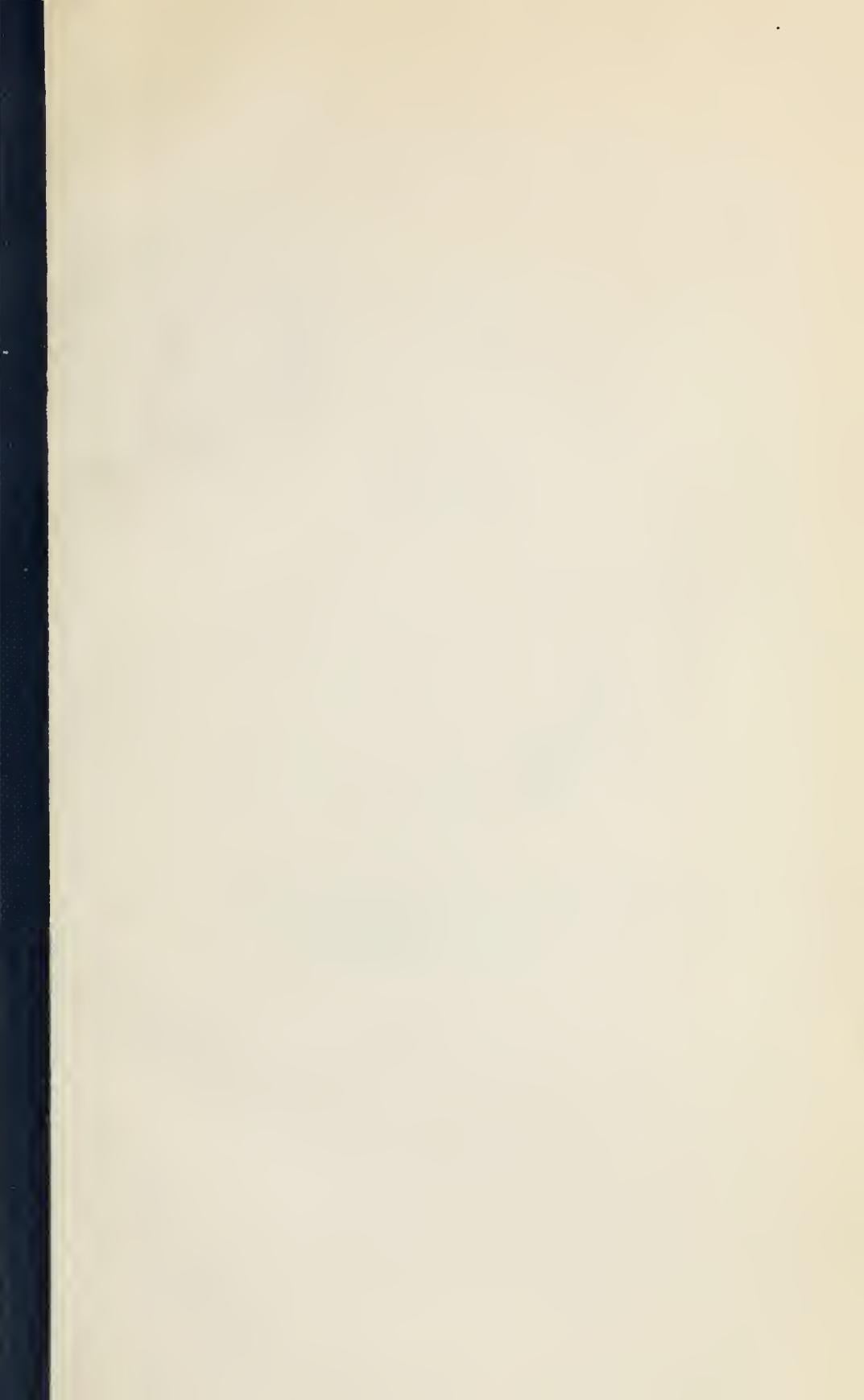


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Omar Khayyám
[Pickering, C.J.]
'Umar of Nishāpūr.





'UMAR OF NISHAPUR

by

C. J. Pickering

412⁴⁰⁶
75.5.13

[Reprinted from the National Review
December, 1890]

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Of the comparatively few Oriental writers who have become well-known in Europe, Al-Khayyâm has perhaps been the least fortunate. Ignored by D’Herbelot, misrepresented and maligned by Von Hammer, and made the mouthpiece of a purely modern pessimism by his most successful translator, the shade of the old Hakîm, were it not long ago well lulled to sleep beneath the ancestral roses, might justly have risen in reproach of a misbelieving and unsympathetic generation, which deems itself wiser than the children of the Dawn.

The brilliant paraphrase of Edward Fitzgerald has made the name of ‘Umar somewhat of a household word. As an English poem it is so nearly faultless that, for those to whom its haunting music has been a companion of years, to balance calmly its merits and defects would be no easy task. But when we compare it with the original, we are surprised to find how much of the English version is original too. And this is not all the indictment. *I traduttori traditori*, runs the Italian proverb, and rarely could it find an apter illustration than the case in point. Among a considerable section of his Oriental readers, as in the parallel case of Hâfiz, and, since Von Hammer’s time, in Europe generally, ‘Umar has had to bear the character of a poetic blacksheep. Following in the track of the author of the *Geschichte der schönen Redekünste Persiens*, the translator, while investing his subject with a beauty of rhythm and phrase that reminds us rather of the Laureate than of any Eastern songster, throws the sceptical side of ‘Umar’s genius into still darker shadow, so that the vacillating doubt and despondency of the Persian grow in his hands a paean of passionate denial and defiance. It would, however, be unfair to contend that for this there is positively no warrant in the original. Lawless and uncertain thoughts occur, but they seem rather to be thrown out at random, stray sparks from the furnace of a fiery spirit ill at ease with itself, than parts of a deliberate system of Heinesque mockery or of Byronic scorn. Phrases scattered here and there throughout the *Rubâ’iyât* are given an emphasis and used in a sequence their author would probably have been the first to disown. Indeed, at the outset it would have been better—*pace* the Calcutta Reviewer,

