

PIGEONS.

PINK-FOOTED, sleekly white, or delicate fawn,
 Or darklier-plumed, with glossy throat where clings
 One soft perpetual ripple of rainbow rings,
 How often to your beauty our sight is drawn
 When back from roamings wide you suddenly dawn,
 A lovely turbulence of quick-fluttered wings,
 Alighting on some brown slanted roof like spring's
 Pale showers of blossoms on an orchard lawn!

Our common barn-yard life, plain, stolid, rude,
 You haunt with tender purity sweet to note;
 And gladden its dullness with your buoyant throng,
 In many a smooth and mellow interlude
 Through homelier sound serenely letting float
 Your strange luxurious monotonous of song!

Edgar Fawcett.

A PERSIAN POET.

I.

A TASTE for Oriental poetry — or such quality of it as drips through the sieve of English translation — is, I fancy, an acquired taste. Those who have made a close study of Eastern literature in this sort naturally discover flavors in it which escape the ordinary reader, who very soon comes to find the rose nauseating and the bulbul indigestible. “Most poetical translations,” says Mr. James Freeman Clarke in the preface to his admirable little herbarium of *Exotics*, “resemble the reverse side of Gobelins tapestry. The figures and colors are there, but the charm is wanting.” In many cases it would seem as if the pleasure in a translation stopped short with the translator. It is not here a question of such matters as Goethe’s *West-Ostliche Divan*, or Victor Hugo’s *Les Orientales*, or the lyrics of Mirtsa Schaffy, whom, by the way, Mr. Alger

in his *Poetry of the East* mistakes for a veritable Persian author, speaking of him as “a living poet, under whose instruction the translator studied Persian literature at Tiflis.” Mirtsa Schaffy — an elder brother of Hans Breitmann — is the happy invention of the German Bodenstedt, who weaves a very neat fiction about him and another professor named Mirtsa Jussuf. Jussuf and Schaffy are pictured as rival teachers of Persian at Tiflis, both of whom endeavor to secure the young Western barbarian as pupil. When I say that Eastern poetry is not generally pleasing to the Occidental taste, I refer to the genuine article as we get it in literal translations, and not to those imitations of imitations which are often not without a charm of their own.

“Some are pretty enough,
 And some are poor indeed.”

The reader who cannot wade through an English version of the *Mahabharata*

— if such an awful thing as a complete English version exists, for the original contains two hundred thousand verses and fills four gigantic quartos — encounters no difficulty in liking *The Sick King in Bokhara* of Matthew Arnold. I do not know of anything more likely to be dreary reading than “a novel from the Chinese,” unless it is one of those interminable epics which possess so deep a fascination for Oriental scholars. One needs to be an Oriental scholar to take delight in them; but one need be nothing more than an unaffected and simple lover of poetry to relish the exquisite quatrains of Omar Khayyám, whose *Rubáiyát* has just come to us from the press of Osgood.¹ The volume will be a revelation to the majority of its possessors, for, though the poems of Omar Khayyám have long been familiar to students of Persian literature, they were comparatively unknown to the English reader until ten or twelve years ago, when Mr. Edward Fitzgerald, of London, translated and published a selection from the *Rubáiyát*, a few copies of which found their way to this country. The book seems to have had but a limited circulation abroad, for it has only now reached a third edition. It is from this that the American reprint is made.

Of the life of Omar Khayyám, the few facts that have been preserved are set forth in Mr. Fitzgerald's interesting introduction to the poems. From this we learn that the poet was born about the middle of the eleventh century, at Naishápúr, in the province of Khorassan; that in early life he was a tent-maker by trade; that through the influence of one of his boyhood's friends, Nizám-ul-Mulk, vizier to Alp Arslám, the sultan granted Omar a yearly pension; that, safe from the care which loves to feed on impecunious literary flesh, he lived at ease in Naishápúr, acquired great learning, became a famous astronomer, hated the Súfis,² wrote sev-

¹ *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám, the Astronomer-Poet of Persia. Rendered into English verse. Boston: James R. Osgood & Co. 1878.

² “He is said to have been especially hated and dreaded by the Súfis, whose practice he ridiculed,

eral hundred faultless quatrains, which likely enough nobody at that time would read; and that there he died, in the year 1123, lamented by the sultan, regarded by the world as a lamp of science, and probably beloved by every one who did n't write quatrains himself. Always excepting the Súfis. That is all. If Khayyám had been a Shakespeare he could not have had a more meagre biography. To learn anything further of Omar one must go to his quatrains; there are glimpses to be had there of the inner man. But first, a couple of anecdotes, with a tolerable air of authenticity to them, considering their age, for they are at least seven hundred years old. I confess, however, that the story of Omar's pension is quite charming enough to be pure fiction. It is thus quoted by Mr. Fitzgerald from an ancient number of the *Calcutta Review*. I should state that the story is told by the Vizier Nizám-ul-Mulk, in his *Wasiyat* or Testament, which he wrote and left as a memorial for future statesmen: —

