



# **THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS**

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**BY  
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# THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS

1

Once on a time from all the Circles seven  
Between the stedfast Earth and rolling Heaven  
THE BIRDS, of all Note, Plumage, and Degree,  
That float in Air, and roost upon the Tree;  
And they that from the Waters snatch their Meat,  
And they that scour the Desert with long Feet;  
Birds of all Natures, known or not to Man,  
Flock'd from all Quarters into full Divan,  
On no less solemn business than to find  
Or choose, a Sultan Khalif of their kind,

10

For whom, if never theirs, or lost, they pined.  
The Snake had his, 'twas said; and so the Beast  
His Lion-lord: and Man had his, at least:  
And that the Birds, who nearest were the Skies,  
And went apparell'd in its Angel Dyes.  
Should be without—under no better Law  
Than that which lost all other in the Maw—  
Disperst without a Bond of Union—nay,  
Or meeting to make each the other's Prey—  
This was the Grievance—this the solemn Thing

20

On which the scatter'd Commonwealth of Wing,  
From all the four Winds, flying like to Cloud  
That met and blacken'd Heav'n, and Thunder-loud  
With Sound of whirring Wings and Beaks that clash'd  
Down like a Torrent on the Desert dash'd:

Till by Degrees, the Hubbub and Pell-mell  
Into some Order and Precedence fell,  
And, Proclamation made of Silence, each  
In special Accent, but in general Speech  
That all should understand, as seem'd him best,

30

The Congregation of all Wings address.

And first, with Heart so full as from his Eyes  
Ran weeping, up rose Tajidar the Wise;  
The mystic Mark upon whose Bosom show'd  
That He alone of all the Birds THE ROAD  
Had travell'd: and the Crown upon his Head  
Had reach'd the Goal; and He stood forth and said:

'O Birds, by what Authority divine  
I speak you know by *His* authentic Sign,  
And Name, emblazon'd on my Breast and Bill:

40

Whose Counsel I assist at, and fulfil:  
At His Behest I measured as he plann'd  
The Spaces of the Air and Sea and Land;  
I gauged the secret sources of the Springs  
From Cloud to Fish: the Shadow of my Wings  
Dream'd over sleeping Deluge: piloted  
The Blast that bore Sulayman's Throne: and led  
The Cloud of Birds that canopied his Head;  
Whose Word I brought to Balkis: and I shared  
The Counsel that with Asaf he prepared.

50

And now you want a Khalif: and I know  
Him, and his whereabouts, and How to go:

And go alone I could, and plead your cause  
Alone for all: but, by the eternal laws,  
Yourselves by Toil and Travel of your own  
Must for your old Delinquency atone.  
Were you indeed not blinded by the Curse  
Of Self-exile, that still grows worse and worse,  
Yourselves would know that, though *you* see him not,  
He is with you this Moment, on this Spot,

60

Your Lord through all Forgetfulness and Crime,  
Here, There, and Everywhere, and through all Time.  
But as a Father, whom some wayward Child  
By sinful Self-will has unreconciled,  
Waits till the sullen Reprobate at cost  
Of long Repentance should regain the Lost;  
Therefore, yourselves to see as you are seen,  
Yourselves must bridge the Gulf you made between  
By such a Search and Travel to be gone  
Up to the mighty mountain Kaf, whereon

70

Hinges the World, and round about whose Knees  
Into one Ocean mingle the Sev'n Seas;  
In whose impenetrable Forest-folds  
Of Light and Dark "Symurgh" his Presence holds;  
Not to be reach'd, if to be reach'd at all  
But by a Road the stoutest might apal;  
Of Travel not of Days or Months, but Years—  
Life-long perhaps: of Dangers, Doubts, and Fears  
As yet unheard of: Sweat of Blood and Brain  
Interminable—often all in vain—

80

And, if successful, no Return again:  
A Road whose very Preparation scared  
The Traveller who yet must be prepared.  
Who then this Travel to Result would bring  
Needs both a Lion's Heart beneath the Wing,  
And even more, a Spirit purified  
Of Worldly Passion, Malice, Lust, and Pride:  
Yea, ev'n of Worldly *Wisdom*, which grows dim  
And dark, the nearer it approaches *Him*,  
Who to the Spirit's Eye alone reveal'd,

90

By sacrifice of Wisdom's self unseal'd;  
Without which none who reach the Place could bear  
To look upon the Glory dwelling there.'

One Night from out the swarming City Gate  
Stept holy Bajazyd, to meditate  
Alone amid the breathing Fields that lay  
In solitary Silence leagues away,  
Beneath a Moon and Stars as bright as Day.  
And the Saint wondering such a Temple were,  
And so lit up, and scarce one worshipper,

100

A voice from Heav'n amid the stillness said:  
'The Royal Road is not for all to tread,  
Nor is the Royal Palace for the Rout,  
Who, even if they reach it, are shut out.  
The Blaze that from my Harim window breaks  
With fright the Rabble of the Roadside takes;  
And ev'n of those that at my Portal din,  
Thousands may knock for one that enters in.'

Thus spoke the Tajidar: and the wing'd Crowd,  
That underneath his Word in Silence bow'd,

110

Clapp'd Acclamation: and their Hearts and Eyes  
Were kindled by the Firebrand of the Wise.  
They felt their Degradation: they believed  
The word that told them how to be retrieved,  
And in that glorious Consummation won  
Forgot the Cost at which it must be done.  
'They only *long'd* to follow: they would go  
Whither he led, through Flood, or Fire, or Snow'—  
So cried the Multitude. But some there were  
Who listen'd with a cold disdainful air,

120

Content with what they were, or grudging Cost  
Of Time or Travel that might all be lost;  
These, one by one, came forward, and preferr'd  
Unwise Objection: which the wiser Word  
Shot with direct Reproof, or subtly round  
With Argument and Allegory wound.

The *Pheasant* first would know by what pretence  
The Tajidar to that pre-eminence  
Was raised—a Bird, but for his lofty Crest  
(And such the Pheasant had) like all the Rest—

130

Who answer'd—'By no Virtue of my own  
Sulayman chose me, but by *His* alone:  
Not by the Gold and Silver of my Sighs  
Made mine, but the free Largess of his Eyes.  
Behold the Grace of Allah comes and goes  
As to Itself is good: and no one knows  
Which way it turns: in that mysterious Court  
Not he most finds who furthest travels for't.



For one may crawl upon his knees Life-long,  
And yet may never reach, or all go wrong:

140

Another just arriving at the Place  
He toil'd for, and—the Door shut in his Face:  
Whereas Another, scarcely gone a Stride,  
And suddenly—Behold he is Inside!—  
But though the Runner win not, he that *stands*,  
No Thorn will turn to Roses in *his* Hands:  
Each one must do his best and all endure,  
And all endeavour, hoping but not sure.  
Heav'n its own Umpire is; its Bidding do,  
And Thou perchance shalt be Sulayman's too.'

