

ART. V.—1. *L'Algebre d'Omar al Khayyâmi, traduite et accompagnée d'extraits de MSS. inédits (en Arabe)*. Paris, 1851.

2. *Dr. Sprenger's Catalogue of Arabic, Persian and Hindustani MSS., article Khayyâm.*

WE have all read in our childhood, in some form or other, the story of the crusades ; and few names are more indelibly impressed on the memory than *the old man of the mountains*,—that mysterious potentate, round whose inaccessible retreat there hung such a cloud of fable, which sober history even in these later days has not been wholly able to dissipate. History tries to make her lamp throw a steady gleam upon that domain of romance, and dispels some of the illusions, which the ignorant awe of the crusaders had conjured up ;—thus his very name has been reduced to the well-known *Shekh*, a symbol of patriarchal authority, not of years. But the imagination, after all, cannot give up the vision of the grey-haired sorcerer, with his impregnable castle and gardens of delight, where the young devotee was introduced intoxicated, and awoke to find himself in a fancied paradise, whose image should remain in his heart for ever, to nerve his arm for any enterprise which his chief might enjoin. These things may fade in the daylight of history, but to the imagination they must still hold their place, and the old man of the mountains will still stand in the background of the crusades—the same fierce and mysterious figure to the young student of every time, which he was to the crusaders who first heard of his name, or to the monks at home, who wrote from their lips, when they returned, histories of “ God’s dealings by the Franks”* in his own land.

It is with this ‘old man’ that we have now to do ; and yet how wide seems the interval between this man of blood in his mountain home, and a poet of Persia ! It is indeed a strange piece of forgotten history, which thus joins two such different characters, and leads us to the spot, where the two streams still flowed side by side, which were fated hereafter to diverge so far.

In the middle of the eleventh century,—some twenty-five years before the Norman won the broad lands of the Saxon,—a great revolution took place in the East. The iconoclast Mahmoud of Ghazni had left his kingdom in a successor’s feebler grasp ; and the fierce Tartar tribes, which roamed beyond the Oxus, in that *officina gentium* of the East, had risen against his authority, and

* “Gesta Dei per Francos”—the title of Guibert’s chronicle, and also of Bongarsius’ collection of the chronicles of the crusades.

driven him an exile southwards beyond the Hindu Kush. The sceptre of Persia thus passed to the invading chief, who, under the name of Toghrul Beg, established the Seljukian dynasty,—a memorable name amid the shadows which chase one another so rapidly across the scene of oriental history. It was the Seljukides who caused the crusades. The Caliphs of Bagdad and Egypt, and their provincial vicegerents, had found it to their interest to protect the pilgrims of the West, as they flocked to the holy city; and they had held undisputed possession of Palestine. The Frank stranger might mourn that Omar's mosque stood on Mount Moriah, but he thankfully paid his pilgrim tax, and returned in peace to his home. But the Turkish conquerors knew nothing of the advantages of interchange and commerce,—their only law was the sword. From the hour of their rise, the pilgrims were crushed by their oppression, and returned to their several lands with dismal tales of Turkish license and cruelty. They did not complain in vain,—“a nerve was touched of exquisite feeling, and the sensation vibrated to the heart of Europe.”*

But the crusades were still future at the time when our narrative opens. Alp Arslán, or Alp the Lion, was on the throne of his father Toghrul Beg,—in every respect the *cœur de lion* of eastern story,—when three youths were studying together under the great doctor of Islam, Mowaffak of Naishápur. One of them has left us his own account, so that we will tell it in his own words:—

“One of the greatest of the wise men of Khorassan was the Imám Mowaffak of Naishápur, a man highly honoured 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 honour and happiness. For this cause did my father send me from Tus to Naishápur with Abd-u-samad, the doctor of law, that I might employ myself in study and learning under the guidance of that illustrious teacher. Towards me he ever turned an eye of favour and kindness, and as his pupil I felt for him extreme affection and devotion, so that I passed four years in his service. 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 to each other the lessons we had heard. Now Omar was a native

* Gibbon.