to whom we owe a debt of gratitude for his delightful biographical sketch—to have taken ‘Umar’s as a mind of the Horatian rather than of the Lucretian order, for system of all things is what is least conspicuous in the kaleidoscopic pages of the *Rubâ’iyât*. Well does Mr. Whinfield, his English editor, say (Pref. xxix.), with reference to the philosophic kinship of the poet, “the parallel often sought to be traced between him and Lucretius has no existence. Whatever he was, he was not an Atheist. To him, as to other Muhammadans of his time, to deny the existence of the Deity would seem to be tantamount to denying the existence of the world and of himself.”

It must be borne in mind that Al-Khayyám, if the bulk of what has come down to us as his be genuine, is a man of many moods. That he had been initiated into all the mysteries of Tasawwuf can hardly be questioned. Even Mr. Fitzgerald, who rejects the Sufism of Hâfiż, and *à fortiori* that of ‘Umar, admits “some traditional presumption” in favour of this view. And that his powerful and original intellect sometimes led him to the threshold of a broader truth, faith in which had risen on the basis of an “honest doubt” which feebler minds so little understood, seems no less certain.* Few of his successors ever rose so high. The lighter or looser rhymes amid which these passages occur, “like sparks among the stubble,” and whose proximity is due to that odd Eastern fashion which ranges poems according to the alphabetic sequence of their terminal letters, only serve to heighten by contrast the effect of these loftier utterances, which if gathered together would yield quite a new conception of ‘Umar’s character and genius.†

* The words of a powerful though obscure English poet of the seventeenth century are here peculiarly applicable. In both temperament and experience, there was much in common between the two men.

Though truth and falsehood be
Near twins, yet trñth a little elder is.
Be busy to seek her: believe me this,
He’s not of none, nor worst, that seeks the Best.
To adore, or scorn an Image, or protest,
May all be bad. Doubt wisely; in strange way
To stand inquiring right is not to stray.

—Donne. 3rd Satire.

† In *Les Quatrains de Khéyam* (Paris: 1867), M. Nicolas has collected upwards of 460 *rubâ’iyât*, or rather has republished that collection lithographed in Teheran some years before. It is, however, only fair to state that Mr. Fitzgerald based his version on the very small *recueil* in the Bodleian (MSS. Ouseley, 140), containing several quatrains not found in the edition of the Imperial Dragonman, which seems to have appeared just too late to be of any practical use to the English poet. The Oxford codex, which, scanty as it is, must be admitted to be one of the oldest redactions (it was transcribed in 1461), is well represented in Mr. E. H. Whinfield’s scholarly edition of the *Rubâ’iyât* (Trübner, 1883), to which the reader is referred for bibliographical and biographical particulars.

In the *Turikh ul-Hukamā*, a philosophical compendium of great value, whose original author, Jamālu'd-din 'Alī, died not much more than a century after 'Umar, we find an interesting notice of him, which, though written from an unfriendly point of view, supports our contention that Al-Khayyām's temper was not purely Pyrrhonic, if indeed it was Pyrrhonic at all.

'Umar al-Khayyām, Imām of Khurāsān, and the profoundest *savant* of his time, was learned in the science of the Greeks (*Yūnān*). He was ever urging the quest of the one only Judge by means of the purification of bodily motions and the sublimation of the human soul. And he enjoined the zealous study of political science according to the principles of the Greek philosophic school. The moderns of the Sūfī sect have adopted and adapted to their own system the exoteric sense of part of his makings, and bring it up for discussion in their assemblies and private gatherings. But their esoteric sense consists of axioms of comprehensive religion (*shari'atu l-wāsi'i*) and maxims of universal obligation. But since the people of his day reviled him for his belief, and exposed to view the secrets he had veiled from them, he feared for his blood, and reined in the bridle of his tongue and pen.

He made the pilgrimage, not from piety, but as the result of a chance *rencontre*; wherein also he betrayed the secrets of his heart's ungodliness. When he got to Baghdād the men of his own method in ancient science beset him, but he shut on them his door with the shutting of compunction and not of companionship (*sadda 'n-nādīmī lā sadda 'n-nādīmī*). And he returned from the Hajj unto his city, to repair morning and evening to the place of worship, concealing his secret thoughts; and yet they could not but out. He was unparalleled in astronomy and natural philosophy (*hikmat*) and his pre-eminence in these provinces would have passed into a proverb, had he only safe-guarded his good name (*lai razaqā l-asmata*). By him there are fugitive verses whose secret sense pierces their veil of concealment, and whose fount of conception is troubled by the turbidness of their hidden intent.

Since my soul is content with an easy eneugh
(Tho' that little *sans* toil palm nor arm may procure)
From the turns and reversions of Time it is safe :
Guard me hand and heart's aim in my life's darkest hour.
In their dizzying whirl hath the heavons not decreed
That all fortunate stars to disaster should lower ?
Then patience, O soul, in thy noonday repose :
Build the base in too close, thou o'er topplest the tower.*

It is a remarkable fact that nearly all that is best in the history and literature of Persia has come from Khurasān. That highland region, whose mountains often rise to an elevation of twelve or thirteen thousand feet, seems to have been peculiarly fitted to foster a strain of hardy intellectual growth which, grafted on the product of the rich soil of historic Irán, was to blossom in strange and beautiful fertility. The Banū Barmaq, that premier clan of the old Guebre aristocracy of Persia, extirpated at one fell swoop by the relentless suspicion of the most fortunate of the Khaliffs, originated in Khurasān. The Ahlu 's-Sāmān, the nursing fathers of Persian letters, traced their ancestry to a like source; and it was at the brilliant court of Abū Nasr, lord of Khurasān and Transoxiana, that the genius of Master Rūdagī, the proto-poet of

Barmadeo

Haroun al-Rachid.