“One of the greatest of the wise men of Khorassan was the Imám Mowaffak of Naishápúr, a man highly honored and revered, — may God rejoice his soul; his illustrious years exceeded eighty-five, and it was the universal belief that every boy who read the Koran or studied the traditions in his presence would assuredly attain to honor and happiness. For this cause did my father send me from Túto to Naishápúr with Abd-us-samad, the doctor of law, that I might employ myself in study and learning under the guidance of that illustrious teacher. . . . When I first came there, I found two other pupils of mine own age newly arrived, Hakim Omar Khayyám and the ill-fated Ben Sabbáh. Both were endowed with sharpness of wit and the highest natural powers; and we three formed a close friendship together. When the Imám rose from his lectures, they used to join me, and we repeated and whose faith amounts to little more than his own when stripped of the mysticism and formal recognition of Islamism, under which Omar would not hide.” — E. F.

to each other the lessons we had heard. Now Omar was a native of Naishápúr, while Hasan Ben Sabbáh's father was one Ali, a man of austere life and practice, but heretical in his creed and doctrine. One day Hasan said to me and to Khayyám, 'It is a universal belief that the pupils of the Imám Mowaffak will attain to fortune. Now, even if we all do not attain thereto, without doubt one of us will; what then shall be our mutual pledge and bond?' We answered, 'Be it what you please.' 'Well,' he said, 'let us make a vow that to whomsoever this fortune falls, he shall share it equally with the rest and reserve no preëminence for himself.' 'Be it so,' we both replied, and on those terms we mutually pledged our words. Years rolled on, and I went from Khorassan to Transoxiana, and wandered to Ghazni and Cabul; and when I returned, I was invested with office, and rose to be administrator of affairs during the sultanate of Sultan Alp Arslán."

The two old school-mates would not have been human beings if they had not turned up just at this period and claimed a share in the vizier's good fortune. There was nothing surprising in that; the surprising part is—the vizier remembered his vow. Hasan got a place under the government, just as if he had been a relation of the royal family, fell into bad ways, as relations to royal families sometimes do, tried to supplant his benefactor, and, not succeeding in that, succeeded in assassinating him.

Omar also had a claim to make; but he wanted neither title nor office. "The greatest boon you can confer on me," he said, "is to let me live in a corner under the shadow of your fortune, to spread wide the advantages of science and pray for your long life and prosperity." The vizier was so unused to such modest demands that he at first took all this as a pleasantry; but finding Omar sincere in his refusal of office, Nizám-ul-Mulk urged him no further, but got him a pension of twelve hundred *mithkâls* of gold from the treasury of Naishápúr. Thus at Naishápúr lived and died Omar Khayyám, as in a fairy-book, "busied,"

adds the vizier, "in winning knowledge of every kind, and especially in astronomy, wherein he attained to a very high preëminence. Under the sultanate of Malik Shah he came to Merv, and obtained great praise for his proficiency in science, and the sultan showered favors upon him." Omar was one of the eight learned men selected by Malik Shah to reform the calendar; the result of the labor was "a computation of time which," according to Gibbon, "surpasses the Julian and approaches the accuracy of the Gregorian style." Our poet was also the author of some astronomical tables and an Arabic treatise on algebra; the latter work has recently been translated and published in Paris.

The second anecdote I mentioned is related by Khwájah Nizámi of Samarcand, one of Omar's pupils. This is also from the Calcutta Review. "I often used to hold conversations with my teacher, Omar Khayyám, in a garden; and one day he said to me, 'My tomb shall be in a spot where the north wind may scatter roses over it.' I wondered at the words he spake, but I knew that his were no idle words. Years after, when I chanced to revisit Naishápúr, I went to his final resting-place, and lo! it was just outside a garden, and trees laden with fruit stretched their boughs over the garden wall, and dropped their flowers upon his tomb, so as the stone was hidden under them."

II.

The poems of Omar Khayyám were never popular among his own countrymen, and his MSS. are so rare now, thinned by mutilation and the accidents of transcription, that few of them are to be found anywhere, especially in Western collections. "There is no copy at the India House," says Mr. Fitzgerald, "none at the Bibliothèque Impériale of Paris. We know but of one in England: No. 140 of the Ouseley MSS. at the Bodleian, written at Shiraz, A. D. 1460. This contains but 158 Rubáiyát. One in the Asiatic Society's Library at Cal-

cutta (of which we have a copy) contains (and yet incomplete) 516, though swelled to that by all kinds of repetition and corruption. So Von Hammer speaks of his copy as containing about 200, while Dr. Sprenger catalogues the Lucknow MS. at double that number." Out of the four or five hundred quatrains left by the poet, the present translator gives us a hundred and one.