150

One day Shah Mahmud, riding with the Wind  
A-hunting, left his Retinue behind,  
And coming to a River, whose swift Course  
Doubled back Game and Dog, and Man and Horse,  
Beheld upon the Shore a little Lad  
A-fishing, very poor, and Tatter-clad  
He was, and weeping as his Heart would break.  
So the Great Sultan, for good humour's sake  
Pull'd in his Horse a moment, and drew nigh,  
And after making his Salam, ask'd why

160

He wept—weeping, the Sultan said, so sore  
As he had never seen one weep before.  
The Boy look'd up, and 'O Amir,' he said,  
'Sev'n of us are at home, and Father dead,  
And Mother left with scarce a Bit of Bread:  
And now since Sunrise have I fish'd—and see!  
Caught nothing for our Supper—Woe is Me!'  
The Sultan lighted from his horse. 'Behold,'

Said he, 'Good Fortune will not be controll'd:  
And, since Today yours seems to turn from you,

170

Suppose we try for once what mine will do,  
And we will share alike in all I win.'  
So the Shah took, and flung his Fortune in,  
The Net; which, cast by the Great Mahmud's Hand,  
A hundred glittering Fishes brought to Land.  
The Lad look'd up in Wonder—Mahmud smiled  
And vaulted into Saddle. But the Child  
Ran after—'Nay, Amir, but half the Haul  
Is yours by Bargain'—'Nay, Today take all,'  
The Sultan cried, and shook his Bridle free—

180

'But mind—Tomorrow All belongs to Me—'  
And so rode off. Next morning at Divan  
The Sultan's Mind upon his Bargain ran,  
And being somewhat in a mind for sport  
Sent for the Lad: who, carried up to Court,  
And marching into Royalty's full Blaze  
With such a Catch of Fish as yesterday's,  
The Sultan call'd and set him by his side,  
And asking him, 'What Luck?' The Boy replied,  
'*This* is the Luck that follows every Cast,

190

Since o'er my Net the Sultan's Shadow pass'd.'  
  
Then came *The Nightingale*, from such a Draught  
Of Ecstasy that from the Rose he quaff'd  
Reeling as drunk, and ever did distil  
In exquisite divisions from his Bill  
To inflame the Hearts of Men—and thus sang He—

'To me alone, alone, is giv'n the Key  
Of Love; of whose whole Mystery possesst,  
When I reveal a little to the Rest,  
Forthwith Creation listening forsakes

200

The Reins of Reason, and my Frenzy takes:  
Yea, whosoever once has quaint this wine  
He leaves unlisten'd David's Song for mine.  
In vain do Men for my Divisions strive,  
And die themselves making dead Lutes alive:  
I hang the Stars with Meshes for Men's Souls:  
The Garden underneath my Music rolls.  
The long, long Morns that mourn the Rose away  
I sit in silence, and on Anguish prey:  
But the first Air which the New Year shall breathe

210

Up to my Boughs of Message from beneath  
That in her green Harim my Bride unveils,  
My Throat bursts silence and *her* Advent hails,  
Who in her crimson Volume registers  
The Notes of Him whose Life is lost in hers.  
The Rose I love and worship now is here;  
If dying, yet reviving, Year by Year;  
But that you tell of, all my Life why waste  
In vainly searching; or, if found, not taste?'

So with Division infinite and Trill

220

On would the Nightingale have warbled still,  
And all the World have listen'd; but a Note  
Of sterner Import check'd the lovesick Throat.

'O watering with thy melodious Tears  
Love's Garden, and who dost indeed the Ears

Of men with thy melodious Fingers mould  
As David's Finger Iron did of old:  
Why not, like David, dedicate thy Dower  
Of Song to something better than a Flower?  
Empress indeed of Beauty, so they say,

230

But one whose Empire hardly lasts a Day,  
By Insurrection of the Morning's Breath  
That made her hurried to Decay and Death:  
And while she lasts contented to be seen,  
And worshipt, for the Garden's only Queen,  
Leaving thee singing on thy Bough forlorn,  
Or if she smile on Thee, perhaps in Scorn.'

Like that fond Dervish waiting in the throng  
When some World-famous Beauty went along,  
Who smiling on the Antic as she pass'd—

240

Forthwith Staff, Bead and Scrip away he cast,  
And grovelling in the Kennel, took to whine  
Before her Door among the Dogs and Swine.  
Which when she often went unheeding by,  
But one day quite as heedless ask'd him—'Why?'—  
He told of that one Smile, which, all the Rest  
Passing, had kindled Hope within his Breast—  
Again she smiled and said, 'O self-beguiled  
Poor Wretch, at whom and not on whom I smiled.'

Then came the subtle *Parrot* in a coat

250

Greener than Greensward, and about his Throat  
A Collar ran of sub-sulphureous Gold;

And in his Beak a Sugar-plum he troll'd,  
That all his Words with luscious Lispering ran,  
And to this Tune—'O cruel Cage, and Man  
More iron still who did confine me there,  
Who else with him whose Livery I wear  
Ere this to his Eternal Fount had been,  
And drunk what should have kept me ever-green.  
But now I know the Place, and I am free

260

To go, and all the Wise will follow Me.  
Some'—and upon the Nightingale one Eye  
He leer'd—'for nothing but the Blossom sigh:  
But I am for the luscious Pulp that grows  
Where, and for which the Blossom only blows:  
And which so long as the Green Tree provides  
What better grows along Kaf's dreary Sides?  
And what more needful Prophet *there* than He  
Who gives me Life to nip it from the Tree?'

To whom the Tajidar—'O thou whose Best

270

In the green leaf of Paradise is drest,  
But whose Neck kindles with a lower Fire—  
O slip the collar off of base Desire,  
And stand apparell'd in Heav'n's Woof entire!  
*This* Life that hangs so sweet about your Lips  
But, spite of all your Khizar, slips and slips,  
What is it but itself the coarser Rind  
Of the True Life withinside and behind,  
Which he shall never never reach unto  
Till the gross Shell of Carcase he break through?'

280

For what said He, that dying Hermit, whom  
Your Prophet came to, trailing through the Gloom  
His Emerald Vest, and tempted—'Come with Me,  
And Live.' The Hermit answered—'Not with Thee.  
Two Worlds there are, and *This* was thy Design,  
And thou hast got it; but The *Next* is mine;  
Whose Fount is *this* life's Death, and to whose Side  
Ev'n now I find my Way without a Guide.'

Then like a Sultan glittering in all Rays  
Of Jewelry, and deckt with his own Blaze,

290

The glorious Peacock swept into the Ring:  
And, turning slowly that the glorious Thing  
Might fill all Eyes with wonder, thus said He.  
'Behold, the Secret Artist, making me,  
With no one Colour of the skies bedeckt,  
But from its Angel's Feathers did select  
To make up mine withal, the Gabriel  
Of all the Birds: though from my Place I fell  
In Eden, when Acquaintance I did make  
In those blest days with that Sev'n-headed Snake,

300

And thence with him, my perfect Beauty marr'd  
With these ill Feet, was thrust out and debarr'd.  
Little I care for Worldly Fruit or Flower,  
Would you restore me to lost Eden's Bower,  
But first my Beauty making all complete  
With reparation of these ugly Feet.'

'Were it,' 'twas answer'd, 'only to return  
To that lost Eden, better far to burn  
In Self-abasement up thy pluméd Pride,  
And ev'n with lamer feet to creep inside—

310

But all mistaken you and all like you  
That long for that lost Eden as the true;  
Fair as it was, still nothing but the shade  
And Out-court of the Majesty that made.  
That which I point you tow'rd, and which the King  
I tell you of broods over with his Wing,  
With no deciduous leaf, but with the Rose  
Of Spiritual Beauty, smells and glows:  
No plot of Earthly Pleasance, but the whole  
True Garden of the Universal Soul.'