* *L'Algèbre d'Omar Alkhayyāmi*, par F. Woepke (1851), p. 52.

modern Irân, was cultivated to an almost phenomenal activity by showers of unstinted gold; and here it was that Persia's loftiest and most human singer, the immortal Firdausî, was born. 'Umar, therefore, from his cradle could not but have been breathing a poetic air; and his love for his native land is testified by the *Heimweh* which led him, in the full sunshine of imperial favour, and at the apex of his scientific fame, to seek retirement for the rest of his days at Nîshâpûr.

One need not linger over the circumstances of 'Umar's career, which are sufficiently well known. Born about the end of the eleventh century's third decade in a township of Nîshâpûr, at the imperial madrasah of that city he not only received from the Imâm Muwaffiq, a "time-white father" of eighty or ninety summers, the solid foundations of a knowledge of the best science of the time, but made in the person of 'Abdu 'l-Qâsim, better known as Nizâmu 'l-Mulk, the future chancellor of three sultâns, and the most enlightened administrator of mediæval Asia, a friendship which was to have a signal effect upon his own fortunes and was only to be severed by death. It was the Nizâm's first action, when he had attained the supreme power in the State under Alp Arslân the Salyûk, to offer office to his old schoolfellow; but 'Umar, like the true sage (*Hakim*) that he was, requested nothing but a modest pension that would suffer him to be true to himself. The generous friend made over to him the revenue of his native place, and 'Umar spent the remainder of his peaceful days at Nîshâpûr, "busy in winning knowledge of every kind and especially in astronomy," says Nizâmu 'l-Mulk himself. One journey of his is recorded, when in the splendid reign of Mâlik Shâh he visited Marv, and the Sultân lavished praises and honours on his famous geometer,* whose labours had effected that rectification of the calendar which still holds good in the Muhammadan East, and according to Gibbon, or rather Hyde, approaches the correctness of the Gregorian style. The snatches of song which have immortalized his name seem to have been his relaxation from the strain of professional toil. In this he offers a striking resemblance to two of the greatest poets of Europe, Dante and Goethe, to whom the pursuit of knowledge was the business of life, and to sing of it their recreation. A passionate devotion to natural science is characteristic of all three, and in each we see a yearning love of human sympathy, and a power of pure and lofty friendship which reminds us of "the antique world."

But from all accounts it seems, is indeed one might gather

* An algebraic tract, edited by M. Woepcke (Paris, 1851) is the only extant scientific production of 'Umar's. His work seems to have been silently absorbed in that of later mathematicians.

from his verses, that 'Umar's devotion even to science was not that of an anchorite. "Persian chroniclers tell us," says M. Nicolas, "that Khayyām was much given to converse and quaff with his friends in moonlit evenings on the terrace of his house, he seated upon a carpet surrounded by singers and musicians, with a Sāqî who, cup in hand, offered the wine to all the joyous company in turn;" an usage which, with the substitution of the crystal decanter for the terra-cotta cruse and the wine-glass for the cup of copper, still holds in Persia at the present day. "We must remember," says a thoughtful writer* in *Fraser* for May 1879, "that drinking had in the East at that time no vulgar associations. Wine-parties were common in the houses of the great men and in the courts of the princes. . . . These wine-parties were in fact the nurseries of all the intellectual life of the time which was unconnected with religion, and did much to counteract the dulness of orthodox Muhammadan life."†

It has been suggested by Von Hammer that 'Umar's flings at philosophy were stimulated by envy at the fame and fortune of Amīr Mū'izī, who had risen from the position of a *sipāhi* ("sepoy") or common soldier, to be the *Dichter-könig*, or laureate of Mālik Shāh, and "ever in his favour," as the historian informs us. This singer was a Sūfi mystic of undoubted sincerity, and, so far as can be seen from the specimens given by Von Hammer, held opinions not widely differing from those of 'Umar himself. One very characteristic *ghazal* chants a lofty pantheism in terms well-nigh identical with 'Umar's own. It might be, indeed, that at moments when the doubting, questioning spirit had set in, the Khurāsānī took expressions of his famous contemporary in vain;

* Mrs. H. M. Cadell, who was the first in England to draw attention to "The true Omar Khayyam."

† In the *Zādū'l-musāfir*, a medical treatise written in the latter half of the tenth century by a physician of Kairwān, Abū Ja'far by name [he is ranked with Avicenna, Averroes, and Rhazes. "Études sur le Zad al Moqāfir," par M. Gustave Dugat, *Journal Asiatique*, III. (1854)], we find a curious corroboration of the view just set forth. "The best means of banishing a tendency to melancholy and keeping it from enrooting itself in the mind, is to drink (wine) with melody, to be merry with one's friends, to occupy oneself with making and reciting verses, and to contemplate running water, gardens, verdure, and sweet fresh faces. . . . Galen saith that whoso matureth the first must of the grape, so that it rejoiceth the sorrowing spirit and reneweth gladness, is a man of healing wisdom." And the learned African goes into much detail concerning the virtues of wine and of music, which are like a body and a soul; and their combined action as a curative treatment is best seen, he says. "when quaffing one seeth seated round him agreeable figures whose shape the Creator hath perfected and finished their graces, and on whom the soul's light cornscates in brilliance and beauty . . . and this, if possible, should be in the midst of fresh gardens and lawny parterres . . . or, at least, in halls carpeted with rose leaves and willow and myrtle and sweet basil which maketh the sad heart to rejoice." With all this, he adds, "let one beware of excess."

and, of course, it is not impossible that some personal rivalry between the two poets may have existed, although such a feeling was alien to the self-contained and independent character of the author of the *Rubâ'iyât*.