Each of these quatrains is complete in itself, except here and there, as in the dialogue between the potter's pipkins, where the fancy overflows awhile from stanza to stanza. These, properly speaking, are not quatrains. In general terms, any stanza of four verses is a quatrain. Mr. Emerson sometimes goes so far as to call a couplet a quatrain. (See *May Day and Other Poems*, page 182.) Dryden defines it as "a stanza of four lines rhyming alternately." The style of poem to which the name has come to be applied is something more than that. The quatrain, as exemplified by the masters of it, occupies a field of its own, like the sonnet; and though not fettered by so involved laws as the latter, it has laws which are not to be broken with impunity. It is a surprisingly difficult species of composition. The quatrain is an instrument on which one may strike the lightest or the deepest note, but it must be a full note. It is imperative that the single thought, fancy, or mood with which it deals should find complete expression. If your statement exceeds the austere limit of four verses and requires one or more additional stanzas to complete itself, you have written a poem of eight, twelve, or fourteen verses, as the case may be, but not a quatrain. Then, again, a trifle too much point or snap turns your poem into an epigram. A perfect quatrain is almost as rare as a perfect sonnet.

Of the kind of verse which Omar Khayyám chose for his work the reader will discover very many unique specimens in the *Rubáiyát*. There is nothing of "sustained effort" here: the poems are not of long breath; they are not to be measured with a yard-stick; but so exquisite is their workmanship, so firmly

and cleanly are they cut, that they are a part of the world's precious things, retaining their freshness and their subtlety through corroding centuries, like those intaglios turned up from time to time in Roman earth. Omar Khayyám has shown us once more that a little thing may be perfect, and that perfection is not a little thing. But are these poems in any sense little things? Here and there the poignant thought in them cuts very deep. It is like a crevasse in an Alpine glacier, only a finger's breadth at the edge, but reaching down to unfathomable depths. The mysteries of life and death and the problem of future existence occupied the good Omar Khayyám very much in his soft nest at Naishápúr. In vain broodings over these matters his supply of Moslem faith gave out; he became a skeptic, a Pantheist; destiny took the place of providence. To him the world became merely an inn, where it was best to eat, drink, and be merry. The landlord was Death; he was inexorable in his demands; he would be paid in any case; so it was wise to have good cheer for a few days before one started forth — into the unknown.

"Think, in this batter'd Caravanserai
Whose Portals are alternate Night and Day,
How Sultán after Sultán with his Pomp
Abode his destin'd Hour, and went his way."

Khayyám's philosophy ran into a very shallow, epicurean channel at last. He says, —

"You know, my friends, with what a brave Carouse
I made a Second Marriage in my house;
Divorced old barren Reason from my Bed,
And took the Daughter of the Vine to Spouse."

Many of his verses are in praise of the wine-cup; but I suspect that he praised more wine than he drank, and that the epigram which English Herrick wrote upon himself would be an excellent fit for the Persian's tombstone:—

"Jocund his Muse was, but his life was chaste."

M. Nicolas, who has somewhat recently published an edition of the original text, accompanied by a French translation, does not hold Mr. Fitzgerald's views in respect to the poet's materialistic philosophy. M. Nicolas is

pleased to regard him as a mystic, "shadowing the Deity under the figure of Wine, Wine-Bearer, etc., as Hafiz is supposed to do; in short, a Súfí poet." Mr. Fitzgerald shows conclusively that this theory is not tenable. While some of the Rubáiyát are obscure and susceptible of mystical interpretation, it is impossible, without a sacrifice of common sense, to accept others as allegories. They must be taken literally. For example:—

"Ah, with the grape my fading life provide,
And wash the body whence the life has died,
And lay me, shrouded in the living leaf,
By some not unfrequented garden-side."

"Were the Wine spiritual," remarks Mr. Fitzgerald, "how wash the body with it when dead? Why make cups of the dead clay to be filled with 'la Divinité'?"

Whether or not Omar Khayyám put his bacchanalian theories into practice, it is evident that his faith in things unseen was of the slightest.

"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."

"O threats of Hell and hopes of Paradise!
One thing at least is certain, — *This* Life flies;
One thing is certain and the rest is Lies;
The Flower that once has blown forever dies."

"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.'"

The poet's moods are many, and there is no monotony in the quatrains. Now and then he gives us a purely picturesque touch, as in these two instances:—

"Wake! For the Sun who scatter'd into flight
The Stars before him from the Field of Night
Drives Night along with them from Heav'n and
strikes
The Sultán's Turret with a Shaft of Light."

"Iram indeed is gone with all his Rose,¹
And Jamshyd's Sev'n-ring'd Cup where no one
knows;
But still a Ruby gushes from the Vine,
And many a Garden by the Water blows."

That many a garden in bloom by the water is a picture which needs no additional detail.