‘ of Naishápur, while Hasan Ben Sabbah’s father was one Ali, ‘ a man of austere life and practice, but heretical in his creed and ‘ doctrine. He had long sojourned in the province of Rei, where ‘ Abu Moslim Rázi was governor, a man of pure life and orthodox ‘ principles, who, like a good Musulman as he was, shewed deep ‘ enmity to such an heretic. But Ali still kept close at his side, ‘ and by lying oaths and protestations, sought to clear himself ‘ from the insane words and actions laid to his charge. Now the ‘ Imám Mowaffak was followed as an example by all orthodox ‘ Musulmán; and so this unhappy man, to remove all suspicion ‘ of his heresies, brought his son to Naishápur, and made him at- ‘ tend the lectures of the Imám. He himself chose a life of asce- ‘ ticism in a cloister; but even while there, men rumoured ‘ speeches of heresy that he had uttered, sometimes of one kind ‘ and sometimes of another. But to my story,—one day Ha- ‘ san 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 pre-eminence for himself.’ ‘ Be it so,’ ‘ we both replied, and on these terms we mutually pledged our ‘ words. Years rolled on, and I went from Khorassan to Tran- ‘ soxiana, and wandered to Ghazni and Cabul; and when I re- ‘ turned, I was invested with office, and rose to be administrator ‘ of affairs during the Sultanate of Sultan Alp Arslán.”

Such is the narrative of Nizám-ul-Mulk, the famous vizier of Alp Arslán and of his son and successor Malik Shah, who gives this story of his youth in his ‘ political will’ (*Wasáiyah Nizám-ul-Mulk*, i. e. *Testamentum Politicum*), which he wrote in his old age, as a manual to future statesmen.* He goes on to state, that years passed by, and both his old school-friends found him out, and came and claimed a share in his good fortune, according to the school-day vow. The vizier was generous and kept his word. Hasan demanded a place in the government, which the Sultan granted at the vizier’s request; but discontented with a gradual rise, he plunged into the maze of intrigue of an oriental court, and, failing in a base attempt to supplant his benefactor, he was disgraced and fell. His subsequent adventures are one of the romances of oriental history. After many mishaps and wanderings, he became the head of the Persian sect of the *Ismaélians*,—a party of fanatics who had

* We give the extract from Mirchond’s History of the Assassins.

long murmured in obscurity, but rose to an evil eminence under the guidance of his strong and evil will. In A. D. 1090, he seized the castle of Alamút, in the province of Rúdbar, which lies in the mountainous tract, south of the Caspian sea. Here he fixed his strong-hold, and it was from this mountain home that the Shekh obtained that evil celebrity among the crusaders as the old man of the mountains. From Alamút issued those fierce fanatics, who in blind devotion to their chief's commands, spread terror through the Mohammedan world; and it is yet disputed whether the word *Assassin*, which they have left in the language of modern Europe as their dark memorial, is derived from the *hashish*, or opiate of hemp-leaves (the Indian *bang*), with which they maddened themselves to the sullen pitch of oriental desperation, or from the name of the founder of the dynasty, whom we have seen in his quiet collegiate days, at Naishápur. To complete the picture, we need only add, that one of the countless victims of the assassin's dagger was Nizám-ul-Mulk himself, the old school-boy friend.

Omar Khayyám also came to the vizier to claim his share; but not to ask for title or 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 tells us, that, when he found that he was really sincere in his refusal, he pressed him no further, but granted him a yearly pension of 1,200 *mithkáls* of gold, from the treasury of Naishápur.

At Naishápur thus lived and died Omar Khayyám, the poet-astronomer of Persia, "busied," adds the vizier, "in winning knowledge of every kind, and especially in astronomy, wherein he attained to a very high pre-eminence. Under the Sultanate of Malik Shah, he came to Merv, and obtained great praise for his proficiency in science, and the Sultan showered favours upon him."

Of Omar's attainments as an astronomer we have ample proof. When Malik Shah determined to reform the calendar, he was one of the eight learned men employed to do it; and the result was the *Jalá'í* era, (so called from *Jalál-ul-din*, one of the king's names,)—"a computation of time," says Gibbon, "which surpasses the Julian, and approaches the accuracy of the Gregorian style." He is also the author of some astronomical tables, entitled *Zíji-Maliksháhí*, and we have placed at the head of our article a treatise of his on algebra, which has been lately translated and published in Europe.

