

The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám Jr.

Translated from the Original Bornese into English Verse by
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Introduction

Since the publication of Edward Fitzgerald's classic translation of the Rubaiyat in 1851 - or rather since its general popularity several years later - poets minor and major have been rendering the sincerest form of flattery to the genius of the Irishman who brought Persia into the best regulated families. Unfortunately there was only one Omar and there were scores of imitators who, in order to make the Astronomer go round, were obliged to draw him out to the thinness of Balzac's Magic Skin. While all this was going on, the present Editor was forced to conclude that the burning literary need was not for more translators, but for more Omars to translate; and what was his surprise to note that the work of a later and superior Omar Khayyam was lying undiscovered in the wilds of Borneo! Here, indeed, was a sensation in the world of letters - a revelation as thrilling as the disinterment of Ossian's forgotten songs - the discovery of an unsubmerged Atlantis. While some stout Cortez more worthy than the Editor might have stood on this new Darien and gazed over the sleeping demesne of Omar Khayyam, Jr., he had, so to speak, the advantage of being first on the ground, and to him fell the duty, nolens volens, of lifting the rare philosophy out of the Erebus that had so long cloaked it in obscurity.

It is still a matter of surprise to the Editor that the discovery of these Rubaiyat should have been left to this late date, when in sentiment and philosophy they have points of superiority over the quatrains of the first Omar of Naishapur. The genius of the East has,

indeed, ever been slow to reveal itself in the West. It took a Crusade to bring to our knowledge anything of the schöner Geist of the Orient; and it was not until the day of Matthew Arnold that the Epic of Persia[1] was brought into the proper realm of English poesy. What wonder, then, that not until the first Omaric madness had passed away were the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, Jr., lifted into the light after an infinity of sudor et labor spent in excavating under the 9,000 irregular verbs, 80 declensions, and 41 exceptions to every rule which go to make the ancient Mango-Bornese dialect in which the poem was originally written, foremost among the dead languages!

Although little is known of the life of Omar Khayyam the elder, the details of his private career are far more complete than those of his son, Omar Khayyam, Jr. In fact, many historians have been so careless as to have entirely omitted mention of the existence of such a person as the younger Omar. Comparative records of the two languages, however, show plainly how the mantle was handed from the Father to the Son, and how it became the commendable duty of the second generation to correct and improve upon the first.

Omar Khayyam died in the early part of the eleventh century, having sold his poems profitably, with the proceeds of which he established taverns throughout the length and breadth of Persia. Omar died in the height of his popularity, but shortly after his death the city of Naishapur became a temperance town. Even yet the younger Omar might have lived and sung at Naishapur had not a fanatical sect of Sufi women, taking advantage of the increasing respectability of the once jovial city, risen in a body against the house of Omar and literally razed it to the ground with the aid of hatchets, which were at that time the peculiar weapon of the sex and sect. It is said that the younger Omar, who was then a youth, was obliged to flee from the wrath of the Good Government Propagandists and to take abode in a distant city. For some time he wandered about Persia in a destitute condition, plying the hereditary trade of tent-maker, but at length poverty compelled him to quit his native country for good and to try his fortunes in a land so remote that the dissolute record of his parent could no longer hound him. Borneo was the island to which the poet fled, and here the historian finds him some years later prospering in the world's goods and greatly revered by the inhabitants. Although Omar, Jr., was undoubtedly the greatest man that Borneo has yet produced, he must not be confused in the mind of the reader with the Wild Man of Borneo, who, although himself a poet, was a man of far less culture than the author of the present Rubaiyat.

While not a Good Templar, the younger Omar showed a commendable tendency

toward reform. The sensitive Soul of the poet was ever cankered with the thought that his father's jovial habits had put him in a false position, and that it was his filial duty to retrieve the family reputation. It was his life work to inculcate into the semi-barbaric minds of the people with whom he had taken abode the thought that the alcoholic pleasures of his father were false joys, and that (as sung in number VI), -

"There's Comfort only in the Smoking Car."

In Tobacco the son found a lasting and comparatively harmless substitute for the Wine, which, none can doubt, caused the elder Omar to complain so bitterly, -

"Indeed, the Idols I have loved so long
Have done my credit in Men's eyes much wrong."