¹ "Iram, planted by King Shaddád, and now sunk somewhere in the Sands of Arabia. Jamshyd's Seven-ring'd Cup was typical of the 7 Heavens, 7

The world is very old to Omar, and sentient with the dust of dead generations:—

"For I remember stopping by the way
To watch a Potter thumping his wet Clay :
And with its *all-obiterated Tongue*
It murmur'd, 'Gently, Brother, gently, pray!'"

This grotesque conceit is frequently to be met with in Oriental poetry; but it is seldom so delicately embodied. One of our own poets has tried his hand at it:

"In the market-place one day
I saw a potter stamping clay;
And the clay beneath his tread
Lifted up its voice, and said,
Potter, gentle be with me,
I was once a man like thee."

The silent, inevitable flight of the hours was never noted with more sadness than by Khayyám:—

"Whether at Naishápúr or Babylon,
Whether the Cup with sweet or bitter run,
The Wine of Life keeps oozing drop by drop,
The Leaves of Life keep falling one by one."

And elsewhere:—

"Each Morn a thousand roses brings, you say;
Yes, but where leaves the Rose of Yesterday?"

In the same plaintive minor key, three centuries later, sings François Villon:—

"Mais où sont les neiges d'autan?"

All things pass away, moans Khayyám, who has not wholly passed away himself, since his voice is still good in this Year of Grace, Eighteen Hundred and Seventy-Eight:—

"They say the lion and the lizard keep
The Courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank
deep:
And Bahrám, that great hunter — the wild ass
Stamps o'er his head, but cannot break his
sleep."

Though the poet sings of roses and wine and friendship, he has little to say of love, unlike Hafiz, Firdousi, and the rest. In one place Khayyám apostrophizes a "beloved," but whether it is friend or mistress we are left in the dark. Here, however, seems to be a very plain case:—

"A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread — and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness —
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!"

In this quatrain occurs the only forced rhyme I have discovered in the series.

Planets, 7 Seas, etc., and was a *Divining Cup*." — E. F.

Aside from the admirable technique of the quatrains, the most striking feature is their intensely modern spirit. Some of them so deal with the questions which assail and defeat us to-day that it would be easy to imagine them the work of a poet of the period, if any poet of the period could have written them. There is a Singer sleeping in the English Burying-Ground at Florence who might have written certain of them. It is to praise both poets to say their quatrains are alike in grace, repose, and consummate finish. For instance:—

“ I sometimes think that never blows so red
The Rose as where some buried Cæsar bled;
That every Hyacinth the Garden wears
Dropt in her Lap from some once lovely Head.”
Landor might have written this.

The compact, flexible stanza in which Mr. Fitzgerald has reset the Persian's jewels is a model for young poets of the “howling dervish” school. Whether or not the translator is always faithful to the method and matter of the original text, the astronomer poet may thank his stars, in that other world, that his work fell into the hands of so accomplished a master of verse in this.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich.

CRUDE AND CURIOUS INVENTIONS AT THE CENTENNIAL EXHIBITION.

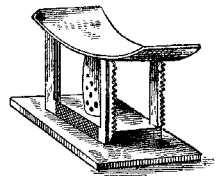
XII.

FURNITURE, SHOES, TOILETTE.

It would be hardly fair to say that elaborateness and variety of furniture are the measure of civilization, for there are highly civilized communities with simple tastes, and there is barbaric splendor with but little culture. Nevertheless, polish and elegance shown in weapons, utensils, and furniture indicate the dawn of taste, and are the result of leisure.

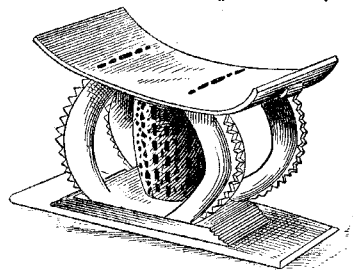
The most leisurely being in the world is perhaps to be found in Africa, but his wants are simple, his tastes undeveloped, and his constructive ability fearfully small. His chairs for important occasions are fashioned from a solid block of wood by laborious and patient carving. He is not troubled with the need of tables or bedsteads. Of his bowls and spoons we have already spoken. Figure 325a is a native Fantee stool made from a solid block of white wood. Figure 326 is an African chief's stool from the Gold Coast of Africa; it

also is made out of the solid wood, and has curved legs and a perforated central pillar. It is thirteen inches in height, and the seat is twenty-two by eleven inches. The ornamentation is laborious without being ingenious or graceful.



(Fig. 325a.) Fantee Stool. Gold Coast Exhibit.

The Bongos of the Upper Nile make a stool for women out of *goll*-tree (*Pro-*



(Fig. 326.) African Chief's Stool. Gold Coast Exhibit.

sopsis lanceolata). It is of a chestnut-brown color, and takes a good polish.