Of the particular incidents of his life we know little enough,

but probably there was little to know. A life, like his, spent in quiet toil,

And hiving knowledge with each studious year,

leaves little for the chronicler to record. His takhallus or poetical name (Khayyám) signifies a tent-maker, and he is said to have at one time exercised that trade, perhaps before Nizám-ul-Mulk's generosity raised him to independence. Many Persian poets similarly derive their names from their occupations; thus we have Attár, "a druggist," Assār, "an oil presser," &c. Omar himself alludes to his name in the following whimsical lines:—

"Khayyám, who stitched the tents of science,
Has fallen in grief's furnace and been suddenly burned;
The shears of fate have cut the tent ropes of his life,
And the broker of hope has sold him for nothing!"

We have only one more anecdote to give, and that relates to the close; and then we shall turn from Omar, the mathematician, to the more interesting character, Omar the poet.

The following incident is given in the anonymous preface which is sometimes prefixed to his poems; it has been printed in the Persian in the appendix to Hyde's *Veterum Persarum religio*, p. 499; and D'Herbelot alludes to it in his *Bibliothèque*, under *Khiam*:—

"It is written in the chronicles of the ancients that this king of the wise, Omar Khayyám, died at Naishápur in the year of the Hegira, 517 (A. D. 1123); in science he was unrivalled,—the very paragon of his age. Khwájah Nizámi of Samarcand, who was one of his pupils, relates the following story: '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 Naishápur, 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 that the stone was hidden under them.'"

A fit grave for the poet, and to his poems we now turn. Omar Khayyám's poems are unique in the literary history of the world. It is not often that a great mathematician indulges in the relaxation of verse; one remembers Sir Isaac Newton's scorn of "spoilt prose," and is apt to think of Urania as somewhat shy of familiar intercourse with her sisters. But in Omar we have not only an example of the perfect compatibility of the severest studies in the exact sciences with that play of fancy and

delicacy of feeling, which we associate with the poet ; this is by no means all the marvel. We find in his verses a totally different character to that which we should have naturally expected from the prevailing habit of thought in which he lived. Our "double-natured poet" is a Janus, whose two heads bear no similarity ; the one half of his life and experience contradicts the other.

Was it that the melancholy temperament which Aristotle of old attributed to all poets and mathematicians, being thus doubled in intensity by this two-fold liability, found its full utterance in these bitter tetrastichs,—turning for a while from its exact and abstract studies, with all their unreal truth,

Distinct but distant, clear but oh ! how cold,

only to find in life and time enigmas still more puzzling, and problems still more indeterminate, and uttering in these lines its sullen protest of weariness ?

" From the centre of earth to the Zenith of Saturn,
I solved all the problems of the heavens,
I leaped forth from the bonds of every snare and deceit,
And every bond was unloosed except the bond of Death.

Every other poet of Persia has written too much,—even her noblest sons of genius weary with their prolixity. The language has a fatal facility of rhyme, which makes it easier to write in verse than in prose, and every author heaps volumes on volumes, until he buries himself and his reader beneath their weight. Our mathematician is the one solitary exception. He has left fewer lines than Gray.

This little volume of tetrastichs, be their real number* what they may, occupies its own niche in Persian literature. For terseness of expression and vigour of thought, we know of no epigrams like them, even in the Greek anthology ; while for passionate earnestness and concentrated sadness, there is nothing equal to them, except Lucretius. The epicurean views which pervade them, but add a deeper gloom to the melancholy,—we know that the gaiety is unreal, and the poet's smile is but a *risus Sardonicus* of despair. All things whisper in his ear of change

* The only two MSS. which we have seen, are No. 140 in the Ouseley Collection in the Bodleian Library, (a very beautiful MS. written at Shiraz, A. H. 865 (A. D. 1460), this contains only 158 tetrastichs,) and No. 1548 in the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, which probably wants a leaf or two at the end, and is negligently transcribed ; this contains 516. Von Hammer (in his *Gesch. d. Sch. Red. P.*) speaks of his own MS. as containing about 200. The Lucknow MS. mentioned in Dr. Sprenger's Catalogue, contains 408. Since this paper was written, we have met with a copy of a very rare edition, printed at Calcutta, A. H. 1252 (A. D. 1836) ; this contains 438 tetrastichs, with an appendix containing 54 others, not found in some MSS., 492 in all.

and decay.—The sad refrain rings ever in his hearing; every where in the world he reads the record of the inscription which Solomon, in eastern story, gave for a signet ring, when one asked him for a motto which should suit alike prosperity and adversity, —“ *This also shall pass away !*”

“ Since life is all passing, what matter Bagdad or Balkh ?
If our cup be full, what matter bitter or sweet ?
Drink wine,—for long after thee and me, yon moon
Will still fill to its full, and still waste to its wane.”

or this,—

“ Yon rolling heaven for our destruction, yours and mine,
Aims its stroke at our lives, yours and mine ;
Come, love, sit on the grass.—it will not be long
Ere grass grows out of *our* dust, yours and mine.”