320

For so Creation's Master-Jewel fell  
From that same Eden: loving which too well,  
The Work before the Artist did prefer,  
And in the Garden lost the Gardener.  
Wherefore one Day about the Garden went  
A voice that found him in his false Content,  
And like a bitter Sarsar of the North  
Shrivell'd the Garden up, and drove him forth  
Into the Wilderness: and so the Eye  
Of Eden closed on him till by and by.

330

Then from a Ruin where conceal'd he lay  
Watching his buried Gold, and hating Day,  
Hooted *The Owl*.—'I tell you, my Delight  
Is in the Ruin and the Dead of Night  
Where I was born, and where I love to wone  
All my Life long, sitting on some cold stone  
Away from all your roustering Companies,  
In some dark Corner where a Treasure lies;  
That, buried by some Miser in the Dark,  
Speaks up to me at Midnight like a Spark;

340

And o'er it like a Talisman I brood,  
Companion of the Serpent and the Toad.  
What need of other Sovereign, having found,  
And keeping as in Prison underground,  
One before whom all other Kings bow down,  
And with his glittering Heel their Foreheads crown?'

'He that a Miser lives and Miser dies,  
At the Last Day what Figure shall he rise?'

A Fellow all his life lived hoarding Gold,  
And, dying, hoarded left it. And behold,

350

One Night his Son saw peering through the House  
A Man, with yet the semblance of a Mouse,  
Watching a crevice in the Wall—and cried  
'My Father?'—'Yes,' the Musulman replied,  
'Thy Father!'—'But why watching thus?'—'For fear  
Lest any smell my Treasure buried here.'  
'But wherefore, Sir, so metamousified?'  
'Because, my Son, such is the true outside  
Of the inner Soul by which I lived and died.'

'Aye,' said *The Partridge*, with his Foot and Bill

360

Crimson with raking Rubies from the Hill,  
And clattering his Spurs—'Wherewith the Ground  
I stab,' said he, 'for Rubies, that, when found  
I swallow; which, as soon as swallow'd, turn  
To Sparks which though my beak and eyes do burn.  
Gold, as you say, is but dull Metal dead,  
And hanging on the Hoarder's Soul like Lead:



But Rubies that have Blood within, and grown  
And nourisht in the Mountain Heart of Stone,  
Burn with an inward Light, which they inspire,

370

And make their Owners Lords of their Desire.'

To whom the Tajidar—'As idly sold  
To the quick Pebble as the drowsy Gold,  
As dead when sleeping in their mountain mine  
As dangerous to Him who makes them shine:  
Slavish indeed to do their Lord's Commands,  
And slave-like aptest to escape his Hands,  
And serve a second Master like the first,  
And working all their wonders for the worst.'

Never was Jewel after or before

380

Like that Sulayman for a Signet wore:  
Whereby one Ruby, weighing scarce a grain  
Did Sea and Land and all therein constrain,  
Yea, ev'n the Winds of Heav'n—made the fierce East  
Bear his League-wide Pavillion like a Beast,  
Whither he would: yea, the Good Angel held  
His subject, and the lower Fiend compell'd.  
Till, looking round about him in his pride,  
He overtax'd the Fountain that supplied,  
Praying that after him no Son of Clay

390

Should ever touch his Glory. And one Day  
Almighty God his Jewel stole away,  
And gave it to the Div, who with the Ring  
Wore also the Resemblance of the King,

And so for forty days play'd such a Game  
As blots Sulayman's forty years with Shame.

Then *The Shah-Falcon*, tossing up his Head  
Blink-hooded as it was—'Behold,' he said,  
'I am the chosen Comrade of the King,  
And perch upon the Fist that wears the Ring;

400

Born, bred, and nourisht, in the Royal Court,  
I take the Royal Name and make the Sport.  
And if strict Discipline I undergo  
And half my Life am blinded—be it so;  
Because the Shah's Companion ill may brook  
On aught save Royal Company to look.  
And why am I to leave my King, and fare  
With all these Rabble Wings I know not where?'—

'O blind indeed'—the Answer was, 'and dark  
To any but a vulgar Mortal Mark,

410

And drunk with Pride of Vassalage to those  
Whose Humour like their Kingdom comes and goes;  
All Mutability: who one Day please  
To give: and next Day what they gave not seize:  
Like to the Fire: a dangerous Friend at best,  
Which who keeps farthest from does wiseliest.

A certain Shah there was in Days foregone  
Who had a lovely Slave he doted on,  
And cherish'd as the Apple of his Eye,  
Clad gloriously, fed sumptuously, set high,

420

And never was at Ease were *He* not by,  
Who yet, for all this Sunshine, Day by Day  
Was seen to wither like a Flower away.  
Which, when observing, one without the Veil  
Of Favour ask'd the Favourite—'Why so pale  
And sad?' thus sadly answer'd the poor Thing—  
'No Sun that rises sets until the King,  
Whose Archery is famous among Men,  
Aims at an Apple on my Head. and when  
The stricken Apple splits. and those who stand

430

Around cry "Lo! the Shah's unerring Hand!"  
Then He too laughing asks me "Why so pale  
And sorrow-some? as could the Sultan fail,  
Who such a master of the Bow confest,  
And aiming by the Head that he loves best."

Then on a sudden swoop'd *The Phoenix* down  
As though he wore as well as gave The Crown:  
And cried—'I care not, I, to wait on Kings,  
Whose crowns are but the Shadow of my Wings!'

'Aye,' was the Answer—'And, pray, how has sped,

440

On which it lighted, many a mortal Head?'

A certain Sultan dying, his Vizier  
In Dream beheld him, and in mortal Fear  
Began—'O mighty Shah of Shahs! Thrice-blest'—  
But loud the Vision shriek'd and struck its Breast,  
And 'Stab me not with empty Title!' cried—  
'One only Shah there is, and none beside,  
Who from his Throne above for certain Ends  
Awhile some Spangle of his Glory lends  
To Men on Earth; but calling in again

450

Exacts a strict account of every Grain.  
Sultan I lived, and held the World in scorn:  
O better had I glean'd the Field of Corn!  
O better had I been a Beggar born,  
And for my Throne and Crown, down in the Dust  
My living Head had laid where Dead I must!  
O wither'd, wither'd, wither'd, be the Wing  
Whose overcasting Shadow made me King!

Then from a Pond, where all day long he kept,  
Waddled the dapper *Duck* demure, adept

460

At infinite Ablution, and precise  
In keeping of his Raiment clean and nice.  
And 'Sure of all the Race of Birds,' said He,  
'None for Religious Purity like Me,  
Beyond what strictest Rituals prescribe—  
Methinks I am the Saint of all our Tribe,  
To whom, by Miracle, the Water, that  
I wash in, also makes my Praying-Mat.'

To whom, more angrily than all, replied  
The Leader, lashing that religious Pride,

470

That under ritual Obedience  
To outer Law with inner might dispense:  
For, fair as all the Feather to be seen,  
Could one see *through*, the Maw was not so clean:  
But He that made both Maw and Feather too  
Would take account of, seeing through and through.

A Shah returning to his Capital,  
His subjects drest it forth in Festival,  
Thronging with Acclamation Square and Street,  
And kneeling flung before his Horse's feet

480

Jewel and Gold. All which with scarce an Eye  
The Sultan superciliously rode by:  
Till coming to the public Prison, They  
Who dwelt within those grisly Walls, by way  
Of Welcome, having neither Pearl nor Gold,  
Over the wall chopt Head and Carcase roll'd,  
Some almost parcht to Mummy with the Sun,  
Some wet with Execution that day done.  
At which grim Compliment at last the Shah  
Drew Bridle: and amid a wild Hurrah

490

Of savage Recognition, smiling threw  
Silver and Gold among the wretched Crew,  
And so rode forward. Whereat of his Train  
One wondering that, while others sued in vain  
With costly gifts, which carelessly he pass'd,  
But smiled at ghastly Welcome like the last;  
The Shah made answer—'All that Pearl and Gold  
Of ostentatious Welcome only told:  
A little with great Clamour from the Store  
Of hypocrites who kept at home much more.