Note the cheerfulness with which the Son answers the Father in a stanza which may be taken as a key to his Reformatory Philosophy,

"O foozied Poetasters, fogged with Wine,
Who to your Orgies bid the Muses Nine,
Go bid them then, but leave to me, the Tenth
Whose name is Nicotine, for she is mine!"

Quite in accordance with his policy of improving on his father's rakish Muse was the frequent endorsement of the beautiful and harmless practice of kissing. The kiss is mentioned some forty-eight times in the present work, and in the nine hundred untranslated Rubaiyat, two hundred and ten more kisses occur, making a grand total of two hundred and fifty-eight Omaric kisses -

"Enough! - of Kisses can there be Enough?"

It may be truly said that the Father left the discovery of Woman to his Son, for nowhere in the Rubaiyat of Naishapur's poet is full justice done to the charms of the fair. Even in his most ardent passages old Omar uttered no more than a eulogy to Friendship.

Where the philosophy of the elder Omar was bacchanalian and epicurean, that of the Son was tobacchanalian and eclectic, allowing excess only in moderation, as it were, and countenancing nothing more violent than poetic license. However, we are led to believe that the tastes of his time called for a certain mild sensuality as the gustatio to a feast of

reason, and had Omar Khayyam lived in our own day he would doubtless have agreed with a reverend Erlington and Bosworth Professor in the University of Cambridge who boldly asserts that the literature redolent of nothing but the glories of asceticism "deserves the credit due to goodness of intention, and nothing else."

Due doubtless to the preservative influence of smoke Omar Khayyam, Jr., was enabled to live to the hale age of one hundred and seven, and to go to an apotheosis fully worthy his greatness. Among the native chroniclers the quatrain (number XCVIII) -

"Then let the balmed Tobacco be my Sheath,
The ardent Weed above me and beneath,
And let me like a living Incense rise,
A Fifty-Cent Cigar between my Teeth,"

has been the source of much relentless debate. By some it is held that this stanza is prophetic in its nature, foreseeing the transcendent miracle of the poet's death; by others it is as stoutly maintained that the poet in the above lines decreed that his work should be preserved and handed down to posterity in a wrapping of tobacco. The Editor is inclined to the belief that there is much truth in both opinions, for the parchment, when it came to hand, was stained and scented from its wrappings of Virginia and Perique; and the manner of the poet's death marks Number XCI as another remarkable instance of the clairvoyance of the Muse. To quote from the quaint words of the native chronicler: -

"For while the Volcanic Singer was seated one day in the shade of a banyan tree, fresh cigars and abandoned stumps surrounding him like the little hills that climb the mountain, he nodded and fell asleep, still puffing lustily at a panatella, sweet and black. Now the poet's beard was long and his sleep deep, and as the weed grew shorter with each ecstatic puff, the little brand of fire drew closer and closer to the beautiful hairy mantle that fell from the poet's chin. That day the Island was wrapped in a light gauze of blue mist, an exotic smoke that was a blessing to the nostrils. It suffused the whole Island from end to end, and reminded the happy inhabitants of the Cigars of Nirvana, grown in some Plantation of the Blessed. When the smoke had passed and our heads were cleared of the narcotic fumes, we hastened to the spot where our good master had loved to sit; but there naught remained but a great heap of white ashes, sitting among the pipes and cigars that had inspired his song. Thus he died as he lived, an ardent smoker." W. I.

[1] "Sohrab and Rustam" being a fragment of the Persian epic.

The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, Jr.

He lets me have good tobacco, and he does not
Sophisticate it with sack-lees or oil,
Nor washes it in muscadell and grains,
Nor buries it in gravel underground,
Wrapped up in greasy leather or sour clouts;
But keeps it in fine lily-pots, that, opened,
Smell like conserve of roses or French beans.

Jonson. (The Alchemist.)

Therefore, O Love, because to all Life's plans
And projects some promotion thou impartest,
Thou still hast many zealous artisans,
Tho' not one artist.

Owen Meredith. (Marah.)

The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, Jr.

I

Avaunt, acerbid Brat of Death, that sours
The Milk of Life and blasts the nascent Flowers!
Back to your morbid, mouldering Cairns, and let
Me do my worrying in Office Hours!

