicidal hands

He sweats to dig and rescue from his Grave,

And sets at large to make Himself its Slave.

'For lo, to what worse than oblivion gone

Are some the cozening World most doted on.

Pharaoh tried Glory: and his Chariots drown'd: 890

Karun with all his Gold went underground:

Down toppled Nembroth with his airy Stair:

Schedad among his Roses lived-but where?

'And as the World upon her victims feeds

So She herself goes down the Way she leads.

For all her false allurements are the Threads

The Spider from her Entrail spins, and spreads

For Home and hunting-ground: And by and by

Darts at due Signal on the tangled Fly,

Seizes, dis-wings, and drains the Life, and leaves 900

The swinging Carcase, and forthwith re-weaves

Her Web: each Victim adding to the store

Of poison'd Entrail to entangle more.

And so She bloats in Glory: till one Day

The Master of the House, passing that way,

Perceives, and with one flourish of his Broom

Of Web and Fly and Spider clears the Room.

'Behold, dropt through the Gate of Mortal Birth,

The Knightly Soul alights from Heav'n on Earth;

Begins his Race, but scarce the Saddle feels, 910

When a foul Imp up from the distance steals,

And, double as he will, about his Heels

Closer and ever closer circling creeps,

Then, half-invited, on the Saddle leaps,

Clings round the Rider, and, once there, in vain

The strongest strives to thrust him off again.

In Childhood just peeps up the Blade of Ill,

That Youth to Lust rears, Fury, and Self-will:

And, as Man cools to sensual Desire,

Ambition catches with as fierce a Fire; 920

Until Old Age sends him with one last Lust

Of Gold, to keep it where he found-in Dust.

Life at both ends so feeble and constrain'd

How should that Imp of Sin be slain or chain'd?

'And woe to him who feeds the hateful Beast

That of his Feeder makes an after-feast!

We know the Wolf: by Strategem and Force

Can hunt the Tiger down: but what Resource

Against the Plague we heedless hatch within,

Then, growing, pamper into full-blown Sin 930

With the Soul's self: ev'n, as the wise man said,

Feeding the very Devil with God's own Bread;

Until the Lord his Largess misapplied

Resent, and drive us wholly from his Side?

'For should the Greyhound whom a Sultan fed,

And by a jewell'd String a-hunting led,

Turned by the Way to gnaw some nasty Thing

And snarl at Him who twitch'd the silken String,

Would not his Lord soon weary of Dispute,

And turn adrift the incorrigible Brute? 940

'Nay, would one follow, and without a Chain,

The only Master truly worth the Pain,

One must beware lest, growing over-fond

Of even Life's more consecrated Bond,

We clog our Footsteps to the World beyond.

Like that old Arab Chieftain, who confess'd

His soul by two too Darling Things possess'd-

That only Son of his: and that one Colt

Descended from the Prophet's Thunderbolt.

"And I might well bestow the last," he said, 950

"On him who brought me Word the Boy was dead."

'And if so vain the glittering Fish we get,

How doubly vain to dote upon the Net,

Call'd Life, that draws them, patching up this thin

Tissue of Breathing out and Breathing in,

And so by husbanding each wretched Thread

Spin out Death's very terror that we dread-

For as the Raindrop from the sphere of God

Dropt for a while into the Mortal Clod

So little makes of its allotted Time 960

Back to its Heav'n itself to re-sublime,

That it but serves to saturate its Clay

With Bitterness that will not pass away.'

One day the Prophet on a River Bank,

Dipping his Lips into the Channel, drank

A Draught as sweet as Honey. Then there came

One who an earthen Pitcher from the same

Drew up, and drank: and after some short stay

Under the Shadow, rose and went his Way.

Leaving his earthen Bowl. In which, anew 970

Thirsting, the Prophet from the River drew,

And drank from: but the Water that came up

Sweet from the Stream. drank bitter from the Cup.

