

THE RUBAIYAT OF OMAR KHAYYAM ¹
by Edward FitzGerald

1

AWAKE! For Morning in the Bowl of Night
Has flung the Stone that puts the Stars to Flight:
And lo! the Hunter of the East has caught
The Sultan's Turret in a Noose of Light.

2

Dreaming when Dawn's Left Hand was in the Sky
I heard a Voice within the Tavern cry,
"Awake, my Little ones, and fill the Cup
Before Life's Liquor in its Cup be dry."

3

And, as the Cock crew, those who stood before
The Tavern shouted – "Open then the Door!
You know how little while we have to stay,
And once departed, may return no more."

4

Now the New Year reviving old Desires,
The thoughtful Soul to Solitude retires,
Where the WHITE HAND OF MOSES on the bough
Puts out, and Jesus from the Ground suspires.

¹ This version differs slightly from existing editions. Selection was based on a text designed to be heard rather than read.

5

Iram indeed is gone with all its Rose,
And Jamshyd's Sev'n-ring'd Cup where no-one knows;
 But still the Vine her ancient Ruby yields,
And still a Garden by the Water blows.

6

And David's Lips are lock't; but in divine
High piping Pehlevi, with "Wine! Wine! Wine!
 Red Wine!" — the Nightingale cries to the Rose
That yellow Cheek of her's to incarnadine.

7

Come, fill the Cup, and in the Fire of Spring
The Winter Garment of Repentance fling:
 The Bird of Time has but a little way
To fly — and Lo! the Bird is on the Wing.

8

Whether at Naishapur or Babylon
Whether the Cup with sweet or bitter run,
 The Wine of Life keeps oozing drop by drop;
The Leaves of Life keep dropping One by One.

9

And look — a thousand Blossoms with the Day
Woke — and a thousand scatter'd into Clay:
 And this first Summer Month that brings the Rose
Shall take Jamshyd and Kaikobad away.

10

Well let it take them, what have we to do
With Kaikobad and Kaikhosru?

Let Zal and Rustum thunder as they will
Or Hatim call to supper — heed not you.

11

With me along some Strip of Herbage strown
That just divides the desert from the sown,
Where name of slave and Sultan scarce is known,
And pity Mahmud on his golden Throne.

12

Here with a Loaf of Bread beneath the Bough,
A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verse — and Thou
Beside me singing in the wilderness —
And Wilderness is Paradise enow.

13

"How sweet is mortal Sovranty!" — think some:
Others — "How blest the Paradise to come!"
Ah, take the Cash and let the Credit go
Nor heed the rumble of a distant Drum!

14

Were it not Folly, Spider-like to spin
The Thread of present Life away to win
What? For ourselves who know not if we shall
Breathe out the very Breath we now breathe in!

15

Look to the Rose that blows about us – "Lo,
Laughing," she says, "into the World I blow:
At once the silken Tassel of my Purse
Tear, and its Treasure on the Garden throw."

16

The Worldly Hope men set their Hearts upon
Turns Ashes – or it prospers; and anon,
Like Snow upon the Desert's dusty Face
Lighting a little Hour or two – is gone.

17

And those who husbanded the Golden Grain,
And those who flung it to the Winds like Rain,
Alike to no such aureate Earth are turn'd
As, buried once, Men want dug up again.

18

Think, in this batter'd Caravanserai
Whose Doorways are alternate Night and Day,
How Sultan after Sultan with his Pomp
Abode his Hour or two, and went his way.

19

They say the Lion and the Lizard keep
The Courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep;
And Bahram, that great Hunter – the Wild Ass
Stamps o'er his head, but cannot break his Sleep.

20

I sometimes think that never blows so red
The Rose as where some buried Caesar bled;

That every Hyacinth the Garden wears
Dropt in its Lap from some once lovely Head.

21

And this delightful Herb whose tender Green
Fledges the River's Lip on which we lean —
Ah, lean upon it lightly! for who knows
From what once lovely Lip it springs unseen!

22

Ah, my Beloved, fill the cup that clears
TO-DAY of past Regrets and future Fears —
Tomorrow? — Why, To-morrow I may be
Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n Thousand Years.