500

But when those sever'd Heads and Trunks I saw—  
Save by strict Execution of my Law  
They had not parted company; not one  
But told my Will not talk'd about, but done.'

Then from a Wood was heard unseen to coo  
The *Ring-dove*—'Yúsuf! Yúsuf! Yúsuf! Yú-'  
(For thus her sorrow broke her Note in twain,  
And, just where broken, took it up again)  
'-suf! Yúsuf! Yúsuf! Yúsuf!'—But one Note,  
Which still repeating, she made hoarse her throat:

510

Till checkt—'O You, who with your idle Sighs  
Block up the Road of better Enterprise;  
Sham Sorrow all, or bad as sham if true,  
When once the better thing is come to do;  
Beware lest wailing thus you meet his Doom  
Who all too long his Darling wept, from whom  
You draw the very Name you hold so dear,  
And which the World is somewhat tired to hear.'

When Yusuf from his Father's Home was torn,  
The Patriarch's Heart was utterly forlorn,

520

And, like a Pipe with but one stop, his Tongue  
With nothing but the name of 'Yusuf' rung.  
Then down from Heaven's Branches flew the *Bird  
Of Heav'n* and said 'God wearies of that word:  
Hast thou not else to do and else to say?'  
So Jacob's lips were sealéd from that Day.  
But one Night in a Vision, far away  
His darling in some alien Field he saw  
Binding the Sheaf; and what between the Awe  
Of God's Displeasure and the bitter Pass

530

Of passionate Affection, sigh'd 'Alas—'  
And stopp'd—But with the morning Sword of Flame  
That oped his Eyes the sterner Angel's came

'For the forbidden Word not utter'd by  
Thy Lips was yet sequester'd in that Sigh.'  
And the right Passion whose Excess was wrong  
Blinded the aged Eyes that wept too long.

And after these came others—arguing,  
Enquiring and excusing—some one Thing,  
And some another—endless to repeat,

540

But, in the Main, Sloth, Folly, or Deceit.  
Their Souls were to the vulgar Figure cast  
Of earthly Victual not of Heavenly Fast.  
At last one smaller Bird, of a rare kind,  
Of modest Plume and unpretentious Mind,  
Whisper'd 'O Tajidar, we know indeed  
How Thou both knowest, and would'st help our Need;  
For thou art wise and holy, and hast been  
Behind the Veil, and there The Presence seen.  
But we are weak and vain, with little care

550

Beyond our yearly Nests and daily Fare—  
How should we reach the Mountain? and if there  
How get so great a Prince to hear our Prayer?  
For there, you say, dwells *The Symurgh* alone  
In Glory, like Sulayman on his Throne,  
And we but Pismires at his feet: can He  
Such puny Creatures stoop to hear, or see;  
Or hearing, seeing, own us—unakin  
As He to Folly, Woe, and Death, and Sin?'—

To whom the Tajidar, whose Voice for those

560

Bewilder'd ones to full Compassion rose  
'O lost so long in exile, you disclaim  
The very Fount of Being whence you came,  
Cannot be parted from, and, will or no,  
Whether for Good or Evil must re-flow!  
For look—the Shadows into which the Light  
Of his pure Essence down by infinite  
Gradation dwindles, which at random play  
Through Space in Shape indefinite—one Ray  
Of his Creative *Will* into *defined*

570

Creation quickens: We that swim the Wind,  
And they the Flood below, and Man and Beast  
That walk between, from Lion to the least  
Pismire that creeps along Sulayman's Wall—  
Yea, that in which they swim, fly, walk, and crawl—  
However near the Fountain Light, or far  
Removed, yet *His* authentic Shadows are;  
Dead Matter's Self but the dark Residue  
Exterminating Glory dwindles to.  
A Mystery too fearful in the Crowd

580

To utter—scarcely to Thyself aloud—  
But when in solitary Watch and Prayer  
Consider'd: and religiously beware  
Lest Thou the Copy with the Type confound;  
And *Deity*, with *Deity* indrown'd,—  
For as pure Water into purer Wine  
Incorporating shall itself reline  
While the dull Drug lies half-resolved below,  
With Him and with his Shadows is it so:  
The baser Forms, to whatsoever Change



590

Subject, still vary through their lower Range:  
To which the higher even shall decay,  
That, letting ooze their better Part away  
For Things of Sense and Matter, in the End  
Shall merge into the Clay to which they tend.  
Unlike to him, who straining through the Bond  
Of outward Being for a Life beyond,  
While the gross Worldling to *his* Centre clings,  
That draws him deeper in, exulting springs  
To merge him in the central *Soul* of Things.

600

And shall not he pass home with other Zest  
Who, with full Knowledge, yearns for such a Rest,  
Than he, who with his better self at strife,  
Drags on the weary Exile call'd *This* Life?—  
One, like a child with outstretcht Arms and Face  
Upturn'd, anticipates his Sire's Embrace;  
The other crouching like a guilty Slave  
Till flogg'd to Punishment across the Grave.  
And, knowing that *His* glory ill can bear  
The unpurged Eye; do thou Thy Breast prepare:

610

And the mysterious Mirror He set there,  
To temper his reflected Image in,  
Clear of Distortion, Doubleness, and Sin:  
And in thy Conscience understanding *this*,  
The *Double* only seems, but The *One is*,  
*Thyself* to Self-annihilation give  
That this false Two in that true One may live.  
For this I say: if, looking in thy Heart,

Thou for *Self-whole* mistake thy *Shadow-part*,  
That Shadow-part indeed into The Sun

620

Shall melt, but senseless of its Union:  
But in that Mirror if with purged eyes  
Thy Shadow Thou *for* Shadow recognise,  
Then shalt Thou back into thy Centre fall  
A conscious Ray of that eternal *All*.'

He ceased, and for awhile Amazement quell'd  
The Host, and in the Chain of Silence held:  
A Mystery so awful who would dare—  
So glorious who would not wish—to share?  
So Silence brooded on the feather'd Folk,

630

Till here and there a timid Murmur broke  
From some too poor in honest Confidence,  
And then from others of too much Pretence;  
Whom both, as each unduly hoped or fear'd,  
The Tajidar in answer check'd or cheer'd.

Some said their Hearts were good indeed to go  
The Way he pointed out: but they were slow  
Of Comprehension, and scarce understood  
Their present Evil or the promised Good:  
And so, tho' willing to do all they could,

640

Must not they fall short, or go wholly wrong,  
On such mysterious Errand, and so long?  
Whom the wise Leader bid but Do their Best  
In Hope and Faith, and leave to Him the rest,

For He who fix'd the Race, and knew its Length  
And Danger, also knew the Runner's Strength.

Shah Mahmud, absent on an Enterprise,  
Ayas, the very Darling of his eyes,  
At home under an Evil Eye fell sick,  
Then cried the Sultan to a soldier 'Quick!