At which the Prophet in a still Surprise

For Answer turning up to Heav'n his Eyes,

The Vessel's Earthen Lips with Answer ran-

'The Clay that I am made of once was Man,

Who dying, and resolved into the same

Obliterated Earth from which he came

Was for the Potter dug, and chased in turn 980

Through long Vicissitude of Bowl and Urn:

But howsoever moulded, still the Pain

Of that first mortal Anguish would retain,

And cast, and re-cast, for a Thousand years

Would turn the sweetest Water into Tears.'

And after Death?-that, shirk it as we may,

Will come, and with it bring its After-Day-

For ev'n as Yusuf (when his Brotherhood

Came up from Egypt to buy Corn, and stood

Before their Brother in his lofty Place, 990

Nor knew him, for a Veil before his Face)

Struck on his Mystic Cup, which straightway then

Rung out their Story to those guilty Ten:-

Not to them only, but to every one;

Whatever he have said and thought and done,

Unburied with the Body shall fly up,

And gather into Heav'n's inverted Cup,

Which, stricken by God's Finger, shall tell all

The Story whereby we must stand or fall.

And though we walk this World as if behind 1000

There were no Judgement, or the Judge half-blind,

Beware, for He with whom we have to do

Outsees the Lynx, outlives the Phoenix too-

So Sultan Mahmud, coming Face to Face

With mightier numbrs of the swarthy Race,

Vow'd that if God to him the battle gave,

God's Dervish People all the Spoil should have.

And God the Battle gave him; and the Fruit

Of a great Conquest coming to compute,

A Murmur through the Sultan's Army stirr'd 1010

Lest, ill committed to one hasty Word,

The Shah should squander on an idle Brood

What should be theirs who earn'd it with their Blood,

Or go to fill the Coffers of the State.

So Mahmud's Soul began to hesitate:

Till looking round in Doubt from side to side

A raving Zealot in the Press he spied,

And call'd and had him brought before his Face,

And, telling, bid him arbitrate the case.

Who, having listen'd, said-'The Thing is plain: 1020

If Thou and God should never have again

To deal together, rob him of his share:

But if perchance you should-why then Beware!'

So spake the Tajidar: but Fear and Doubt

Among the Birds in Whispers went about:

Great was their Need: and Succour to be sought

At any Risk: at any Ransom bought:

But such a Monarch-greater than Mahmud

The Great Himself! Why how should he be woo'd

To listen to them? they too have come 1030

O So suddenly, and unprepared from home

With any Gold, or Jewel, or rich Thing

To carry with them to so great a King-

Poor Creatures! with the old and carnal Blind,

Spite of all said, so thick upon the Mind,

Devising how they might ingratiate

Access, as to some earthly Potentate.

'Let him that with this Monarch would engage

Bring the Gold Dust of a long Pilgrimage:

The Ruby of a bleeding Heart, whose Sighs 1040

Breathe more than Amber-incense as it dies;

And while in naked Beggary he stands

Hope for the Robe of Honour from his Hands.'

And, as no gift this Sovereign receives

Save the mere Soul and Self of him who gives,

So let that Soul for other none Reward

Look than the Presence of its Sovereign Lord.'

And as his Hearers seem'd to estimate

Their Scale of Glory from Mahmud the Great,

A simple Story of the Sultan told 1050

How best a subject with his Shah made bold-

One night Shah Mahmud who had been of late

Somewhat distemper'd with Affairs of State

Stroll'd through the Streets disguised, as wont to do-

And, coming to the Baths, there on the Flue

Saw the poor Fellow who the Furnace fed

Sitting beside his Water-jug and Bread.

Mahmud stept in-sat down-unask'd took up

And tasted of the untasted Loaf and Cup,

Saying within himself, 'Grudge but a bit, 1060

And, by the Lord, your Head shall pay for it!'

So having rested, warm'd and satisfied

Himself without a Word on either side,

At last the wayward Sultan rose to go.