II

What though Gorgona at the Portal knocks
And charms the squamiest Serpent in her Locks -
I wear tobacchanalian Wreaths of Smoke
And there are more Perfectos in the box.

III

Now the New Year, reviving old Desires,
The craving Phoenix rises from its Fires.
Indeed, indeed Repentance oft I swore,
But last Year's Pledge with this New Year expires.

IV

Mark how Havana's sensuous-philtred Mead
Dispels the cackling Hag of Night at Need,
And, foggy-aureoled, the Smoke reveals
The Poppy Flowers that blossom from the Weed.

V

Come, fill the Pipe, and in the Fire of Spring
The Cuban Leaves upon the Embers fling,
That in its Incense I may sermonize
On Woman's Ways and all that sort of Thing.

VI

While the tired Dog Watch hailed the sea-merged Star
I heard the Voice of Travellers from Afar
Making Lament with many an Ivory Yawn,
"There's Comfort only in the Smoking Car!"

VII

See, heavenly Zamperina, damselish,
The Day has broken Night's unwholesome Dish,
The Lark is up betimes to hail the Dawn,
The Early Worm is up to catch the Fish.

VIII

Let us infest the Lintel of the Gloam
And chase the Steeds from Morning's Hippodrome,
And let Aurora's wastrel Wanderings be
A good Excuse to stay away from Home.

IX

Ah, Love, th' Invisible Buskin at the Gate
Illumes your Eyes that languored gaze and wait
And in their Incandescence seem to ask
The world-old Question: "Is my Hat On Straight?"

X

Than Basilisk or Nenuphar more fair,
Your Locks with countless glistening Pendants glare,
Then as the Fountain patters to the brim
A hundred Hairpins tumble from your Hair.

XI

So let them scatter, jangled in Duress.
What reckons Love of Hairpins more or less?
Guard well your Heart and let the Hairpins go -
To lose your Heart were arrant Carelessness.

XII

Acephalous Time to febrous Lengths bestirred
Strips the lush Blossom and outstrips the Bird,
Makes sweet the Wine - I cannot say the Same
Of Women or of Songs that I have heard.

XIII

With me along that mezzotinted Zone
Where Hymen Spring is hymning to his Own -
See how grave Mahmud gambols on the Glebe
And hangs the sign TO LET upon his Throne!

XIV

A Grand Piano underneath the Bough,
A Gramophone, a Chinese Gong, and Thou
Trying to sing an Anthem off the Key -
Oh, Paradise were Wilderness enow?

XV

Chromatic Catches troll from yonder Hill
Where Bill to Beak the Wren and Whip-poor-Will
In deed and truth beshrew the Beldam Life
Who kisses first and then presents the Bill.

XVI

As one who by the Sphinx delays a space
And on her Shoulder finds a Resting Place,
Breathes an awed Question in her stupored Ear.
And lights a Sulphur Match upon her Face,

XVII

So unto Venus' Oracle in turn
I leaned the Secret of my Love to learn.
The Answering Riddle came: "She loves you, yes,
In just Proportion to the Sum you Earn."

XVIII

Some by Eolian Aloes borne along
Swound on the Dulcimer's reverbrant Thong;
But I, who make my Mecca in a Kiss,
Begrudge the Lips that waste their Time in Song.

XIX

Some clamour much for kisses, some for Few,
Others deep sup, their Thirstings to renew,
And mumble into Maunderings, but I,
In Kissing, scorn the How Much for the Who.

XX

Svelte Zamperina's Lips incarnadine,
And languored lifting, fasten unto mine,
Their rubric Message giving Hint and Clew
How frequently a Kiss in Time saves Nine.

XXI

Then swart Gorgona rears her snaky Zone
Demanding Sip of Lip in poisonous Tone
While back Abaft I cower, for well I wot
A Face like that needs not a Chaperone.

XXII

The Fair of Vanity has many a Booth
To sell its spangled Wares of Age and Youth;
And there have I beheld the Wordlings buy
Their Paris Gowns to clothe the Naked Truth.

XXIII

But cannot Beauty render Sin the less
When Aphroditan Damosels transgress,
Making the Error lovely with the Thought -
A Dimple is its own Forgiveness?

XXIV

Into your Soul may truculent Daemons pass
All hugger-mugger in that dun Morass,
But while the Rouge is mantling to your Cheek,
Nothing will chide you in your Looking-Glass.