23

For some we loved, the loveliest and the best
That Time and Fate of all their Vintage prest,
Have drunk their Cup a Round or two before,
And one by one crept silently to Rest.

24

And we, that now make merry in the Room
They left, and Summer dresses in new Bloom,
Ourselves must we beneath the Couch of Earth
Descend, ourselves to make a Couch — for whom?

25

Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,
Before we too into the Dust descend;
Dust into Dust, and under Dust to lie,
Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and — sans End!

26

Alike for those who for TO-DAY prepare,
And those that after a TO-MORROW stare,
A Muezzin from the Tower of Darkness cries
"Fools! Your reward is neither Here nor There!"

27

Why, all the Saints and Sages who discuss'd
Of the Two Worlds so learnedly, are thrust
Like foolish Prophets forth; their Words to Scorn
Are scatter'd, and their mouths are stopt with Dust.

28

Oh, come with old Khayyam, and leave the Wise
To talk; one thing is certain, that Life flies;
One thing is certain, and the Rest is Lies;
The Flower that once has blown for ever dies.

29

Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint, and heard great Argument
About it and about: but evermore
Came out by the same Door where in I went.

30

With them the Seed of Wisdom did I sow,
And with my own hand labour'd it to grow:
And this was all the Harvest that I reap'd —
"I came like Water, and like Wind I go."

31

Into this Universe, and *why* not knowing,
Nor *whence*, like Water willy-nilly flowing:

And out of it, as Wind along the Waste,
I know not *whither*, willy-nilly blowing.

32

What, without asking, *hither* hurried, *whence*?
And without asking, *whither* hurried, *hence*?
Oh, many a Cup of this forbidden Wine
Must drown the memory of that insolence!

33

Up from Earth's Centre though the Seventh Gate
I rose, and on the Throne of Saturn sate,
And many a knot unravel'd by the Road;
But not the Master-knot of Human Fate.

34

There was a Door to which I found no Key:
There was a Veil past which I could not see:
Some little talk awhile of ME and THEE
There seem'd - and then no more of THEE and ME.

35

Then of the THEE IN ME who works behind
The Veil, I lifted up my hands to find
A Lamp amid the Darkness and I heard
As from Without – “THE ME WITHIN THEE BLIND!”

36

Then to the Lip of this poor earthen urn
I lean'd the Secret of my Life to learn
And Lip to Lip it murmur'd – “While you live,
“Drink! – for once dead you never shall return.

37

I think the Vessel, that with fugitive
Articulation answer'd, once did live,
 And drink; and Ah! the cold Lip I kiss'd
How many Kisses might it take - and give!

38

For in the Market-place, one Dusk of Day,
I watch'd the Potter thumping his wet Clay:
 And with its all obliterated Tongue
It murmur'd - "Gently, Brother, gently, pray!"

39

For has not such a Story from of Old
Down Man's successive generations roll'd
 Of such a clod of saturated earth
Cast by the Maker into Human mould?

40

And not a drop that from our Cups we throw
For Earth to drink of, but may steal below
 To quench the fire of Anguish in some Eye
There hidden — far beneath and long ago.

41

As then the Tulip for her morning sup
Of Heavenly Vintage lifts her chalice up
 Do you, devoutly, do the like, till Heav'n
To Earth invert you like an empty cup.

42

Perplext no more with Human and Divine
Tomorrow's tangle to the winds resign
And lose your fingers in the tresses of
The Cypress-slender Minister of Wine.

43

And if the Wine you drink, the Lip you press
End in what All begins and ends in — Yes;
Think then you are TODAY what YESTERDAY
You were — TO-MORROW you shall not be less.

44

While the Rose blows along the River Brink,
With old Khayyam the Ruby Vintage drink
And when the Angel with his darker Draught
Draws up to Thee — take that and do not shrink.

45

Why, if the Soul can fling the Dust aside,
And naked on the Air of Heaven ride,
Wer't not a Shame — wer't not a Shame for him
In this clay carcass crippled to abide?

46

'Tis but a Tent where takes his one day's rest
A Sultan to the realm of Death address;
The Sultan rises, and the dark Ferrash
Strikes, and prepares it for another Guest.

47

And fear not lest Existence closing your
Account, and mine, should know the like no more;

The Eternal Saki from that Bowl has pour'd
Millions of Bubbles like us, and will pour.