This law (if one might call it so) of corporeal transmigration occurs again and again in his poems,—it seems to jar on the poet’s inmost soul, and give him a peculiar pang. Elsewhere he has it in a more general shape :—

“ Wheresoever is rose or tulip-bed,
Its redness comes from the blood of kings ;
Every violet stalk that springs from the earth,
Was once a mole on a loved one’s cheek.”

In this form the thought is not peculiar to the East ; we find a very similar passage in one of Shelley’s poems :—

“ There’s not one atom of yon earth
But once was living man ;
Nor the minutest drop of rain,
That hangeth in its thinnest cloud,
But flowed in human vein.”

We will add one more of this class of tetrastichs, before we pass on to others,—in this there is a peculiar delicacy of touch, which softens the roughness of the original thought :—

“ This flask was once a poor lover like me,
All immersed in the chase of a fair face ;
And this its handle you see on its neck
Was once a hand that clasped a beloved.”

The extracts which we have already quoted, will give our readers an idea of Omar’s poetry ; and perhaps they will, ere this, have recognised one of its peculiar features. Omar lived in an age of poetical mysticism, but he himself is no mystic. His exact sciences kept him from the vague dreams of his contemporaries ; he never loses himself in the one and the all ; he plants his foot on the *terra firma* of to-day, and builds on it as if it were rock, and not a quick sand :—

“ Sweet blows on the rose’s face the breeze of the new spring,
Sweet down in the garden are the faces of the heart inflamers ;
But nought is sweet that thou canst tell of a yesterday *passed* ;
Come be glad, nor talk of yesterday,—to-day is so sweet.”

But Omar, for all his insight, had not made the wiser choice. The mysticism, in which the better spirits of Persia loved to lose themselves, was a higher thing, after all, than his keen worldliness, because this was but of the earth, and bounded by the earth's narrow span, while that, albeit an error, was a groping after the divine. There was a depth in that vague mysticism which Omar's science had never sounded ; it sprang from wants and feelings, to which his own heart was a stranger ; and hence, though his poetry was real, and full of passion, it moves "cabinéd, cribbéd, confinéd" in the animal life of the senses, and seems dazzled at any prospect beyond the grave. His very ideas of death seem confinéd to the body ; he can feel, like Keats, "the 'flowers growing over him ;" but he rarely looks or thinks beyond. And yet it is not always so ; a few rare tetrastichs testify that Omar could not always prove a traitor to his own genius,—that sometimes it overmastered his habits, and wrung unwonted aspirations perforce from his lips :—

" Oh heart, wert thou pure from the body's dust,
Thou shouldst soar naked spirit above the sky ;
Highest heaven is thy native seat,—for shame, for shame,
That thou shouldst stoop to dwell in a city of clay !"

No wonder that gloom overshadows all Omar Khayyám's poetry ; he was false to his better self, and therefore ill at ease and sad. He was resolved to ignore the future and the spiritual, and anchor only by the material and tangible ; but his very insight became blinded and misled him, and instead of something solid and satisfying, he grasped only a "darkness that *could be felt.*" We can trace the evil, running like a canker through his life ; his pleasures, his friendships,—nay, his very studies become blighted under its touch. Bernouilli could find such an intense delight in his problems, that he could say that they gave him some idea of the happiness of heaven ; his faculties were working unrestrained towards their proper object ; and pleasure, old philosophers tell us, supervenes on such harmonious action, as a finish or bloom. But in Omar there was no such internal harmony ; the diviner part within him was ignored ; and hence the very studies, in which his life was spent, failed to yield him solid enjoyment.