XXV

Unto the Glass Gorgona torques her Eye
Beholding there Ten Myriad Fragments fly,
The Parts dispersing with lugubrious Din -
Who will invent a Mirror that will lie?

XXVI

Oft have I heard the Cant of flattering Friend
Admire my Forehead's Apollonic Bend,
Then to the Glass I've wreathed my sad Regard -
The Looking-Glass is candid to the End.

XXVII

Look to the Rose who, as I pass her by,
Breathes the fond Attar-musk up to the Sky,
Spreading her silken Blushes - does she know
That I have come to smell and not to Buy?

XXVIII

Ah, Rose, assume a gentle Avarice
And hoard the soft Allurements that entice;
For One will come who holds the Golden Means
To buy your Blushes at the Standard Price.

XXIX

Down to the Deeps of Sheol, anguish-torn,
I've hurtled Beauty to a State forlorn,
Beauty the Curse, - yet if a Curse it be,
With what an Equanimity 'tis borne!

XXX

What shallow Guerdon of terrestrial Strife,
For him who quits this Donjon Keep of Life,
To read the World's expectant Epitaph:
"He left a handsome Widow in his Wife!"

XXXI

Before the Dawn's Encroachment I awoke
And heard again the bodeful Adage spoke:
Society Engagements are like Eggs -
You know not what's Inside them till they're Broke.

XXXII

Creation stands between the Won't and Will,
Yes, and that Doubt Infinitude might fill -
It took nine Tailors once to make a Man;
It took nine more to make him pay the Bill.

XXXIII

The Thunderbolts of Heaven's potent Sway
Gather and break, but never can dismay
When Indestructible Resistless meets,
The Please Remit confronts the Cannot Pay.

XXXIV

And true as Star and Star pursue their Course
Must Rapture crumb to Ashes of Remorse:
How many a Marriage License that is writ
Has proved a legal Permit to Divorce!

XXXV

Myself when young did eagerly frequent
A Woman's Club and heard great Argument
Of crazy Cults and Creeds; but evermore
'Twas by much Gossip of the Fashions rent.

XXXVI

In them the Seed of Wisdom did I sow,
Speaking of Things a Woman ought to know.
"Better than Years with Ibsen spent," I said,
"One Evening with my Friend, Boccacio."

XXXVII

And that same Bard who strews rhythmic Daisies
And many a Female Heart discreetly crazes,
Seek him not out, fair Maid, for oftentimes
His Head is vastly Balder than his Phrases.

XXXVIII

Upon the Book of Time the Autocrat
Has writ in Stars the fiery Idem Stat,
Lettered the Riddle in the Lambent Suns -
rather write than read a Book like that.

XXXIX

Better a meager Tome to sow the Seed
Of errant Thought and Fancy's Lantern feed;
Better a Penny Dreadful than the Book
That sends you into Slumber when you read.

XL

And better still than these gorglorious Things
The Briar's gracious Narcotine that clings
To my ambrosial Temples till I wear
A Halo-crown of vapoured Vortex Rings.

XLI

Virginia for the Pipe's sweet Charity,
Havana for Cigars to solace me,
And Turkey for the transient Cigarette -
Was all I learned of my Geography.

XLII

Cigars I puff devoutly when I May,
And when I Can the Pipe, another Day,
And when I Must I browse on Cigarettes -
Then, as you love me, take the Stubs away!

XLIII

Waste not your Weed, the Leaves are all too few
It's Nectar to defile as Others do -
Ah, shun the Solecism and the Plug
For Cattle-Kings and Stevedores to chew.

XLIV

Once in a Dream 'twas granted unto me
The open Gates of Paradise to see,
While Israfel loud chanted from the Void,
"This Vision comes of Pie; not Piety!"

XLV

Belovèd, smoke my amber Pipe awhile
And from its Bowl narcotic Joys beguile,
Suck Lethe from its Stem - what though I trace
A certain greenish Pallour in your Smile?

XLVI

Strange is it not that, oft her Dolour cloaking
In hurried Puffs with Nonchalance provoking,
No woman reads that apodictic Ode
"How to be Happy Even Though You're Smoking?"