And then at last his Host broke silence-'So?-

Art satisfied? Well, Brother, any Day

Or Night, remember, when you come this Way

And want a bit of Provender-why, you

Are welcome, and if not-why, welcome too.'-

The Sultan was so tickled with the whim 1070

Of this quaint Entertainment and of him

Who offer'd it, that many a Night again

Stoker and Shah forgather'd in that Vein-

Till, the poor Fellow having stood the Test

Of true Good-fellowship, Mahmud confess'd

One Night the Sultan that had been his Guest:

And in requital of the scanty Dole

The Poor Man offer'd with so large a soul,

Bid him ask any Largess that he would

A Throne-if he would have it, so he should. 1080

The Poor Man kiss'd the Dust, and 'All,' said he,

'I ask is what and where I am to be;

If but the Shah from time to time will come

As now and see me in the lowly Home

His presence makes a palace, and my own

Poor Flue more royal than another's Throne.'

So said the cheery Tale: and, as they heard,

Again the Heart beneath the Feather stirr'd:

Again forgot the Danger and the Woes

Of the long Travel in its glorious Close:-1090

'Here truly all was Poverty, Despair

And miserable Banishment-but there

That more than Mahmud, for no more than Prayer

Who would restore them to their ancient Place,

And round their Shoulders fling his Robe of Grace.'

They clapp'd their Wings, on Fire to be assay'd

And prove of what true Metal they were made,

Although defaced, and wanting the true Ring

And Superscription of their rightful King.

'The Road! The Road!' in countless voices cried 1100

The Host-'The Road! and who shall be our Guide?'

And they themselves 'The Tajidar!' replied:

Yet to make doubly certain that the Voice

Of Heav'n according with the People's Choice,

Lots should be drawn; and He on whom should light

Heav'n's Hand-they swore to follow him outright.

This settled, and once more the Hubbub quell'd,

Once more Suspense the Host in Silence held,

While, Tribe by Tribe, the Birds their fortune drew;

And Lo! upon the Tajidar it flew. 1110

Then rising up again in wide and high

Circumference of wings that mesh'd the sky

'The Tajidar! The Tajidar!' they cry-

'The Tajidar! The Tajidar!' with Him

Was Heav'n, and They would follow Life and Limb!

Then, once more fluttering to their Places down,

Upon his Head they set the Royal Crown

As Khalif of their Khalif so long lost,

And Captain of his now repentant Host;

And setting him on high, and Silence call'd, 1120

The Tajidar, in Pulpit-throne install'd,

His Voice into a Trumpet-tongue so clear

As all the winged Multitude should hear

Raised, to proclaim the Order and Array

Of March; which, many as it frighten'd-yea,

The Heart of Multitudes at outset broke,

Yet for due Preparation must be spoke.

-A Road indeed that never Wing before

Flew, nor Foot trod, nor Heart imagined-o'er

Waterless Deserts-Waters where no Shore-1130

Valleys comprising cloud-high Mountains: these

Again their Valleys deeper than the Seas:

Whose Dust all Adders, and whose vapour Fire:

Where all once hostile Elements conspire

To set the Soul against herself, and tear

Courage to Terror-Hope into Despair,

And Madness; Terrors, Trials, to make stray

Or Stop where Death to wander or delay:

Where when half dead with Famine, Toil, and Heat,

'Twas Death indeed to rest, or drink, or eat. 1140

A Road still waxing in Self-sacrifice

As it went on: still ringing with the Cries

And Groans of Those who had not yet prevail'd,

And bleaching with the Bones of those who fail'd:

Where, almost all withstood, perhaps to earn

Nothing: and, earning, never to return.-

And first the VALE OF SEARCH: an endless Maze,

Branching into innumerable Ways

All courting Entrance: but one right: and this

Beset with Pitfall, Gulf, and Precipice, 1150

Where Dust is Embers, Air a fiery Sleet,

Through which with blinded Eyes and bleeding Feet

The Pilgrim stumbles, with Hyena's Howl

Around, and hissing Snake, and deadly Ghoul,

Whose Prey he falls if tempted but to droop,

Or if to wander famish'd from the Troop

For fruit that falls to ashes in the Hand,

Water that reacht recedes into the Sand.