48

When you and I behind the Veil are past
O, but the long, long while the World shall last,
Which of our Coming and Departure heeds
As the Sea's self should heed a pebble-cast.

49

A Moment's Halt – a momentary taste
Of BEING from the Well amid the Waste –
And LO! – the phantom Caravan has reach'd
The NOTHING it set out from – Oh make haste!

50

Would you that Spangle of Existence spend
About THE SECRET — quick about it, Friend!
A Hair perhaps divides the False and True —
And upon what, prithee, may life depend?

51

A Hair perhaps divides the False and True
Yes, and a single Alif were the clue —
Could you but find it — to the Treasure-house,
And peradventure to The MASTER too;

52

Whose secret Presence, through Creation's veins
Running Quicksilver-like eludes your pains;
Taking all shapes from Mah to Mahi; and
They change and perish all — but He remains.

53

A moment guess'd — then back behind the Fold
Immerst of Darkness round the Drama roll'd
Which, for the Pastime of Eternity,
He doth Himself contrive, enact, behold.

54

But if in vain, down on the stubborn floor
Of Earth, and up to Heav'n's unopening Door
You gaze TODAY, while You are You — how then
TOMORROW when You shall be You no more?

55

Waste not your Hour, nor in the vain pursuit
Of This and That endeavour and dispute;
Better be merry with the fruitful grape
Than sadden after none, or bitter, fruit.

56

You know, my Friends, how long since in my House
For a new Marriage I did make Carouse:
Divorced old barren Reason from my Bed,
And took the Daughter of the Vine to Spouse.

57

For "IS" and "IS-NOT" though with Rule and Line,
And "UP-AND-DOWN" without, I could define,
Of all that one should care to fathom, I
Was never deep in anything but – Wine.

58

Ah, but my Computations, People say,
Reduced the Year to better reckoning?--Nay,

'Twas only striking from the Calendar
Unborn To-morrow, and dead Yesterday.

59

And lately, by the Tavern Door agape,
Came stealing through the Dusk an Angel Shape
 Bearing a Vessel on his Shoulder; and
He bid me taste of it; and 'twas--the Grape!

60

The Grape that can with Logic absolute
The Two-and-Seventy jarring Sects confute:
 The subtle Alchemist that [can] in a Trice
Life's leaden Metal into Gold transmute:

61

But leave the Wise to wrangle, and with me
The Quarrel of the Universe let be:
 And, in some corner of the Hubbub coucht,
Make Game of that which makes as much of Thee.

62

Why, be this Juice the growth of God, who dare
Blaspheme the twisted tendril as a Snare?
 A Blessing, we should use it, should we not?
And if a Curse — why, then. Who set it there?

63

I must abjure the Balm of Life, I must,
Scared by some After-reckoning ta'en on trust,
 Or lured with Hope of some Diviner Drink,
To fill the Cup — when crumbled into Dust!

64

Strange, is it not? that of the myriads who
Before us pass'd the door of Darkness through,
Not one returns to tell us of the Road,
Which to discover we must travel too.

65

The Revelations of Devout and Learn'd
Who rose before us, and as Prophets burn'd,
Are all but Stories, which, awoke from Sleep
They told their fellows, and to Sleep return'd.

66

I sent my Soul through the Invisible,
Some letter of that After-life to spell:
And by and by my Soul return'd to me,
And answer'd "I Myself am Heav'n and Hell":

67

Heav'n but the Vision of fulfill'd Desire,
And Hell the Shadow of a Soul on fire,
Cast on the Darkness into which Ourselves,
So late emerg'd from, shall so soon expire.

68

For in and out, above, about, below,
'Tis nothing but a Magic Shadow-show,
Play'd in a Box whose Candle is the Sun,
Round which we Phantom Figures come and go.

69

'Tis all a Chequer-board of Nights and Days
Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays:
 Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays,
And one by one back in the Closet lays.

70

The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
 Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

71

And that inverted Bowl they call the Sky,
Whereunder crawling coop'd we live and die,
 Lift not your hands to It for help — for It
As impotently moves as you or I.

72

YESTERDAY This Day's Madness did prepare;
TO-MORROW'S Silence, Triumph, or Despair:
 Drink! for you know not whence you came, nor why:
Drink! for you know not why you go, nor where.