XLVII

Look not so wild, the Fit will pass away -
No barbèd Anguish chooses long to stay,
And only in the Pipe is Friendship
found That waxes Strong and Stronger day by day.

XLVIII

Come, rest your Head if Earth rotative seems
And close your Lids from these o'er wakeful Gleams -
Although your Palate cringe you shall not shrink
Within the Kitchen of the House of Dreams.

XLIX

Murkly I muse on that transcendent State
Where all my Past within the Future wait -
If I for Heavenly Marriages am marked,
Oh what a Turk I'll be beyond the Gate!

L

Minnie and Maud across my Flight will wing,
Birdie and Bess and Gwendolyn will bring
A Score of Other Pasts and make a Scene,
To say the Least, a Bit Embarrassing.

LI

Some I have known are jabbering in Hell,
Others have passed in Heaven's Reward to dwell;
So, when my Soul has flitted, must I find
The same bland Bores, the same old Tales to tell.

LII

There is the Thought beneath whose vampire Tooth
The Soul outshrieks at such unseemly Sooth:
The Solemn Bore still waits beyond the Grave -
Ah, let me stay and taste undying Youth!

LIII

Into some secret, migrant Realm without,
By the dun Cloak of Darkness wrapped about,
Or by ringed Saturn's Swirl thou may'st be hid
In vain: be sure the Bore will find you out.

LIV

Were't not a shame, were't not a shame I say,
That in this sorry Brotherhood of Clay
No Necromance the Philtre can distil
To keep Mosquitoes, Death and Bores away?

LV

Northly or Southly may I ride or walk
Beneath the glacial Crag or fronded Stalk,
But still the Spectre gibbers in my Ears
And drowns my Spirits in a Sea of Talk.

LVI

The Noun and Verb he scatters without End
And Adjectives to Pronouns Horror lend -
Ah, fumid Pipe, I thank you hour by hour
That you have never learned to talk, my Friend!

LVII

Better the pleasaunce-breathing Pipe for me
Than lodgment in that Great Menagerie
Where Birds of aureate Plumage preen their Quills
And Social Lions growl above their Tea.

LVIII

The Tea, that in the magic of its Flow
Anoints the Tongue to wag of So-and-So,
To gabble garbled Garrulousness ere
You lay the Cup and Saucer down and Go.

LIX

And we that now make Madness in the Room
Where last week's Lion had his little Boom
Ourselves must go and leave that flattering Din
And let them brew another Tea - for whom?

LX

They say the Lion and the Ladies keep
The Court where Johnson jested and drank deep;
Now Minor Poets label new Cigars
And sell their Reputations passing cheap.

LXI

O foozled Poetasters, fogged with Wine,
Who to your Orgies bid the Muses Nine,
Go bid them, then, but leave to me the Tenth,
Whose name is Nicotine, for she is mine!

LXII

Peace to the Pipe, that silent Infidel,
Whose spiral-twisted Coils Discretion spell!
How many Kisses has he seen me Give,
How many Take - and yet he will not Tell.

LXIII

Dumbly he saw the rosy-tinted Bliss
When Zamperina kissed her maiden Kiss,
Her Innocence betraying in the Cry,
"Oh, how can you respect me after This?"

LXIV

Another Time, all dalliant and slow,
To those deluscious Lips I bended low,
And at the Second Kiss she only said,
"Do you do This to Every Girl you Know?"

LXV

Unto that flowery Cup I bent once more;
Again she showed no seeming to abhor,
But at the Third Kiss all she asked or wist
Was, "Is This all you Come to See me For?"

LXVI

But One there is more sage in that Caress,
Raising no mawkish Pennant of Distress,
But when I tip the Osculative Brim
Accepts the Kiss in Silent Thankfulness.

LXVII

Her Lips no Questions ask - Content is hers
If her Artistic Spirit wakes and stirs,
Nor recks of those Romances Heretofore -
Engagements where I won my Brazen Spurs.

LXVIII

A Microbe lingers in a Kiss, you say?
Yes, but he nibbles in a pleasant Way.
Rather than in the Cup and Telephone
Better to catch him Kissing and be gay.

LXIX

Enough of Kisses, whose ecstatic Stuff
Endures an Age and flickers in a Puff,
That undeservèd Web of foibled Toys,
Enough - of Kisses can there be Enough?