After all, Khayyâm's mockery is more at the expense of self than of others, and his satire is evidently reserved for the pretenders to divine knowledge ; *v.g.*, in the last quatrain he says :

They who an ocean are of virtues and of wit,
By whose consummate glory are all their fellows lit.
Out of this obscure slumber find us not a way,
Tell us an old-wives' tale† and fall asleep in it.

Elsewhere he brings out more clearly the cause of his dissatisfaction :

Those who the whole world's quintessential spirit appaor,
Who wing their contemplation past the crowning sphere.
For all they know of Thee, are like the heavens themselves :
Dizzed and in amaze, they bow the head in fear. (120.)

He shadows forth the remedy in another passage, where also man, as the microcosm, is termed the quintessence (*khalâsah*) of the world, and which may help us as a clue to the meaning of many of his ambiguous utterances about wine :

O thou, who art tho Kosmos' quintessential strain,
For a brief breath let be the worry of loss and gain ;
Take but one cup from the eternal Sâqi,‡ take,
And go forever free from the two worlds' grief and pain. (319.)

The thought that one draught of the mystic wine, the love-potion of the Eternal, induces oblivion alike of natural and supernatural hope and fear, is elsewhere expressed under a different symbolism :

In convent and in college,§ synagogue and chnrch,
Of Hell they live in fear, for Paradise they search ;
But whoso once hath known the mysteries of God
Will never let such weeds his soul's fair field besmirch. (46.)

And in another quatrain the quietist doctrine is enunciated with a still greater boldness :

Each heart wherein He kneads the leavening light of love,
Whether a haunter of mosque or synagogue he prove,
In the great book of love if he his name hath writ
Is free from Hell and free from Paradise above. || (60.)

* No. 464. All the citations are from Nicolas's Paris edition of 1867.

† The original is *fâsinah*, a fable or myth.

‡ The phrase "Eternal Cupbearer," is elsewhere (R. 137) used by 'Umar, and occurs in the romance of *Autar*.

§ The *madrasah*, attached to Muhammedan monasteries or mosques.

|| Jeremy Taylor, in his sermon "On the Mercy of the Divine Judgments," cites a story of St. Ivo going on an embassy to St. Louis, and meeting by the way a grave, sad woman, with fire in one hand and water in the other, who, asked what these symbols may mean, makes answer: " My purpose is with fire to burn Paradise, and with my water to quench the flames of Hell, that men may serve God without the incentives of hope and fear, and purely for the love of God." Vaughan's *Hours with the Mystics*, vol. ii., p. 201.

This conclusion reminds us of the beautiful legend of Abū bin Adham, so gracefully and tenderly versified by Leigh Hunt :

Write me as one that loves his fellow men ;

but that ‘Umar’s love is rather the divine affection which rounds all human brotherhood and charity in its perfect orb.

The formalism of current orthodoxy seems to have exercised the mind of ‘Umar in no little degree, and accounts for much of his apparent irreverence. He frequently takes up his parable against the Pharisees and hypocrites of his day, and their practice of making long prayers arouses his especial dislike. To him, the humble hope that trusts and is not afraid, is a truer adoration than that which clothes itself in the garb of liturgical forms :

They are gone, the travellers, and ne’er a one returns
To tell of aught beyond the mystic Veil that burns ;
Thy work were better done by esperance than prayer,
For without Truth and Hope no prayer a profit earns. (227.)

The above reads like the recantation of an utterance closing in the same rime-cadence, of which it is the perfect antithesis :

Of all the travellers who tread the long, long way,
Has one returned for me to ask him news, I pray ?
Take care lest thou within this little inn of life
Leave aught on the score of hope ; thou ’lt not re-view the day. (217.)

In reading the Rubā’iyāt we seem to be spectators of a “life-drama,” a master-spirit’s progress and development through the clash and conflict of the eternal Nay and Yea ; not less so, though less fully expressed, than that of Carlyle in *Sartor*, Shakspeare in the *Sonnets*, or Tennyson in *In Memoriam*. When we begin to trace our way through the sad jumble of thought produced by the alphabetical arrangement of the quatrains, no two of which were probably more consecutive than a pair of Greek epigrams, we cannot but be conscious of three dominant moods of mind, if not periods of mental development—epicurean, sceptical, mystic. Infinite and well-nigh imperceptible are the gradations whereby the exhortation to mere physical enjoyment, the joyous and thoughtless spirit of youth, pass over into the bitter or sorrowful questioning of a soul without God or hope in the world ; and these, again, through the self-abasement of conscious sin, into the calm and deliberate utterance of trust, or the half-enigmatical rapture of one who sees behind the veil. And as every great spirit exists no less as the child of his own age than “for all time,” so we may consider ‘Umar’s earlier compositions to have been influenced if not inspired by the prevailing fashion of the time, with its princely symposiums and feasts of reason, and not a little by the graceful wine-songs of Avicenna (d. 1037), in whom also science blossomed into poetry ; as in his after days, grown wiser by the discipline of

intellectual defeat, he became more and more in harmony with that profounder cast of thought and feeling which found, a few years later, so grand an exponent in Jalālu'd-dīn of Iconium, and an interpreter to the world in Sa'adī of Shiraz. It is the remark of Von Hammer that a sceptical era is followed no less in nations than in individuals by a period of mystic devotion and the religious revival which is its external token and garb.