650

To Horse! to Horse! without a Moment's Stay,—  
The shortest Road with all the Speed you may,—  
Or, by the Lord, your Head shall pay for it!—  
Off went the Soldier, plying Spur and Bit—  
Over the sandy Desert, over green  
Valley, and Mountain, and the Stream between,  
Without a Moment's Stop for rest or bait,  
Up to the City—to the Palace Gate—  
Up to the Presence-Chamber at a Stride—  
And Lo! The Sultan at his Darling's side!—

660

Then thought the Soldier—'I have done my Best,  
And yet shall die for it.' The Sultan guess'd  
His Thought and smiled. 'Indeed your Best you did,  
The nearest Road you knew, and well you rid:  
And if *I* knew a shorter, my Excess  
Of Knowledge does but justify thy Less.'

And then, with drooping Crest and Feather, came  
Others, bow'd down with Penitence and Shame.  
They long'd indeed to go; 'but how begin,  
Mesh'd and entangled as they were in Sin

670

Which often-times Repentance of past Wrong  
As often broken had but knit more strong?'  
Whom the wise Leader bid be of good cheer,  
And, conscious of the Fault, dismiss the Fear,  
Nor at the very Entrance of the Fray  
Their Weapon, ev'n if broken, fling away:  
Since Mercy on the broken Branch anew  
Would blossom were but each Repentance true.

For did not God his Prophet take to Task?  
'Sev'n-times of Thee did Karun Pardon ask;

680

Which, hadst thou been like Me his Maker—yea,  
But present at the Kneading of his Clay  
With those twain Elements of Hell and Heav'n,—  
One prayer had won what Thou deny'st to Sev'n.'

For like a Child sent with a fluttering Light  
To feel his way along a gusty Night  
Man walks the World: again and yet again  
The Lamp shall be by Fits of Passion slain:  
But shall not He who sent him from the Door  
Relight the Lamp once more, and yet once more?

690

When the rebellious Host from Death shall wake  
Black with Despair of Judgment, God shall take  
Ages of holy Merit from the Count  
Of Angels to make up Man's short Amount,  
And bid the murmuring Angel gladly spare  
Of that which, undiminishing his Share,  
Of Bliss, shall rescue Thousands from the Cost  
Of Bankruptcy within the Prison lost.

Another Story told how in the Scale  
Good Will beyond mere Knowledge would prevail.

700

In Paradise the Angel Gabriel heard  
The Lips of Allah trembling with the Word  
Of perfect Acceptation: and he thought  
'Some perfect Faith such perfect Answer wrought,  
But whose?'—And therewith slipping from the Crypt  
Of Sidra, through the Angel-ranks he slipt  
Watching what Lip yet trembled with the Shot  
That so had hit the Mark—but found it not.  
Then, in a Glance to Earth, he threaded through  
Mosque, Palace, Cell and Cottage of the True

710

Belief—in vain; so back to Heaven went  
And—Allah's Lips still trembling with assent!  
Then the tenacious Angel once again  
Threaded the Ranks of Heav'n and Earth—in vain—  
Till, once again return'd to Paradise,  
There, looking into God's, the Angel's Eyes  
Beheld the Prayer that brought that Benison  
Rising like Incense from the Lips of one  
Who to an Idol bowed—as best he knew  
Under that False God worshipping the True.

720

And then came others whom the summons found  
Not wholly sick indeed, but far from sound:  
Whose light inconstant Soul alternate flew  
From Saint to Sinner, and to both untrue;  
Who like a niggard Tailor, tried to match  
Truth's single Garment with a worldly Patch.  
A dangerous Game; for, striving to adjust  
The hesitating Scale of either Lust,  
That which had least within it upward flew,  
And still the weightier to the Earth down drew,

730

And, while suspended between Rise and Fall,  
Apt with a shaking Hand to forfeit all.

There was a Queen of Egypt like the Bride  
Of Night, Full-moon-faced and Canopus-eyed,  
Whom one among the meanest of her Crowd  
Loved—and she knew it (for he loved aloud),  
And sent for him, and said 'Thou lov'st thy Queen:  
Now therefore Thou hast this to choose between:  
Fly for thy Life: or for this one night Wed  
Thy Queen, and with the Sunrise lose thy Head.'

740

He paused—he turn'd to fly—she struck him dead.  
'For had he truly loved his Queen,' said She,  
'He would at once have giv'n his Life for me,  
And Life and Wife had carried: but he lied;  
And loving only Life, has justly died.'

And then came one who having clear'd his Throat  
With sanctimonious Sweetness in his Note  
Thus lisp'd—'Behold I languish from the first  
With passionate and unrequited Thirst  
Of Love for more than any mortal Bird.

750

Therefore have I withdrawn me from the Herd  
To pine in Solitude. But Thou at last  
Hast drawn a line across the dreary Past,  
And sure I am by Foretaste that the Wine  
I long'd for, and Thou tell'st of, shall be mine.'

But he was sternly checkt. 'I tell thee this:  
Such Boast is no Assurance of such Bliss:

Thou canst not even fill the sail of Prayer  
Unless from *Him* breathe that authentic Air  
That shall lift up the Curtain that divides

760

His Lover from the Harim where *He* hides—  
And the Fulfilment of thy Vows must be,  
Not from thy Love for Him, but His for Thee.'

The third night after Bajazyd had died,  
One saw him, in a dream, at his Bedside,  
And said, 'Thou Bajazyd? Tell me O Pyr,  
How fared it there with Munkar and Nakyr?'  
And Bajazyd replied, 'When from the Grave  
They met me rising, and "If Allah's slave"  
Ask'd me, "or collar'd with the Chain of Hell?"

770

I said "Not I but God alone can tell:  
My Passion for his service were but fond  
Ambition had not He approved the Bond:  
Had He not round my neck the Collar thrown  
And told me in the Number of his own;  
And that He only knew. What signifies  
A hundred Years of Prayer if none replies?"

'But,' said Another, 'then shall none the Seal  
Of Acceptation on his Forehead feel  
Ere the Grave yield them on the other Side

780

Where all is settled?'

But the Chief replied—  
'Enough for us to know that who is meet  
Shall enter, and with unreprieved Feet,

(Ev'n as he might upon the Waters walk)  
The Presence-room, and in the Presence talk  
With such unbridled Licence as shall seem  
To the Uninitiated to blaspheme.'

Just as another Holy Spirit fled,  
The Skies above him burst into a Bed  
Of Angels looking down and singing clear

790

'Nightingale! Nightingale! thy Rose is here!  
And yet, the Door wide open to that Bliss,  
As some hot Lover slights a scanty Kiss,  
The Saint cried 'All I sigh'd for come to *this*?  
I who lifelong have struggled, Lord, to be  
Not of thy Angels one, but one with Thee!'

Others were sure that all he said was true:  
They were extremely wicked, that they knew:  
And much they long'd to go at once—but some,  
They said, so unexpectedly had come

800

Leaving their Nests half-built—in bad Repair—  
With Children in—Themselves about to pair—  
'Might he not choose a better Season—nay,  
Better perhaps a Year or Two's Delay,  
Till all was settled, and themselves more stout  
And strong to carry their Repentance out—  
And then'—

'And then, the same or like Excuse,  
With harden'd Heart and Resolution loose  
With dallying: and old Age itself engaged  
Still to shirk that which shirking we have aged:



810

And so with Self-delusion, till, too late,  
Death upon all Repentance shuts the Gate;  
Or some fierce blow compels the Way to choose,  
And forced Repentance half its Virtue lose.'