LXX

What, then, of Him in dizzy Heights profound
Who scans the Zenith's constellated Round?
Alas! who goes ballooning to the Stars
Too often runs his Trade into the Ground.

LXXI

Little we Learn beyond the A B C -
Except D E F G H I it be,
Or J K L M N O P Q R
And then S T U V W X Y Z.

LXXII

A Solon ponders till his Years are great
On Sway of Power and Magnitude of State,
Then in his Age he leaves the Questions to
The Wisdom of the Sweet Girl Graduate.

LXXIII

The Delphic Gaberdine avails me not
When Laurels fester into loathly Rot,
And in his starry Shroud the Poet starves
While growing Roses in a Cabbage Lot.

LXXIV

Forgive, ye Wise, the Oaf who nothing knows
And glories in the Bubbles that he blows,
And while you wrestle blindly with the World,
He whistles on his Fingers and his Toes.

LXXV

What good to dread the Storm's impending Black
With woful Ululation and "Alack!" -
The garbled Tenor of a sore Despite
Can never bring your lost Umbrella back.

LXXVI

So what of Secrets mouthed beneath the Rose,
Rumorous Badinage of These and Those? -
The Lady Lodger in the Flat upstairs
Knows all you do and say - she knows - she knows!

LXXVII

She knows, but though her cavernous Ears are sage,
Nought can she fathom of one glyphic Page,
Nought from a Woman's Record can she tell -
I still must guess at Zamperina's Age.

LXXVIII

Time only knows, whose spinning Axes quake
The astral Turrets where the Patient wake
To count the Stars and Planets as they pass -
Oh, what a Task for one to Undertake!

LXXIX

Ask not behind my moated Soul austere
One Moment on my Secret Self to peer -
Already you have seen Sufficient there
To keep me in a wholesome State of Fear.

LXXX

Nay, Zamperina, save those agate Eyes
From shrewd empiric Paths where Knowledge lies;
Throw Truth to the Unlovely, when to you
It were a rash Unwisdom to be Wise.

LXXXI

Oh, like the Smoke that rises and is gone,
Let your own Spirit lift from Dawn to Dawn
And so bestartle Ennui that at last
Even the Grave will quite forget to yawn!

* * * * *

LXXXII

As hooded Eve behind her rosy Bars
Her soft Kinoon betinkled to the Stars,
Again to the Tobacconist's I came
And stood among the Stogies and Cigars.

LXXXIII

Some were whose Scent exhaled the Asphodel,
And some whose Smoke gave forth a roseate Smell,
And some poor Weeds that told you at a Whiff
How they were made to Give Away, not Sell.

LXXXIV

One said, "And can no wiser Law revoke
The Edict that foredestined me to Smoke,
My stump to be a Byword and a Jest? -
But if a Jest I fail to see the Joke."

LXXXV

A Second murmured, "Surely we might learn
Some undiminished Anodyne to burn,

For ne'er a Smoker puffed a good Cigar
But wished Another Like It might return."

LXXXVI

After a momentary Silence spake
A Stogie of a bileful Pittsburg make;
"The One who puffs my Wrappings to the End
Will never ask my Memory to awake."

LXXXVII

Then spake a Panatela finely rolled,
"If to a fiery Doom I must be sold,
Then let it be my happy Fate to find
A high-born Mouth whose Teeth are filled with Gold."

LXXXVIII

An auburn Weed uprose as one surprised.
"If for a Martyr's Death I so am prized,
May not my hallowed Ashes be preserved
That Saint Cigar I may be canonized?"

LXXXIX

"Well," murmured One, "when in my ashen Shroud
My Stump descends to meet the shrieking Crowd,

I yet may know that in the Fire of Hell
There stands no Placard, 'Smoking Not Allowed.'"

XC

And while this corvine Clatter still endured
A lambent Flame, by fragrant Promise lured,
Crept in, as all the Inmates cried amain,
"The Shop's afire and we are Uninsured!"

XCI

Arise, then, Zamperina, Day grows old,
The Shepherd pipes his sundered Flocks to Fold,
Your Garments quail and ripple in the Chill,
Your pagan Nose empurples with the Cold.

XCII

The How is swiftly mingling with the When,
The What describes its Orbit's round, and then
Of Why or Which nor Mite nor Mote delays
To fall in Line and get mixed up again.