We need not, therefore, be discouraged by the strange ambiguity of many of 'Umar's utterances, where it seems equally difficult to accept the literal or parabolic sense. That a poet may at one period of his life use a phrase in the ordinary acceptation which in a later development of thought he may employ as a symbol of higher things, is not without a notable example in the case of Dante, whose human if not sensuous passion, sublimated by the fire of bereavement and sorrow, is ultimately refined into a high rapture of mystic adoration whose terms are yet the same, though in their later tenour, like kindred sounds in Spenser's enchanted forest or the dream-world of Blake, "more is meant than meets the ear."

'Umar's wine-epigram is sometimes so dark a saying, that for lack of an interpreter we are fain to leave it in its own melodious obscurity, not without a shrewd suspicion that he, like other powerful minds, is occasionally apt to take pleasure in mystifying his hearers, and to send forth his poetic shafts, *φωνάγα την συνέτοισιν*, without very much care as to where and who the "understanding" may be. His friends would hold the key, and that was enough for him.

There is a strange and terribly audacious play of fancy about the following, which may or may not be figurative :

When I am dead, my friends, wash me with vintage rare,
Wine and the gohlet o'er me invoke in lieu of prayer;
On Resurrection Day, if ye would seek my lair,
Look for me 'neath the dust our wine-house portals hear. (7.)

Elsewhere he recurs to the same thought :

O my beloved companions, hearten me with wine,
And make ye ruby red this ambered face of mine;
Wash yo with wine my corpse when I am cold and dead,
And make my coffin wood of timber of the vine. (109.)

By comparison with the following we get a little light :

The Kūrān, which men use to call .. the Word sublime,*
Not constantly they read, only from time to time;
But on the Beaker's brim is written a verse of light
Which men forevermore may read in every clime. (11.)

According to the exoteric (*zāhiri*) sense, this of course means merely that potion is better than devotion, but, as the Teheran

* *Mahmūn katām*

Sūfī pointed out to Nicolas, there is another and an esoteric (*bâtini*) which interprets the wine-cup as the world of phenomena, brimming with the love of God, and the inscription on the lip the apocalypse of Hinsel in creation, which, unlike the scrolls of mortal prophets, is ever open to those unto whose eyes it is given to see.

In another place (196) he gives to the thought, if we may interpret it in the above sense, a still more mystical expression :

Drink thou of this : it is the wine of life etern ;
Drink ! 'tis the reservoir whence joys of youth ye earn ;
'Tis burning like the fire, yet lighteneth our face
Even like the Water of Life ; drink deeply from the urn.

To this passage there is rather a remarkable parallel in the Jewish-Christian apocryphal Book of Esdras (2 Esd. xiv. 39, 40). The prophet, watching under the oak-tree for his revelation, has a vision of the Lord : " Behold, he reached me a full cup, which was full as it were with water, but the colour of it was like fire ; and I took it and drank ; and when I had drunk of it, my heart uttered understanding, and wisdom grew in my breast."

But whatever we may think of the foregoing, there is surely little that is enigmatical about the following :

On the world's coquetry, fools, lavish not your coin,
When all her ways and windings know ye, line by line ;
Give not unto the wind* this precious life, your own,
But hasten, seek the Friend, and quickly quaff the Wine. (108.)

The prevailing thought, however, of those which we would consider as the earlier quatrains is the brevity of life, and the Horatian maxim *Carpe diem*. It is on these, as indeed we might expect in a youthful poet, that 'Umar has chiefly expended the wealth of his fancy. A few may be adduced as fair samples of the rest.

Wake ! for the morning breaks, and rends the robe of night ;
Why sorrowful ? Rise and quaff the draught of dawn aright ;
Drain thou the wine, sweetheart, for many a morn shall break,
And turn her eyes to ours, and ours be lorn of light. (255.)

The yesterday that 's gone endeavour to forget,
And mourn not for to-morrow : 'tis not risen yet ;
Root not thy hope in aught of things that come and go,
Be happy now, and fling not life to the winds to fret. (334.)

A wise man unto me came in my sleep, and said :
.. From whose sleep ever bloomed the rose of gladness red ?
Why wilt thou do a thing that 's so the twin of death ?
Drink, for full soon thou 'lt sleep with dust above thy head." (48.)

See how the wind of dawn has rent the Rose's robe,
How Bulbul by her beauty is filled with joy and love !
Sit in the Rose's shade, for many a bloom like this
Has out o' the dust arisen and lain with dust above. (370.)

* We are reminded of the dying words of Nizâmu'l-Mulk, " O God I am passing away in the hand of the wind."

Since no one can become a surety for the morrow,
 Rejoice thee now, and clear thy heart of carking sorrow :
 Drink wine i' the light of wine, for the moon, my Moon, shall look
 For us no more, how oft the heaven she circle thorow. (8.)
 "tis a sweet day ; the breeze is neither hot nor cold ;
 Soft clouds have laved the dust from every rose's fold ;
 And to the yellow rose in speech like ours implores
 The nightingale, " Oho draught, and lose thy hue of gold." (153.)
 Be of good cheer, for chagrin will be infinite ;
 Upon the sphere of heaven stars shall conjein and smite ;
 The potter's clay that from thy body kned shall be
 Will build the palace walls where others see the light. (138.)
 Khayyām, Time's very self 's ashamed of anyone
 Who in the day of sorrow sits faint-hearted down :
 Wine do thou quaff in crystal to the lute's lament
 Or e'er thy crystal bowl be shattered on the stone. (252.)
 Lay in my palm the wine ; my heart's on fire to-day ;
 And, fleet-foot as quicksilver, this life will not stay ;
 Wake ! for the smile of Fortune is but as a dream,
 Wake ! for the fire of Youth like water flew away. (54.)
 What time her robing purple on her the violet throws,
 And morning breezes ruffle petal-folds of rose,
 Wiser were he who by his silver-breasted love
 Quaffs of the wine and shatters goblet ere he goes. (189.)