The only word is 'Forward!' Guide in sight,

After him, swerving neither left nor right, 1160

Thyself for thine own Victual by Day,

At night thine own Self's Caravanserai.

Till suddenly, perhaps when most subdued

And desperate, the Heart shall be renew'd

When deep in utter Darkness, by one Gleam

Of Glory from the far remote Harim,

That, with a scarcely conscious Shock of Change,

Shall light the Pilgrim toward the Mountain Range

Of KNOWLEDGE: where, if stronger and more pure

The Light and Air, yet harder to endure; 1170

And if, perhaps, the Footing more secure,

Harder to keep up with a nimble Guide,

Less from lost Road than insufficient Stride-

Yet tempted still by false Shows from the Track,

And by false Voices call'd aside or back,

Which echo from the Bosom, as if won

The Journey's End when only just begun,

And not a Mountain Peak with Toil attain'd

But shows a top yet higher to be gain'd.

Wherefore still Forward, Forward! Love that fired 1180

Thee first to search, by Search so re-inspired

As that the Spirit shall the carnal Load

Burn up, and double wing Thee on the Road;

That wert thou knocking at the very Door

Of Heav'n, thou still would'st cry for More, More, More!

Till loom in sight Kaf's Mountain Peak ashroud

In Mist-uncertain yet Mountain or Cloud,

But where the Pilgrim 'gins to hear the Tide

Of that one Sea in which the Sev'n subside;

And not the Sev'n Seas only: but the sev'n 1190

And self-enfolded Spheres of Earth and Heav'n-

Yea, the Two Worlds, that now as Pictures sleep

Upon its Surface-but when once the Deep

From its long Slumber 'gins to heave and sway-

Under the Tempest shall be swept away

With all their Phases and Phenomena:

Not senseless Matter only, but combined

With Life in all Varieties of Kind;

Yea, ev'n the abstract Forms that Space and Time

Men call, and Weal and Woe, Virtue and Crime, 1200

And all the several Creeds like those who fell

Before them, Musulman and Infidel

Shall from the Face of Being melt away,

Cancell'd and swept as Dreams before the Day.

So hast thou seen the Astrologer prepare

His mystic Table smooth of sand, and there

Inscribe his mystic figures, Square, and Trine,

Circle and Pentagram, and heavenly Sign

Of Star and Planet: from whose Set and Rise,

Meeting and Difference, he prophesies; 1210

And, having done it, with his Finger clean

Obliterates as never they had been.

Such is when reacht the Table Land of One

And Wonder: blazing with so fierce a Sun

Of Unity that blinds while it reveals

The Universe that to a Point congeals,

So, stunn'd with utter Revelation, reels

The Pilgrim, when that Double-seeming House,

Against whose Beams he long had chafed his Brows,

Crumbles and cracks before that Sea, whose near 1220

And nearer Voice now overwhelms his Ear.

Till blinded, deafen'd, madden'd, drunk with doubt

Of all within Himself as all without,

Nay, whether a Without there be, or not,

Or a Within that doubts: and if, then what?-

Ev'n so shall the bewilder'd Pilgrim seem

When nearest waking deepliest in Dream,

And darkest next to Dawn; and lost what had

When All is found: and just when sane quite Mad-

As one that having found the Key once more 1230

Returns, and Lo! he cannot find the Door

He stumbles over-So the Pilgrim stands

A moment on the Threshold-with raised Hands

Calls to the eternal Saki for one Draught

Of Light from the One Essence: which when quaff'd,

He plunges headlong in: and all is well

With him who never more returns to tell.

Such being then the Race and such the Goal,

Judge if you must not Body both and Soul

With Meditation, Watch and Fast prepare. 1240

For he that wastes his body to a Hair

Shall seize the Locks of Truth: and He that prays

Good Angels in their Ministry waylays:

And the Midnightly Watcher in the Folds

Of his own Darkness God Almighty holds.