As of an aged Indian King they tell  
Who, when his Empire with his Army fell  
Under young Mahmud's Sword of Wrath, was sent  
At sunset to the Conqueror in his Tent;  
But, ere the old King's silver head could reach  
The Ground, was lifted up—with kindly Speech,

820

And with so holy Mercy reassured,  
That, after due Persuasion, he abjured  
His idols, sate upon Mahmud's Divan,  
And took the Name and Faith of Musulman.  
But when the Night fell, in his Tent alone  
The poor old King was heard to weep and groan  
And smite his Bosom; which, when Mahmud knew,  
He went to him and said 'Lo, if Thou rue  
Thy lost Dominion, Thou shalt wear the Ring  
Of thrice as large a Realm.' But the dark King

830

Still wept, and Ashes on his Forehead threw  
And cried 'Not for my Kingdom lost I rue:  
But thinking how at the Last Day, will stand  
*The Prophet* with *The Volume* in his Hand,  
And ask of me "How was't that, in thy Day  
Of Glory, Thou didst turn from Me and slay  
My People; but soon as thy Infidel  
Before my True Believers' Army fell

Like Corn before the Reaper—thou didst own  
His Sword who scoutedst *Me.*" Of seed so sown

840

What profitable Harvest should be grown?'

Then after cheering others who delay'd,  
Not of the Road but of Themselves afraid,  
The Tajidar the Troop of those address'd,  
Whose uncomplying Attitude confess'd  
Their Souls entangled in the old Deceit,  
And hankering still after forbidden Meat—

'O ye who so long feeding on the Husk  
Forgo the Fruit, and doting on the Dusk  
Of the false Dawn, are blinded to the True:

850

That in the Maidan of this World pursue  
The Golden Ball which, driven to the Goal,  
Wins the World's Game but loses your own Soul:  
Or like to Children after Bubbles run  
That still elude your Fingers; or, if won,  
Burst in Derision at your Touch; all thin  
Glitter without, and empty Wind within.  
So as a prosperous Worldling on the Bed  
Of Death—"Behold, I am as one," he said,  
"Who all my Life long have been measuring Wind,

860

And, dying, now leave even that behind"—  
This World's a Nest in which the Cockatrice  
Is warm'd and hatcht of Vanity and Vice:  
A false Bazaar whose Wares are all a lie,  
Or never worth the Price at which you buy:  
A many-headed Monster that, supplied

The faster, faster is unsatisfied;  
So as one, hearing a rich Fool one day  
To God for yet one other Blessing pray,  
Bid him no longer bounteous Heaven tire

870

For Life to feed, but Death to quench, the Fire.  
And what are all the Vanities and Wiles  
In which the false World decks herself and smiles  
To draw Men down into her harlot Lap?  
Lusts of the Flesh that Soul and Body sap,  
And, melting Soul down into carnal Lust,  
Ev'n that for which 'tis sacrificed disgust:  
Or Lust of worldly Glory—hollow more  
Than the Drum beaten at the Sultan's Door,  
And fluctuating with the Breath of Man

880

As the Vain Banner flapping in the Van.  
And Lust of Gold—perhaps of Lusts the worst;  
The mis-created Idol most accurst  
That between Man and Him who made him stands:  
The Felon that with suicidal hands  
He sweats to dig and rescue from his Grave,  
And sets at large to make Himself its Slave.

'For lo, to what worse than oblivion gone  
Are some the cozening World most doted on.  
Pharaoh tried *Glory*: and his Chariots drown'd:

890

Karun with all his Gold went underground:  
Down toppled Nembroth with his airy Stair:  
Schedad among his Roses lived—but *where?*

'And as the World upon her victims feeds  
So She herself goes down the Way she leads.  
For all her false allurements are the Threads  
The Spider from her Entrail spins, and spreads  
For Home and hunting-ground: And by and by  
Darts at due Signal on the tangled Fly,  
Seizes, dis-wings, and drains the Life, and leaves

900

The swinging Carcase, and forthwith re-weaves  
Her Web: each Victim adding to the store  
Of poison'd Entrail to entangle more.  
And so She bloats in Glory: till one Day  
The Master of the House, passing that way,  
Perceives, and with one flourish of his Broom  
Of Web and Fly and Spider clears the Room.

'Behold, dropt through the Gate of Mortal Birth,  
The Knightly Soul alights from Heav'n on Earth;  
Begins his Race, but scarce the Saddle feels,

910

When a foul Imp up from the distance steals,  
And, double as he will, about his Heels  
Closer and ever closer circling creeps,  
Then, half-invited, on the Saddle leaps,  
Clings round the Rider, and, once there, in vain  
The strongest strives to thrust him off again.  
In Childhood just peeps up the Blade of Ill,  
That Youth to Lust rears, Fury, and Self-will:  
And, as Man cools to sensual Desire,  
Ambition catches with as fierce a Fire;

920

Until Old Age sends him with one last Lust  
Of Gold, to keep it where he found—in Dust.  
Life at both ends so feeble and constrain'd  
How should that Imp of Sin be slain or chain'd?

'And woe to him who feeds the hateful Beast  
That of his Feeder makes an after-feast!  
We know the Wolf: by Strategem and Force  
Can hunt the Tiger down: but what Resource  
Against the Plague we heedless hatch within,  
Then, growing, pamper into full-blown Sin

930

With the Soul's self: ev'n, as the wise man said,  
Feeding the very Devil with God's own Bread;  
Until the Lord his Largess misapplied  
Resent, and drive us wholly from his Side?

'For should the Greyhound whom a Sultan fed,  
And by a jewell'd String a-hunting led,  
Turned by the Way to gnaw some nasty Thing  
And snarl at Him who twitch'd the silken String,  
Would not his Lord soon weary of Dispute,  
And turn adrift the incorrigible Brute?

940

'Nay, would one follow, and without a Chain,  
The only Master truly worth the Pain,  
One must beware lest, growing over-fond  
Of even Life's more consecrated Bond,  
We clog our Footsteps to the World beyond.  
Like that old Arab Chieftain, who confess'd  
His soul by two too Darling Things possess'd—  
That only Son of his: and that one Colt  
Descended from the Prophet's Thunderbolt.  
"And I might well bestow the last," he said,

950

"On him who brought me Word the Boy was dead."  
'And if so vain the glittering Fish we get,  
How doubly vain to dote upon the Net,  
Call'd Life, that draws them, patching up this thin  
Tissue of Breathing out and Breathing in,  
And so by husbanding each wretched Thread  
Spin out Death's very terror that we dread—  
For as the Raindrop from the sphere of God  
Dropt for a while into the Mortal Clod  
So little makes of its allotted Time

960

Back to its Heav'n itself to re-sublime,  
That it but serves to saturate its Clay  
With Bitterness that will not pass away.'

One day the Prophet on a River Bank,  
Dipping his Lips into the Channel, drank  
A Draught as sweet as Honey. Then there came  
One who an earthen Pitcher from the same  
Drew up, and drank: and after some short stay  
Under the Shadow, rose and went his Way.  
Leaving his earthen Bowl. In which, anew

970

Thirsting, the Prophet from the River drew,  
And drank from: but the Water that came up  
Sweet from the Stream. drank bitter from the Cup.  
At which the Prophet in a still Surprise  
For Answer turning up to Heav'n his Eyes,  
The Vessel's Earthen Lips with Answer ran—  
'The Clay that I am made of once was Man,  
Who dying, and resolved into the same

Obliterated Earth from which he came  
Was for the Potter dug, and chased in turn

980

Through long Vicissitude of Bowl and Urn:  
But howsoever moulded, still the Pain  
Of that first mortal Anguish would retain,  
And cast, and re-cast, for a Thousand years  
Would turn the sweetest Water into Tears.'