Occasionally, as in his Roman prototype, we catch amid this forced gaiety a tone of deeper pathos.

"Twere best we o'er the wine-cup gave our hearts to glee,
 And take light thought of aught that's gone or come to be ;
 And this our soul that's lent us, prisoner as it is,
 One moment from the bonds of Intellect set free. (265.)
 Ah, that the scroll of Youth so soon should be uprolled,
 And Pleasne's springtide freshness wrinkle so and fold !
 That bird of joy whereon is set the name of Youth
 Knows neither how it came nor whither its course must hold. (128.)
 When never a labour of ours has issue to our heart,
 Wherefore should we take thought, whereto our impulse start ?
 So sit we down in sorrow and sigh in our regret,
 " Too late, too late, we came, too soon must we depart." (41.)
 In this wild whirl of time that breeds the base alone,
 Uncounted griefs and pangs bear I till life be done ;
 My heart a rosebud shut i' the rosiere of the world,
 A blood-red tulip flower in time's plantation grown. (201.)

His longing for the sympathy of a kindred spirit—a *mahram i' raz*, a confidant of soul-secrets—which is characteristic of all true poets, the *nec recito cuiquam nisi amicis* of Horace in a deeper sense, finds expression again in the following :

Falcon-like in the world of Mystery have I flown
 Iu hope to leave this low and reach a loftier zone ;
 But for I find not here a soul for confidence,
 I from that door whereby I came again am gone.

In spite of its distinctly Sūfi flavour, this quatrain can surely be

read in a merely human sense. He has felt for but not yet found the eternal Friend, and in his loneliness he yearns for a brother man with whom to share his perplexities.

As with Shakspeare in his middle period—that of Timon and of Troilus—there seems to have come a time in ‘Umar’s history when the beauty of life was as apples of Sodom, the bitterness of self-reproach a very Marah to his soul; a time when he could not sing as in the thoughtless days,

Plant not within thy soul the shoot of Sorrow’s tree,
The manuscript of joy read unremittingly;

for the newly-awakened conscience will not be lulled, and gives him no rest. “When the thought of my faults presents itself before me,” he says, “my face flows down with tears that are born of my heart of fire.”

At this wild whirl of Heaven I sorrow evermore,
And with my own base nature ever am at war;
Science avails me not to rise above the world.
Nor Reason lets me rest where no earth-noises roar. (273.)

To the reproaches of those who do not understand him, and accuse him of moral cowardice, he replies—and the humility of his answer is reflected in his style :

Deem not it is the world whereat I am dismayed,
Or death and soul’s departure frighten with their shade:
For that it is a fact, of death have I no fear;
Tis that I live not well, whereof I am afraid. (276.)

In the turmoil of self-accusation and self-excuse he seeks for comfort in the doctrine of determinism which he had imbibed from childhood, and gives it a characteristic turn.

That day the Steed of Heaven was saddled for the race,
Parwîn and Mushtari * sprang forth in all their grace,
In the Divân of Fate was my lot cast also:
How then should sin be mine, with Destiny in the chase? (110.)

In his perplexity, he is almost ready to reproach the First Cause :

Thou before Whom the maze of sin is clear to see,
To him hath ears to hear declare this mystery:
Foreknowledge absolute † of Sin’s cause to conceive
In a wise man’s eyes the extreme of ignorance would be. (116.)

It seems to him that if the nature of sin, its causal power, had been present to the Infinite Consciousness, it would never in the scheme of creation have been suffered to be—an anticipation, we might almost say, of that “philosophy of the Unconscious” which has proceeded from the school of Schopenhauer.‡

* The Pleiads and Jnpiter.

† *Azali* = unbeginning, and therefore eternal.

‡ This theory of the unconsciousness of the First Cause is taught by Plotinus, and seems to have been held by Clement of Alexandria, whose Logos is the Consciousness of the Father. (Bigg, *The Christian Platonists* (1886), pp. 10, 54.)

Wearied with beating his wings against the bars of this insoluble problem, he falls back upon a pathetic remonstrance and lament :

Of clay and water hast Thon kneaded me: what can I?
 Hast woven me of silk and wool to be: what can I?
 And every deed I give to life, be it good or ill,
 Was written on my soul by Thy decree: what can I? (268.)

Al-Khayyâm's final appeal for remission, if we may so regard it, is not without an added interest for us as having been the subject of one of the most daring inversions in literature. The following is a bald reproduction of 'Umar's words as they stand in the Teheran text :

O Knower of the secrets of the heart of every man,
 Who in the hour of weakness bear'st the part of every man,
 Accept, O Lord, my penitence, and me forgiveness give,
 Thou who Forgiver and Excuser art of every man. (236.)

This quatrain, as Mrs. Cadell was the first to point out, is the sole known warrant for that startling passage in Mr. Fitzgerald's poem, which has so largely affected our conception of 'Umar :

Oh Thon, who Man of baser Earth didst make
 And e'en with Paradise devise the Snake:
 For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man
 Is blacken'd—Man's forgiveness give—and take!