He that would prosper here must from him strip

The World, and take the Dervish Gown and Scrip:

And as he goes must gather from all Sides

Irrelevant Ambitions, Lusts and Prides,

Glory and Gold, and sensual Desire, 1250

Whereof to build the fundamental Pyre

Of Self-annihilation: and cast in

All old Relations and Regards of Kin

And Country: and, the Pile with this perplext

World platform'd, from the Fables of the Next

Raise it tow'rd Culmination, with the torn

Rags and Integuments of Creeds out-worn;

And top the giddy Summit with the Scroll

Of Reason that in dingy Smoke shall roll

Over the true Self-sacrifice of Soul: 1260

(For such a Prayer was his-'O God, do Thou

With all my Wealth in the other World endow

My Friends: and with my Wealth in this my Foes,

Till bankrupt in thy Riches I repose!')

Then, all the Pile completed of the Pelf

Of either World-at last throw on Thyself,

And with the torch of Self-negation fire;

And ever as the Flames rise high and higher,

With Cries of agonising Glory still

All of that Self burn up that burn up will, 1270

Leaving the Phoenix that no Fire can slay

To spring from its own Ashes kindled-nay,

Itself an inextinguishable Spark

Of Being, now beneath Earth-ashes dark,

Transcending these, at last Itself transcends

And with the One Eternal Essence blends.

The Moths had long been exiled from the Flame

They worship: so to solemn Council came,

And voted One of them by Lot be sent

To find their Idol. One was chosen: went. 1280

And after a long Circuit in sheer Gloom,

Seeing, he thought, the TAPER in a Room

Flew back at once to say so. But the chief

Of Mothistan slighted so slight Belief,

And sent another Messenger, who flew

Up to the House, in at the window, through

The Flame itself; and back the Message brings,

With yet no sign of Conflict on his wings.

Then went a Third, and spurr'd with true Desire,

Plunging at once into the sacred Fire, 1290

Folded his Wings within, till he became

One Colour and one Substance with the Flame.

He only knew the Flame who in it burn'd;

And only He could tell who ne'er to tell return'd.

After declaring what of this declared

Must be, that all who went should be prepared,

From his high Station ceased the Tajidar-

And lo! the Terrors that, when told afar,

Seem'd but as Shadows of a Noonday Sun,

Now that the talkt-of Thing was to be done, 1300

Lengthening into those of closing Day

Strode into utter Darkness: and Dismay

Like Night on the husht Sea of Feathers lay,

Late so elate-'So terrible a Track!

Endless-or, ending, never to come back!-

Never to Country, Family, or Friend!'-

In sooth no easy Bow for Birds to bend!-

Even while he spoke, how many Wings and Crests

Had slunk away to distant Woods and Nests;

Others again in Preparation spent 1310

What little Strength they had, and never went:

And others, after preparation due-

When up the Veil of that first Valley drew

From whose waste Wilderness of Darkness blew

A Sarsar, whether edged of Flames or Snows,

That through from Root to Tip their Feathers froze-

Up went a Multitude that overhead

A moment darken'd, then on all sides fled,

Dwindling the World-assembled Caravan

To less than half the Number that began. 1320

Of those who fled not, some in Dread and Doubt

Sat without stirring: others who set out

With frothy Force, or stupidly resign'd,

Before a League, flew off or fell behind.

And howsoever the more Brave and Strong

In Courage, Wing, or Wisdom push'd along,

Yet League by League the Road was thicklier spread

By the fast falling Foliage of the Dead:

Some spent with Travel over Wave and Ground;

Scorcht, frozen, dead for Drought, or drinking drown'd. 1330

Famisht, or poison'd with the Food when found:

By Weariness, or Hunger, or Affright

Seduced to stop or stray, become the Bite

Of Tiger howling round or hissing Snake,

Or Crocodile that eyed them from the Lake:

Or raving Mad, or in despair Self-slain:

Or slaying one another for a Grain:-

Till of the mighty Host that fledged the Dome

Of Heav'n and Floor of Earth on leaving Home,

A Handful reach'd and scrambled up the Knees 1340

Of Kaf whose Feet dip in the Seven Seas;

And of the few that up his Forest-sides

Of Light and Darkness where The Presence hides,

But Thirty-thirty desperate draggled Things,

Half-dead, with scarce a Feather on their Wings,

Stunn'd, blinded, deafen'd with the Crash and Craze

Of Rock and Sea collapsing in a Blaze

That struck the Sun to Cinder-fell upon

The Threshold of the Everlasting One,

With but enough of Life in each to cry, 1350

On THAT which all absorb'd-

And suddenly

Forth flash'd a winged Harbinger of Flame

And Tongue of Fire, and 'Who?' and 'Whence they came?'