XCIII

I must not heed that elemental Whirl
Where Arc on Arc the trained Planets swirl -

The Astronomic Marvels have no charm
For him who walks the Gloaming with his Girl.

XCIV

The Keeper of the Sky has hasped his Doors,
Forgetting Zal's accumulative Roars,
And drunk with Night's Elixir, prone he lies
In Warp of dreamless Sleep - and Woof of Snores.

XCV

So must I those soporic Echoes woo
When, all my intermittent Joyaunce through,
Each Thrill must be a Threnod, as I know
That They Who Kiss can teach me nothing New.

XCVI

Indeed, indeed, Repentance oft before
I swore, but Was I Smoking when I swore?
And ever and anon I made Resolve
And sealed the holy Pledge - with One Puff More.

XCVII

O Thou who sought our Fathers to enslave
And ev'n the Pipe to Walter Raleigh gave,

I love you still for your Redeeming Vice
And shower Tobacco Leaves upon your Grave!

XCVIII

Then let the balmed Tobacco be my Sheath,
The ardent Weed above me and beneath,
And let me like a Living Incense rise,
A Fifty-Cent Cigar between my Teeth.

XCIX

Havana's Witch-fog murks my Horoscope
Until my dream-enamoured Senses grope
Towards the Light, where in her opal Shrine
Smiles Hopefulness, the great Reward of Hope.

* * * * *

C

Let those who to this daedal Valley throng
And by my tumid Ashes pass along,
Let them be glad with this consoling Thought:
I got a Market Value for my Song.

CI

And some expectant Devotee who knocks
At that poor House where once I rent my locks,
In vain may seek a Last Cigar and find
My Muse asleep within an empty Box.

Hamman

Notes

I - "Sours the Milk of Life;" thunderstorms, earthquakes and artificial commotions of the earth are popularly and quasi-scientifically believed to have the effect of turning milk from sweet to sour; so here the Milk of Life is soured by the sudden advent of the Brat of Death (Care, perhaps, who is said to have killed a cat on one occasion). By some critics it is held that the figure might have been enriched by the substitution of the Cream of Life for the Milk of Life.

II- Gorgona is referred to but three times in the present work, in Rubs II, XXI and XXVI. Number II would lead us to believe that the poet used her figuratively as Sorrow or Remorse; but the text of XXI and XXVI point another conclusion. The latter Rubaiyat tell us forcefully that Gorgona was but too real and that her unloveliness was a sore trial to the fine attunement of the poet's nerves.

II - Such words as "tobacchanalian" (compounded from tobacco and bacchanalian) Lewis Carrol claimed as his own under the title of "portmanteau words," - another example of the antiquity of modernity.

VII - "The Early Worm is up to Catch the Fish;" the worm, caught as bait, will in turn serve as captor for some luckless fish. This, possibly, is the Borneese version of our own proverb, "The early bird catches the worm."

IX - "The Invisible Buskin at the Gate" probably refers to the shoe left outside of temples and mosques in the Orient. The temple here meant is doubtless the Temple of Love, and the fact of the Buskin being Invisible

illumes the eyes of the damosel who knows that the devotee is worshipping at the Shrine of Love.

X - Than Basilisk or Nenuphar; the poet has given us in two words the dual aspect of Woman; flowerlike in repose, serpentine in action.

X - Pendants; who has not noted a hairpin in the act of falling, hanging for a moment, as though loth to leave its gentle habitation? Omar Khayyam, Jr., was an observer of small things as well as great.

X - A Hundred Hairpins; aspirates are used liberally in this line, probably to give the effect of falling hairpins.

XIII - Hymen Spring; Hymen, while not the god of husbandry, was the accepted deity of marriage; hence Spring, the incorrigible match-maker, may very, easily be identified with Hymen. Note the pleasing alliteration of the words Hymen and hymning brought so close together.

XVIII - Eolian Aloes; aloes, according to Oscar Wilde in the Picture of Dorian Grey, have the power of banishing melancholy wherever their perfume penetrates. Eolian Aloes may be the exotic melodies that drive care from the mind.

XXIII - Forgiveness; the reader will probably regard this spelling of forgiveness somewhat unusual, and the Editor freely confesses that he has no authority for such usage. But since Fitzgerald has coined enow for the sake of a rhyme, the Editor hopes that he will be forgiven his forgiveness.