"Khayyâm was bold enough at times," remarks the critic, "but we do not think he reached the point of offering God forgiveness for man's sins." The allusions in the second and third lines do not seem to be traceable in any extant text of the Rubâ'iyyât.

Let us now examine a few *rubâ'iyyat* of the strictly mystical class, that which we would consider characteristic of his later and graver years. But between these and the rest there is no hard and fast line to be drawn; there is no sudden conversion, but a gradually growing conviction of eternal realities, not objectively merely, but as existent in the Self, the individual consciousness. This reunion of finite with infinite, the *Maksud-i-Aqsâ*, or "Uttermost Aim" of Sufic devotion, is beautifully figured by Jalâl in one of his *ghazals*, as translated most worthily by Mr. Gibb (in Appendix to *The Book of Sindibad*, edited by W. A. Clouston, Glasgow, 1884, page 270) :

If to travel thou canst not avail, then journey to thine own heart,
 And e'en as the ruby mine, be fired by the ray serene.

O master, journey thou forth, away from thyself to Thyself;
 For the ore of the mine turns gold by a journey like this, I ween.

From sourness and bitterness here, to the region of sweetness fare;
 For that every moon from the light of the sun is with grace beseen.

In his own quaint manner Al-Khayyâm gives the thought expression :

While on the path of Hope let no heart pass unknown.
While on the path of Presence* make a Friend your own;
A hundred clay and water Ka'abas are not worth
One Heart : whereafter seek, and Ka'abas leave alone. (15.)

As he rises in the scale of insight, his sympathies widen, and he can perceive that to the true believer no faith is alien, and that variations and discrepancies of worship, be it sincere, are less of kind than of degree ; the fairest feature of the mystic school in every age. Hinduism, which he typifies by the name *pagoda* (*but-kadu*, or “ idol-house ”). and which was in his time the object of unceasing crusades on the part of Islâm, is more than once brought by him into honourable prominence, and is made, equally with Zoroastrianism and with Christianity, the vehicle of his wider hope.

Pagoda, Ka'aba, both are temples of true service.
The bell-peal† is the hymning music of true service ;
The Mihrab and the Church, the Rosary‡ and Cross,
In truth are one and all but tokens of true service. (30.)

Elsewhere, by a play upon words not unknown to the Hebrew Scriptures, he opposes to the everlasting Light (*nûr*) of Islâm the eternal Fire (*nâr*) of Mazdeism—not surely, as Nicolas would have us suppose, the “ fire of hell,” unless, indeed, there be a lurking *double entendre*, mischievously contrived for those profane ones who could or would not distinguish the one from the other—a view quite in keeping with what we know of ‘Umar’s character:

Though our lot be not the roses, yet we have the thorn,
And there’s a Fire, although for us no Light be born ;
And there’s the belfry-chime and Church and Brahma-thread,
Although no Khankah§ shelter or Darvish dress be worn. (253.)

This feeling is expressed as boldly in the *rubâ’iy* (60) where he says that the worshipper, whether he be Jew or Muslim, if only his name is written in God’s great book of Love (σ γὰρ Θεὸς ἀγάπη ἔστι), is freed alike from the gross pains and the grosser pleasures of the popular hell and paradise ; a sentiment strangely in opposition to the recorded injunction of Muhammad, “ Spare not the synagogue of Satan.” That spiritual liberty, whose correlative

* *Niyáz* (Hope or Aspiration) and *Hazâr* (Presence, the Beatific Vision), are, respectively, the second and penultimate stages of the *Turiq* or Way of Perfection, of which the fourth and last is *Haqiqat* (Truth=Ged)—absolute absorption into the Divine essence, or Nirvana.

† *Nâkûs*=the ἱερὰ ξῦλα of the Eastern Chrch.

‡ *Tasbih*=the head-roll of the names of Allah, for the purpose of praise (*subh*).

§ A Muhammadan monastery.

in the moral sphere is the *αὐτάρκεια* of Epictetus * and Antonine, is the object of his earnest longing. If haply he may find it?

The heart that isolation's fulness doth not own
Is helpless, daily mate of her own penitent moan :
How shall true joy be hers, except the soul is free ?
All else, whate'er it be, is root of grief alone. (97.)

Like Sir Henry Wotton, he can picture to himself the blissful state of the man who is “ lord of himself though not of lands, and having nothing yet hath all.” Indeed, his conception has as much a Christian as a Stoic flavour, and recalls the Sermon on the Mount as well as the *Meditations*.

Happy the heart of him who passes life unknown,
Who never wore cashmere or lawn or lamb's-wool gown :
Who like the Simurgh† wings his flight in highest heaven,
Who makes not like the owl 'mid ruined worlds his moan. (140.)

In this world whoso hath but half a loaf of bread,
And in his breast a refnge where to lay his head.—
Who of no man is slave, who of no man is lord—
Tell such to live in joy : his world is sweet indeed.‡ (146.)

All these currents of thought meet and mingle in one harmonious outburst of devotion, which is vigorously expressed in Umar's truest style.

In Faith are two and seventy Worships, great and small.
But the worship of Thy Love will I choose before them all ;
What's Unbelief, Belief, Obedience, or Sin ?
Before Thee, the one Aim, let all pretences fall. (248.)

Here, in common with the mystics of every school, he seeks to solve the riddle of evil by questioning its existence in fact, or by assuming it to be merely relative, a shadow which, rightly seen, is swallowed up in the fulness of the infinite Light. And to this conclusion he must have been helped not a little by the deterministic theology which he had learned from the Imām Muwaffiq, and to which he gives, as to every phase of his thought, a characteristic expression :

Limned on creation's Tablet each and all exists,
Yet evermore from Good or Ill the Pencil rests ;
All that is destined must in Justice come to be,
And vain the wish that yearns, the sorrow that resists. (31.)