Had he been only a thoughtless Epicurean, we should have looked at his poetry in a very different light. The careless gaiety of Horace never loses its charm, for it was the spontaneous outburst of his nature. He floated on life's surface, with no deep passion for anything, and his poetry bears the true impress of his character. But in Omar there was a resolute will,—he was deeply earnest in science ; and to dally with doubt and Epicureanism was possible only where he was not in earnest. It

was this which caused the moral jar in his character, and hence his poetry reads to us—

“ Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh.”

We have said that Omar was no mystic,—we find no trace of Sufeyism in his book. His roses bloom in an earthly summer, his wine is of mortal vintage ; unlike all other Persian poets, every thing with him is real and concrete. That tone of revelry which in Háfiz and Jámi was but a passing fashion under which their genius veiled its higher aspirations,—like the Petrarchan sonnet in the hands of Shakespeare or Milton,—is in Omar Khayyám the matter itself, not the form. He turns in these quatrains from his science and astronomy to drown thought in the passing moment's pleasures ; he seems to forget his better self in his temporary Epicurean disguise :—

“ My coming was not of mine own design,
And one day I must go, and no choice of mine ;
Come, light-handed cupbearer, gird thee to serve,
We must wash down the care of this world with wine.

“ Come bring me that ruby in yon crystal cup,
That true friend and brother of every open heart ;
Thou knowest too well that this life on earth
Is a wind that hurries by,—bring the wine.

“ Since none can promise himself to-morrow,
Make that forlorn heart of thine glad to-day ;
Drink wine, fair moon-faced, by the light of yon moon,
For oft shall it look for us and find us not.

“ What though the wine rends my veil,
While I live, I will never tear me away ;
I marvel much at the sellers of wine,
For what better thing can they *buy* than what they *sell* ?

“ The caravan of life hurries strangely by,
Seize every moment that passes in joy ;
Why, cupbearer, mourn for the morrow of thy friends ?
Give the cup of wine, for the night hurries by.”

A few of the tetrastichs breathe the same spirit of contentment which we should have expected from their author's old reply to the vizier's invitations to power :—

“ Some ruby wine and a *díván* of poems,
A crust of bread to keep the breath in one's body,
And thou and I alone in a desert,—
Were a lot beyond a Sultan's throne.

“ Of all the world my choice is two crusts and a corner,
I have severed my desires from power and its pomp ;
I have bought me poverty with heart and soul,
For I have found the true riches in poverty.

"Oh my heart, since life's reality is illusion,
 Why vex thyself with its sorrows and cares ?
 Commit thee to fate, contented with the hour,
 For the pen, once passed, returns not back for thee !"

But in too many of his poems we find a settled gloom, which stands in striking contrast to the assumed carelessness. Omar is ill at ease within, and his internal discord reflects itself in an angry defiance of the world and its opinions and beliefs. Like the Roman Lucretius, his very science leads him astray ; he has learned enough to unsettle his ancient instincts, but not enough to rebuild them on a surer basis. In the sublime poem of Lucretius, we see the inevitable battle between the vague dreams of an obsolete mythology, and the progressive certainties of physical science ; and in the first intensity of the conflict, the iconoclasm extends itself beyond the idols of the old belief, to the very bases of belief itself within the soul. The arbitrary laws and tenets of the national creed are found at variance with the discoveries of science ; the idea of ' laws of nature ' slowly evolves itself, in its sublime simplicity and universality ; and the idle causes of phenomena, which mythology had fabricated in the personal caprices of certain deified abstractions, melt away of themselves like shadows in the light of morning. But under all these erroneous figments, there lay the primitive instinct of *some* first cause,—the obstinate unconquerable want which no created thing can fill ; and this remained untouched amidst the change, as the soul when the body is shattered. But this Lucretius did not understand ; he proceeded from the gods of mythology to demolish the very idea of a Providence at all. The very truth which he had grasped so firmly, that nature obeys certain unvarying laws, led him astray ; and it was a step reserved for a later time, to see that this grand idea is by no means at variance with the ancient instincts of the soul,—that the laws of nature, like any other laws, must imply a lawgiver's sanction and authority,—and that long before Greek or Roman science, in an unlettered people whose very name Greece and Rome despised, ancient seers had recognised the scientific principle, and yet at once subordinated it to the highest truth, when they sang of man's impotence " to break God's covenant* of the day and of the ' night, that there should not be day and night in their ' season.' "