And 'Why?' demanded. And the Tajidar

For all the Thirty answer'd him-'We are

Those Fractions of the Sum of Being, far

Dis-spent and foul disfigured, that once more

Strike for Admission at the Treasury Door.'

To whom the Angel answer'd-'Know ye not

That He you seek recks little who or what 1360

Of Quantity and Kind-himself the Fount

Of Being Universal needs no Count

Of all the Drops o'erflowing from his Urn,

In what Degree they issue or return?'

Then cried the Spokesman, 'Be it even so:

Let us but see the Fount from which we flow,

'And, seeing, lose Ourselves therein!' and, Lo!

Before the Word was utter'd, or the Tongue

Of Fire replied, or Portal open flung.

They were within-they were before the Throne, 1370

Before the Majesty that sat thereon,

But wrapt in so insufferable a Blaze

Of Glory as beat down their baffled Gaze.

Which, downward dropping, fell upon a Scroll

That, Lightning-like, flash'd back on each the whole

Past half-forgotten Story of his Soul:

Like that which Yusuf in his Glory gave

His Brethren as some Writing he would have

Interpreted; and at a Glance, behold

Their own Indenture for their Brother sold! 1380

And so with these poor Thirty: who, abasht

In Memory all laid bare and Conscience lasht,

By full Confession and Self-loathing flung

The Rags of carnal Self that round them clung;

And, their old selves self-knowledged and self-loathed,

And in the Soul's Integrity re-clothed,

Once more they ventured from the Dust to raise

Their Eyes-up to the Throne-into the Blaze,

And in the Centre of the Glory there

Beheld the Figure of-Themselves-as 'twere 1390

Transfigured-looking to Themselves, beheld

The Figure on the Throne en-miracled,

Until their Eyes themselves and That between

Did hesitate which Sëer was, which Seen;

They That, That They: Another, yet the Same:

Dividual, yet One: from whom there came

A Voice of awful Answer, scarce discern'd

From which to Aspiration whose return'd

They scarcely knew; as when some Man apart

Answers aloud the Question in his Heart-1400

'The Sun of my Perfection is a Glass

Wherein from Seeing into Being pass

All who, reflecting as reflected see

Themselves in Me, and Me in Them: not Me,

But all of Me that a contracted Eye

Is comprehensive of Infinity:

Nor yet Themselves: no Selves, but of The All

Fractions, from which they split and whither fall.

As Water lifted from the Deep, again

Falls back in individual Drops of Rain 1410

Then melts into the Universal Main.

All you have been, and seen, and done, and thought,

Not You but I, have seen and been and wrought:

I was the Sin that from Myself rebell'd:

I the Remorse that tow'rd Myself compell'd:

I was the Tajidar who led the Track:

I was the little Briar that pull'd you back:

Sin and Contrition-Retribution owed,

And cancell'd-Pilgrim, Pilgrimage, and Road,

Was but Myself toward Myself: and Your 1420

Arrival but Myself at my own Door:

Who in your Fraction of Myself behold

Myself within the Mirror Myself hold

To see Myself in, and each part of Me

That sees himself, though drown'd, shall ever see.

Come you lost Atoms to your Centre draw,

And be the Eternal Mirror that you saw:

Rays that have wander'd into Darkness wide

Return, and back into your Sun subside.'-

This was the Parliament of Birds: and this 1430

The Story of the Host who went amiss,

And of the Few that better Upshot found;

Which being now recounted, Lo, the Ground

Of Speech fails underfoot: But this to tell-

Their Road is thine-Follow-and Fare thee well. 1435