And after Death?—that, shirk it as we may,  
*Will* come, and with it bring its After-Day—

For ev'n as Yusuf (when his Brotherhood  
Came up from Egypt to buy Corn, and stood  
Before their Brother in his lofty Place,

990

Nor knew him, for a Veil before his Face)  
Struck on his Mystic Cup, which straightway then  
Rung out their Story to those guilty Ten:—  
Not to *them* only, but to every one;  
Whatever he have said and thought and done,  
Unburied with the Body shall fly up,  
And gather into Heav'n's inverted Cup,  
Which, stricken by God's Finger, shall tell all  
The Story whereby we must stand or fall.  
And though we walk this World as if behind

1000

There were no Judgement, or the Judge half-blind,  
Beware, for He with whom we have to do  
Outsees the Lynx, outlives the Phoenix too—

So Sultan Mahmud, coming Face to Face  
With mightier numbrs of the swarthy Race,

Vow'd that if God to him the battle gave,  
God's Dervish People all the Spoil should have.  
And God the Battle gave him; and the Fruit  
Of a great Conquest coming to compute,  
A Murmur through the Sultan's Army stirr'd

1010

Lest, ill committed to one hasty Word,  
The Shah should squander on an idle Brood  
What should be theirs who earn'd it with their Blood,  
Or go to fill the Coffers of the State.  
So Mahmud's Soul began to hesitate:  
Till looking round in Doubt from side to side  
A raving Zealot in the Press he spied,  
And call'd and had him brought before his Face,  
And, telling, bid him arbitrate the case.  
Who, having listen'd, said—'The Thing is plain:

1020

If Thou and God should never have again  
To deal together, rob him of his share:  
But if perchance you should—why then Beware!

So spake the Tajidar: but Fear and Doubt  
Among the Birds in Whispers went about:  
Great was their Need: and Succour to be sought  
At any Risk: at any Ransom bought:  
But such a Monarch—greater than Mahmud  
The Great Himself! Why how should he be woo'd  
To listen to them? they too have come

1030

O So suddenly, and unprepared from home  
With any Gold, or Jewel, or rich Thing  
To carry with them to so great a King—



Poor Creatures! with the old and carnal Blind,  
Spite of all said, so thick upon the Mind,  
Devising how they might ingratiate  
Access, as to some earthly Potentate.

'Let him that with this Monarch would engage  
Bring the Gold Dust of a long Pilgrimage:  
The Ruby of a bleeding Heart, whose Sighs

1040

Breathe more than Amber-incense as it dies;  
And while in naked Beggary he stands  
Hope for the Robe of Honour from his Hands.'  
And, as no gift this Sovereign receives  
Save the mere Soul and Self of him who gives,  
So let that Soul for other none Reward  
Look than the Presence of its Sovereign Lord.'  
And as his Hearers seem'd to estimate  
Their Scale of Glory from Mahmud the Great,  
A simple Story of the Sultan told

1050

How best a subject with his Shah made bold—  
One night Shah Mahmud who had been of late  
Somewhat distemper'd with Affairs of State  
Stroll'd through the Streets disguised, as wont to do—  
And, coming to the Baths, there on the Flue  
Saw the poor Fellow who the Furnace fed  
Sitting beside his Water-jug and Bread.  
Mahmud stept in—sat down—unask'd took up  
And tasted of the untasted Loaf and Cup,  
Saying within himself, 'Grudge but a bit,

1060

And, by the Lord, your Head shall pay for it!  
So having rested, warm'd and satisfied  
Himself without a Word on either side,  
At last the wayward Sultan rose to go.  
And then at last his Host broke silence—'So?—  
Art satisfied? Well, Brother, any Day  
Or Night, remember, when you come this Way  
And want a bit of Provender—why, you  
Are welcome, and if not—why, welcome too.'—  
The Sultan was so tickled with the whim

1070

Of this quaint Entertainment and of him  
Who offer'd it, that many a Night again  
Stoker and Shah forgather'd in that Vein—  
Till, the poor Fellow having stood the Test  
Of true Good-fellowship, Mahmud confess'd  
One Night the Sultan that had been his Guest:  
And in requital of the scanty Dole  
The Poor Man offer'd with so large a soul,  
Bid him ask any Largess that he would  
A Throne—if he *would* have it, so he *should*.

1080

The Poor Man kiss'd the Dust, and 'All,' said he,  
'I ask is what and where I am to be;  
If but the Shah from time to time will come  
As now and see me in the lowly Home  
His presence makes a palace, and my own  
Poor Flue more royal than another's Throne.'

So said the cheery Tale: and, as they heard,  
Again the Heart beneath the Feather stirr'd:  
Again forgot the Danger and the Woes  
Of the long Travel in its glorious Close:—

1090

'Here truly all was Poverty, Despair  
And miserable Banishment—but there  
That more than Mahmud, for no more than Prayer  
Who would restore them to their ancient Place,  
And round their Shoulders fling his Robe of Grace.'  
They clapp'd their Wings, on Fire to be assay'd  
And prove of what true Metal they were made,  
Although defaced, and wanting the true Ring  
And Superscription of their rightful King.

'The Road! The Road!' in countless voices cried

1100

The Host—'The Road! and who shall be our Guide?'  
And they themselves 'The Tajidar!' replied:  
Yet to make doubly certain that the Voice  
Of Heav'n according with the People's Choice,  
Lots should be drawn; and He on whom should light  
Heav'n's Hand—they swore to follow him outright.  
This settled, and once more the Hubbub quell'd,  
Once more Suspense the Host in Silence held,  
While, Tribe by Tribe, the Birds their fortune drew;  
And Lo! upon the Tajidar it flew.

1110

Then rising up again in wide and high  
Circumference of wings that mesh'd the sky  
'The Tajidar! The Tajidar!' they cry—  
'The Tajidar! The Tajidar!' with Him  
Was Heav'n, and They would follow Life and Limb!  
Then, once more fluttering to their Places down,  
Upon his Head they set the Royal Crown  
As Khalif of their Khalif so long lost,

And Captain of his now repentant Host;  
And setting him on high, and Silence call'd,

1120

The Tajidar, in Pulpit-throne install'd,  
His Voice into a Trumpet-tongue so clear  
As all the winged Multitude should hear  
Raised, to proclaim the Order and Array  
Of March; which, many as it frighten'd—yea,  
The Heart of Multitudes at outset broke,  
Yet for due Preparation must be spoke.

—A Road indeed that never Wing before  
Flew, nor Foot trod, nor Heart imagined—o'er  
Waterless Deserts—Waters where no Shore—

1130

Valleys comprising cloud-high Mountains: these  
Again their Valleys deeper than the Seas:  
Whose Dust all Adders, and whose vapour Fire:  
Where all once hostile Elements conspire  
To set the Soul against herself, and tear  
Courage to Terror—Hope into Despair,  
And Madness; Terrors, Trials, to make stray  
Or Stop where Death to wander or delay:  
Where when half dead with Famine, Toil, and Heat,  
'Twas Death indeed to rest, or drink, or eat.