Omar Khayyám's scepticism seems to us to belong to a

* The word ' covenant ' (*berith*) occurs several times in scripture to express the laws which God has imposed on nature, and in Jeremiah, xxxiii., 25, we have the word ' ordinances ' (*hukkoth*) used in the same sense. Cf. the prayer-book version of Ps. cxlviii., 6. " He hath given them a law which shall not be broken."—It is singular that Lucretius uses the word *foedus* in the same sense, (v. 58,) though his atheism deprives the phrase of its real significance.

similar phase of mental history with that of Lucretius. He lived in an age and country of religious darkness, and the very men around him who most felt their wants and misery, had no power to satisfy or remove them. Amidst the religious feeling which might be at work, acting in various and arbitrary directions, hypocrisy and worldliness widely mingled; and every where pressed the unrecognised but yet over-mastering reality—that the national creed was itself not based on the eternal relations of things as fixed by the Creator. The religious fervour, therefore, when it betook itself to its natural channel to flow in—the religion of the people—found nothing to give it sure satisfaction; the internal void remained unfilled. Hence this fervour naturally turned to asceticism and mysticism; the dervishes, fakirs and sufis of the Mohammedan world have risen by a law of the human mind; and we think that the scepticism of Omar Khayyám, and similar writers, is but the result of another similar law. The asceticism and mysticism failed in their turn to give solid peace to the inquirer, and they were soon over-laid by mummeries and deceits,—the earnest enthusiasts died, and their places were too often filled by impostors; and Omar Khayyám is the result of the inevitable re-action. His tetrastichs are filled with bitter satires of the sensuality and hypocrisy of the pretenders to sanctity, but he did not stop there. He could see with a clear eye the evil and folly of the charlatans and empirics; but he was blind, when he turned from these, to deny the existence of the soul's disease, or, at any rate, the possibility of a cure. Here, like Lucretius, he cut himself loose from facts; and in both alike we trace the unsatisfied instincts,—the dim conviction that their wisdom is folly,—which reflect themselves in darker colours in the misanthropy and despair, which cloud their visions of life.

Lucretius, when he resolved to follow his material science to the last, whithersoever it should lead him, built a system for himself in his poem, or rather acted as the exponent and interpreter of the Greek system, which he had embraced. His poem on nature has a professed practical aim—to explain the world's self-acting machine to the polytheist, and disabuse him of all spiritual ideas. Omar Khayyám builds no system,—he contents himself with doubts and conjectures,—he loves to balance antitheses of belief, and settle himself in the equipoise of the sceptic (*ἑποχῆ*.) Fate and free will, with all their infinite ramifications and practical consequences,—the origin of evil,—the difficulties of evidence—the immortality of the soul—future retribution,—all these questions recur again and again. Not

that he throws any new light upon these world-old problems, he only puts them in a tangible form, condensing all the bitterness in an epigram. Of this class we subjoin two of the more harmless,—some of the most daring are better left in their original Persian:—

“ I am not the man to fear annihilation ;
That half forsooth is sweeter than this half which we have ;
This life of mine is entrusted as a loan,
And when pay-day comes, I will give it back.

“ Heaven derived no profit from my coming hither,
And its glory is not increased by my going hence ;
Nor hath mine ear ever heard from mortal man,—
This coming and going—why they are at all ?”

That Omar in his impiety was false to his better knowledge, we may readily admit, while at the same time we may find some excuse for his errors, if we remember the state of the world at that time. His clear strong sense revolted from the prevailing mysticism where all the earnest spirits of his age found their refuge, and his honest independence was equally shocked by the hypocrites who aped their fervour and enthusiasm ; and at that dark hour of man’s history, whither, out of Islám, was the thoughtful Mohammedan to repair ? No missionary’s step, bringing good tidings, had appeared on the mountains of Persia ; the few Christians who might cross his path in his native land, would only seem to him idolaters ; and even in Europe itself Christianity lay stifled under an incubus of ignorance and superstition ; Christendom came before Omar only in the form of the First Crusade ! These things should be borne in mind, as we study Mohammedan literature. While Arabian and Persian letters were in their glory, Europe was buried in mediæval darkness ; science and learning were in their noon-tide splendour in Bagdad and Cordova, while feudal barbarism brooded over France and England. When we read such a life as Sadi’s with its thirty years of adventure and travel, it is strange to mark how entirely the range of his experience is confined to Asia and the Mohammedan world. Almost the only one point of contact with Christendom is his slavery under the crusaders at Tripoli. The same isolation runs through all the golden period of Persian literature ; it was already fast fading into tasteless effeminacy, when the two Sherleys first found their way to the court of Abbas the great.