73

The Vine had struck a fibre: which about
If clings my Being — let the Sufi flout;
 Of my Base metal may be filed a Key,
That shall unlock the Door he howls without.

74

And this I know: whether the one True Light
Kindle to Love, or Wrath-consume me quite,

One Flash of It within the Tavern caught
Better than in the Temple lost outright.

75

What! Out of senseless Nothing to provoke
A conscious Something to resent the yoke
Of unpermitted Pleasure, under pain
Of Everlasting Penalties, if broke!

76

What! from his helpless Creature be repaid
Pure Gold for what he lent us dross-allay'd;
Sue for a Debt we never did contract,
And cannot answer? — Oh the sorry trade!

77

Oh Thou, who didst with pitfall and with gin
Beset the Road I was to wander in,
Thou wilt not with Predestin'd Evil round
Enmesh me and impute my Fall to Sin!

78

Oh Thou, who Man of baser Earth didst make,
And ev'n with Eden didst devise the Snake:
For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man
Is blacken'd — Man's Forgiveness give — and take!

79

Listen again, One Evening at the Close
Of Ramazán, ere the better Moon arose,
In that old Potter's Shop I stood alone
With the clay Population round in Rows.

80

And once again there gather'd a scarce heard
Whisper among them; as it were, the stirr'd
Ashes of some all but extinguisht Tongue
Which mine ear kindled into living Word.

81

Said one among them — “Surely not in vain,
“My Substance from the common Earth was ta'en,
“ That He who subtly wrought me into Shape
“Should stamp me back to shapeless Earth again.”

82

Another said — “Why, ne'er a peevish Boy,
“Would break the Bowl from which he drank in Joy;
“And He that with his hand the Vessel made
“Will surely not in after Wrath destroy.”

83

After a momentary silence spake
Some Vessel of more ungainly Make:
“They sneer at me for leaning all awry;
“What! Did the Hand then of the Potter shake?”

84

Whereat some one of the loquacious Lot —
I think a Sufi pipkin — waxing hot —
“All this of Pot and Potter — Tell me then,
“Who is the Potter, pray, and who the Pot?”

85

“Why”, said another, “Some there are who tell
“Of one who threatens he will toss to Hell
“The luckless Pots he marr’d in making — Pish!
“He’s a Good Fellow, and ‘twill all be well.”

86

Then said another with a long drawn Sigh,
“My Clay with long oblivion is gone dry:
“But fill me with the old familiar Juice,
“Methinks I might recover by and by.”

87

Ah, with the Grape my fading Life provide,
And wash my Body whence the Life has died,
And in a Windingsheet of Vine-leaf wrapt,
So bury me by some sweet Garden-side

88

That ev’n my buried Ashes such a Snare
Of Perfume shall fling up into the Air,
As not a True Believer passing by
But shall be overtaken unaware.

89

Indeed the Idols I have loved so long
Have done my Credit in Men’s Eye much wrong,
Have drown’d my Honour in a shallow Cup
And sold my Reputation for a Song.

90

Indeed, indeed, Repentance oft before
I swore – but was I sober when I swore?

And then, and then came Spring, and Rose-in-hand
My threadbare Penitence apieces tore.

91

And much as Wine has play'd the Infidel,
And robb'd me of my Robe of Honour – well,
I often wonder what the Vintners buy
One half so precious as the Goods they sell.

92

Alas, that Spring should vanish with the Rose!
That Youth's sweet-scented Manuscript should close!
The Nightingale that in the Branches sang,
Ah, whence, and whither flown again who knows!

93

Would that some winged Angel ere too late
Arrest the yet unfolded Roll of Fate,
And make the stern Recorder otherwise
Enregister, or quite obliterate!

94

Ah Love! could thou and I with Fate conspire
To grasp the sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits – and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!

95

Ah, Moon of my Delight who know'st no wane,
The Moon of Heav'n is rising once again:
How oft hereafter rising shall it look
Through this same Garden after me – in vain!

96

And when Thyself with shining Foot shall pass
Among the Guests Star-scatter'd on the Grass,
And in thy joyous Errand reach the Spot
Where I made one — turn down an empty Glass

TAMAM SHUD (It is done.)