From the belief that good and evil, in our sense of the words, are banished from the councils of Eternity, to a denial to moral distinctions of anything but a relative existence, was but a step.

* See, especially, the fine passage on *ἀλευθερία* in the *Discourses*, Book IV. *ad init.*

† “ Silver Bird,” the griffin symbol of celestial wisdom, of whom wonderful stories are told. In a debased form the myth survives as the “ Roe ” of Sindbad.

‡ The second and third lines read like a translation of Marenus Anrelius (*Comm.* IV. 3, 31) : ἀνθρώπων δὲ μηδενὸς μῆτε τύραννον μῆτε δοῦλον ἑαυτὸν καθιστάς.

This most dangerous doctrine, so capable of the *corruptio optimi pessima*, is touched upon by Jāmī, the last of the great Sūfi poets, in the proem to his exquisite allegory, Salāman and Absāl, as a prayer that the beatific vision may annihilate his self-identity and release him from the distinction between good and evil, may make him, as Mr. Fitzgerald well expresses it in his fine paraphrase—

Self-lost, and conscience-quit of Good and Evil.

Sometimes ‘Umar’s rapture of contemplation carries him very high, and his tone, though not his style, reminds us now of Shelley and now of Emerson. Take, for example, the following :

Thou, Whom the whole world seeks in freuzy and fire of mind,

Barreualike before Thee are rich and poor mankind;

Thou 'rt mingled in all speech, and every ear is deaf,

Thou 'rt present to all men, and every eye is blind. (204.)

Sometime to mortal man Thou show'st Thy hiddeu Face,

Sometime art manifest in Kosmic form and trace ;

And this magnificeence show'st Thou to Thine own Self,

For Thou 'rt the Eyes that see, the Vision they ombrace. (443.)

The Drop to the Sea's lamenting, “ Separate are we.”

“ Rather 'tis thou and I are all things,” langhs the Sea;

“ Trnly there is none other : we are God alone.

‘Tis but a tittle's varying sunders thee and Me.” (365.)

We should be doing injustice to ‘Umar’s genius were we to omit from our view that aspect of it which is so characteristic of the man, and singles him out from all his fellows; that grotesque humour, so rare in Eastern literature, which is the one point he possesses in common with Heine, and which we may almost say is the antiseptic salt that has preserved his thought fresh for us after the lapse of centuries. This spirit of self-banter, which plays lightly around so many of his utterances, is not quite absent from even such a topic as the assurance of his own immortality, to which it gives the quaintest of turns. Yet here he is evidently in earnest :

The moment when I shall from death escape and flee,

And shed like leaf from bough my body from life 's tree,

With what glad heart I 'll make the universe a sieve

Or e'er an earthly riddle sift the dust of me! (266.)

The same spirit is noticeable in one of his potatory quatrains (185), of which it were difficult to say whether he is merely jesting or is propounding a Sūfic sentiment under a *bizarre* form. Like some passages already quoted, it is of so enigmatical a character as to fairly baffle our scrutiny :

When aznre Dawn begins to lift her light divine,

Look in thine hand there be the wine-bowl flashing fine :

They say that Truth is ever bitter in the month,

And by that argumt the Truth must needs be Wine.

In the same category we might include a quatrain in which

Khayyam, after his own peculiar fashion, reproaches Fortune's wheel.

Ah, Wheel of Heaven ! no guest but fears thy perfidy.*
 Naked thou keop'st me stript as fish that's in the sea ;
 While all creation's clad by spinning-wheels of earth.
 There's ne'er a spinning-wheel but far surpasseth thee ! (251.)

We have seen how 'Umar speaks of Christianity : let us see how a Muhammadan may speak of its Founder. Even though it be not genuine, the *rubā'iy* was assuredly written by a Muslim. The mode adopted is that of self-remonstrance :

Fool, for thy fear of death and boding of surcease,
 When from extinction springs a life of endless bliss ;
 Soon as in 'Isâ's breath I grow a living soul
 Eternal death shall leave my little life in peace. (39.)

The quickening breath of Jesus is frequently made a poetic figure by the Persians, and sometimes, as in the *Masibat-nâmaht* of 'Attâr, the effect of its miraculous exertion is described : but nowhere, so far as we are aware, is the spiritual significance so beautifully brought out as in the above.‡ We must, however, bear in mind that by the Persian Jesus was regarded less as the penultimate prophet of Islám than as the supreme Sûfi, the master-mystic who had attained absolute identity with Deity, and who was, to all who followed in the same path of contemplation and purity, at once a Teacher and a Type.

There is yet one aspect more of 'Umar's mind in which we have not contemplated him, and this is a very amiable one. With it let us take our leave of him, laying at his feet our feeble tribute of admiration and sympathy, in the hope that the circle of his true friends and faithful interpreters may widen, and that, in his own words, he may bind many a heart to him hereafter in the cords of love.

Tho' the world's face thou make all populous to be,
 'Tis far less than to bring one sorrowing heart in glee :
 If thou by graciousness but make one freeman bond,
 'Tis better than to set a thousand bondmen free. (444.)

* "Thon knowest neither bread nor salt"—a periphrasis for the basest ingratitude in host or guest.

† To convince a sinner, Maryam's Son "makes earth rosy" with the blood of a gazelle, broils and partakes of it; then gathering the bones, breathes into them—

New life the fawn snatched from that breath's impress.
 Worshipped, and sprang into the wilderness.

‡ Hâfiz, after his fashion, makes 'Isâ lead the celestial dance with Znhra (Venus), the spirit of the Evening Star.



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