We now proceed to add a few of the more striking tetrastichs ; they will serve as further proofs of what we have remarked on the author’s singular position among the poets of his country.

None that we know of has written fewer lines, and in none is there so large a proportion of good :—

“ The spring-cloud came and wept bitterly above the grass,
I cannot live without the arghuvān-coloured wine;
This grass is our festal place to-day,
But the grass that grows from our dust, *whose* festal place will it be ? 1X

“ Ask not for empire, for life is a moment,
Every atom of dust was once a Kai-kobād or Jamshíd;
The story of the world and this whole life of ours
Is a dream and a vision, an illusion and a breath.

“ When the nightingale raises his lament in the garden,
We must seize, like the tulip, the wine in our hand;
Ere men, one to the other, in their foolish talk,
Say “ such an one hath seized his cup and is gone !”

“ That castle, in whose hall king Bahrám* drained the cup,
There the fox hath brought forth her young and the lion made his lair.
Bahrám who his life long seized the deer (*gor*)
See how the tomb (*gor*) has seized him to-day !

“ By the running stream and the grass, cupbearer bright as the lamp,
Give the wine, break thy vows, and touch the lute;
Be glad, for the running stream lifts its voice,—
“ I am gone,” it cries, “ and shall never return !”

“ Alas that the book of youth is folded,
And the fresh purple spring become December;
That bird of joy, whose name was youth,—
Alas I know not, how he came or is gone !

“ Be glad, for the moon of the Eed will be here,
All the means of mirth will soon be well,—
Pale is yon moon, its back bowed, and lean,
You would say it will soon sink in its sorrow.

“ Lip to lip I passionately kissed the bowl,
To learn from it the secret of length of days;
Lip to lip in answer it whispered reply,
“ Drink wine, for once gone thou shalt never return !”

“ I went last night into a potter's shop,
A thousand pots did I see there, noisy and silent;
When suddenly one of the pots raised a cry,
“ Where is the pot-maker, the pot-buyer, the pot-seller ?”

“ In the view of reality, not of illusion,
We mortals are chess-men and fate is the player;
We each act our game on the board of life,
And then one by one are swept into the box !

* Bahrám Gor, the hunter, was one of the Sassanian dynasty. He reigned A. D. 420—438.

"Yon rolling heavens, at which we gaze bewildered,
Are but the image of a magic lanthorn;*
The sun is the candle, the world the shade,
And we the images which fit therein.

"Last night I dashed my clay cup on the stone,
And at the reckless freak my heart was glad,
When with a voice for the moment out spake the cup,
"I was once as thou and thou shalt be as I!"

We would conclude with two more tetrastichs, which may fitly close our imperfect sketch. Omar Khayyám, we have said, was ill-at-ease and unhappy; his tone of revelry and enjoyment vainly masked the aching void within, and where shall we find a more melancholy dirge than the following over a wasted life, with all its knowledge and genius?—

"If coming had been in my power, I would not have come,
If going had been in my power, I would not go;
Oh best of all lots, if in this world of clay
I had come not, nor gone, nor been at all!"

And if the present was dark, darker still seemed the future;
its darkness made even the present seem bright!

"Ere Death raises his night attack on thy head,
Bid them bring the rose-red wine.
No gold art thou, poor brainsick fool,
That once buried, they should dig thee out again!"

How different from the feeling of good old Izaak Walton, when he stood by the open grave of his friend Dr. Donne, and thought of "that body which once was a temple of the Holy Ghost, and is now become a small quantity of Christian dust,—but I shall see it re-animated!"

* The *fānūs-i-khiyāl* is explained as a lanthorn, which revolves by the smoke of the candle within, and has on the sides of it figures of various animals.

These lanthorns are very common in Calcutta. They are made of a tale cylinder with figures of men and animals cut out of paper and pasted on it. The cylinder, which is very light, is suspended on an axis, round which it easily turns. A hole is cut near the bottom, and the part cut out is fixed at an angle to the cylinder, so as to form a vane. When a small lamp or candle is placed inside, a current of air is produced, which keeps the cylinder slowly revolving.—
ED. C. R.