XXIX - With what an Equanimity; there is an untranslated quatrain to the effect that ugliness is the only sin that can make a woman ashamed to look her mirror in the face.

XXV - The breaking of the glass at the gaze of Gorgona, as well as the squamiest serpent in her locks, mentioned in II, give us a clew as to the derivation of her name from that of the Gorgon, Medusa, whose uncomeliness was so intense as to petrify all that met her gaze. On the other hand, the glance of Gorgona seemed to be rather explosive than congealing.

XXV - Torques; this word (like squamiest) is derived directly from the Latin, to be used in this work. They are not properly English words, but the Editor intends they shall become so in the near future.

XXVI - Wreathed is used in obsolete English and especially in Spenser, to mean turned or bent.

XXVII - Attar-Musk; attar is the Persian word for druggist, but we hesitate to believe that the poet would attribute an artificial perfume to the rose.

XXXV - Myself when young; this stanza is supposed to be biographical in its intent. It is known that before the anti-Omaric uprising in Naishapur, and even during his errant tour through Persia, the younger Omar was socially lionized, becoming much sought after. It may seem improbable that Omar, Jr., as a member of the sterner sex, should have been admitted as a regular frequenter of women's clubs, but it must be remembered that then, even as in our own day, men were eagerly prized as lecturers on subjects of interest to women. Omar, Jr., appeared for several seasons before the women's clubs of Naishapur, giving recitations and readings from his father's works.

XXXVI - Ibsen - Boccacio; for a Persian poet of so remote a date, Omar Khayyam, Jr., showed a remarkable knowledge of modern as well as mediaeval literature.

LVII - That Great Menagerie; another reference to his experience as a social lion is found here, as in the three rubaiyat following. The gabble garbled garrulousness (the familiar "gobble, gabble and git, crystallized into the higher form of expression) indicates that the narcotic effect of tea on womankind was much the same in Omar's time as in ours.

LXI - Leave to me the Tenth; the discovery of a tenth Muse puts the younger Omar on an equal footing with his father in science as well as in poetry. The editor has found that upon quitting forever his native Persia, Omar Khayyam, Jr., brought to Borneo many of the more refined sciences. In his hereditary profession, astronomy, he claims the rare distinction of having first made observations through the medium of a wine-glass. His long fidelity to this method was rewarded by some remarkable results, for his private journals show that on several occasions he was able to discern as many as eight sister satellites swimming in eccentric orbits around the moon - a discovery which our much-vaunted modern science has never been able to equal or even to approach.

LXVII - Her Lips no Questions ask;

"Lips with kissing forfeit no favour;
Nay, they increase as the moon doth ever."
Boccacio. (Decameron.)

LXXI - The A B C; this rubá'iy, though indescribably beautiful in the Original, is somewhat too involved for us to grasp the meaning at one reading. Perhaps, in thus weaving the alphabet into his numbers, it was the purpose of the poet to give promise of the ultimate attainment of the Alpha and Omega of knowledge. Perhaps the stanza, on the other hand, was merely intended as a pretty poetical conceit, an exercise in metrical ingenuity. If the latter theory holds good, what a pity it would seem that these rubaiyat were not originally written in Chinese, the infinite alphabet of which language would have furnished material for the present work and several revised editions also!

LXXIII - While Growing Roses in a Cabbage Lot; confusing, perhaps at first reading, but here again may the student employ the device of symbolism with great advantage. The Roses may be taken for the flowers of fancy, the Cabbage Lot for the field of sordid reality. As a staple vegetable, the rose can never compete with the Cabbage.

LXXIV - He Whistles on his Fingers and his Toes; there are many who may very justly consider this line as undignified and unrefined; but such readers should always remember that these quatrains may be taken as purely symbolical. Thus the Fingers and Toes may be regarded as mental aspects and the whistle as whatever best suits the reader.

LXXXIII - Asphodel; the fabled flower of immortality; also a brand of cigar much favoured by the younger Omar.

LXXXV - Anodyne; some translations have this Iodine.

XCIII - The How is swiftly mingling with the When, etc.; the great questions, How, What and When, are being withdrawn unanswered by the dnulovpec, who is responsible for their propounding.

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