1140

A Road still waxing in Self-sacrifice  
As it went on: still ringing with the Cries  
And Groans of Those who had not yet prevail'd,  
And bleaching with the Bones of those who fail'd:  
Where, almost all withstood, perhaps to earn  
Nothing: and, earning, never to return.—

And first the *VALE OF SEARCH*: an endless Maze,  
Branching into innumerable Ways  
All courting Entrance: but one right: and this  
Beset with Pitfall, Gulf, and Precipice,

1150

Where Dust is Embers, Air a fiery Sleet,  
Through which with blinded Eyes and bleeding Feet  
The Pilgrim stumbles, with Hyena's Howl  
Around, and hissing Snake, and deadly Ghoul,  
Whose Prey he falls if tempted but to droop,  
Or if to wander famish'd from the Troop  
For fruit that falls to ashes in the Hand,  
Water that reacht recedes into the Sand.  
The only word is 'Forward!' Guide in sight,  
After him, swerving neither left nor right,

1160

Thyself for thine own Victual by Day,  
At night thine own Self's Caravanserai.  
Till suddenly, perhaps when most subdued  
And desperate, the Heart shall be renew'd  
When deep in utter Darkness, by one Gleam  
Of Glory from the far remote *Harim*,  
That, with a scarcely conscious Shock of Change,  
Shall light the Pilgrim toward the Mountain Range  
Of KNOWLEDGE: where, if stronger and more pure  
The Light and Air, yet harder to endure;

1170

And if, perhaps, the Footing more secure,  
Harder to keep up with a nimble Guide,  
Less from lost Road than insufficient Stride—  
Yet tempted still by false Shows from the Track,  
And by false Voices call'd aside or back,

Which echo from the Bosom, as if won  
The Journey's End when only just begun,  
And not a Mountain Peak with Toil attain'd  
But shows a top yet higher to be gain'd.  
Wherefore still Forward, Forward! Love that fired

1180

Thee first to search, by Search so re-inspired  
As that the Spirit shall the carnal Load  
Burn up, and double wing Thee on the Road;  
That wert thou knocking at the very Door  
Of Heav'n, thou still would'st cry for More, More, More!

Till loom in sight Kaf's Mountain Peak ashroud  
In Mist—uncertain yet Mountain or Cloud,  
But where the Pilgrim 'gins to hear the Tide  
Of that one Sea in which the Sev'n subside;  
And not the Sev'n Seas only: but the sev'n

1190

And self-enfolded Spheres of Earth and Heav'n—  
Yea, the Two Worlds, that now as Pictures sleep  
Upon its Surface—but when once the Deep  
From its long Slumber 'gins to heave and sway—  
Under the Tempest shall be swept away  
With all their Phases and Phenomena:  
Not senseless Matter only, but combined  
With Life in all Varieties of Kind;  
Yea, ev'n the abstract Forms that Space and Time  
Men call, and Weal and Woe, Virtue and Crime,

1200

And all the several Creeds like those who fell  
Before them, Musulman and Infidel  
Shall from the Face of Being melt away,

Cancell'd and swept as Dreams before the Day.  
So hast thou seen the Astrologer prepare  
His mystic Table smooth of sand, and there  
Inscribe his mystic figures, Square, and Trine,  
Circle and Pentagram, and heavenly Sign  
Of Star and Planet: from whose Set and Rise,  
Meeting and Difference, he prophesies;

1210

And, having done it, with his Finger clean  
Obliterates as never they had been.

Such is when reacht the Table Land of One  
And *Wonder*: blazing with so fierce a Sun  
Of Unity that blinds while it reveals  
The Universe that to a Point congeals,  
So, stunn'd with utter Revelation, reels  
The Pilgrim, when that *Double*-seeming House,  
Against whose Beams he long had chafed his Brows,  
Crumbles and cracks before that Sea, whose near

1220

And nearer Voice now overwhelms his Ear.  
Till blinded, deafen'd, madden'd, drunk with doubt  
Of all within Himself as all without,  
Nay, whether a *Without* there be, or not,  
Or a *Within* that doubts: and if, then what?—  
Ev'n so shall the bewilder'd Pilgrim seem  
When nearest waking deepliest in Dream,  
And darkest next to Dawn; and lost what had  
When *All* is found: and just when sane quite Mad—  
As one that having found the Key once more

1230

Returns, and Lo! he cannot find the Door  
He stumbles over—So the Pilgrim stands  
A moment on the Threshold—with raised Hands  
Calls to the eternal Saki for one Draught  
Of Light from the One Essence: which when quaff'd,  
He plunges headlong in: and all is well  
With him who never more returns to tell.  
Such being then the Race and such the Goal,  
Judge if you must not Body both and Soul  
With Meditation, Watch and Fast prepare.

1240

For he that wastes his body to a Hair  
Shall seize the Locks of Truth: and He that prays  
Good Angels in their Ministry waylays:  
And the Midnightly Watcher in the Folds  
Of his own Darkness God Almighty holds.  
He that would prosper here must from him strip  
The World, and take the Dervish Gown and Scrip:  
And as he goes must gather from all Sides  
Irrelevant Ambitions, Lusts and Prides,  
Glory and Gold, and sensual Desire,

1250

Whereof to build the fundamental Pyre  
Of Self-annihilation: and cast in  
All old Relations and Regards of Kin  
And Country: and, the Pile with this perplex  
World platform'd, from the Fables of the Next  
Raise it tow'rd Culmination, with the torn  
Rags and Integuments of Creeds out-worn;  
And top the giddy Summit with the Scroll  
Of *Reason* that in dingy Smoke shall roll  
Over the true Self-sacrifice of Soul:



1260

(For such a Prayer was his—'O God, do Thou  
With all my Wealth in the other World endow  
My Friends: and with my Wealth in *this* my Foes,  
Till bankrupt in *thy* Riches I repose!')  
Then, all the Pile completed of the Pelf  
Of either World—at last throw on *Thyself*,  
And with the torch of Self-negation fire;  
And ever as the Flames rise high and higher,  
With Cries of agonising Glory still  
All of that *Self* burn up that burn up will,

1270

Leaving the Phoenix that no Fire can slay  
To spring from its own Ashes kindled—nay,  
Itself an inextinguishable Spark  
Of Being, *now* beneath Earth-ashes dark,  
Transcending these, at last *Itself* transcends  
And with the One Eternal Essence blends.

The Moths had long been exiled from the Flame  
They worship: so to solemn Council came,  
And voted *One* of them by Lot be sent  
To find their Idol. One was chosen: went.

1280

And after a long Circuit in sheer Gloom,  
Seeing, he thought, the TAPER in a Room  
Flew back at once to say so. But the chief  
Of *Mothistan* slighted so slight Belief,  
And sent another Messenger, who flew  
Up to the House, in at the window, through  
The Flame itself; and back the Message brings,  
With yet no sign of Conflict on his wings.

Then went a Third, and spurr'd with true Desire,  
Plunging at once into the sacred Fire,

1290

Folded his Wings within, till he became  
One Colour and one Substance with the Flame.  
He only knew the Flame who in it burn'd;  
And only He could tell who ne'er to tell return'd.

After declaring what of this declared  
Must be, that all who went should be prepared,  
From his high Station ceased the Tajidar—  
And lo! the Terrors that, when told afar,  
Seem'd but as Shadows of a Noonday Sun,  
Now that the talkt-of Thing was to be *done*,

1300

Lengthening into those of closing Day  
Strode into utter Darkness: and Dismay  
Like Night on the husht Sea of Feathers lay,  
Late so elate—'So terrible a Track!  
Endless—or, ending, never to come back!—  
Never to Country, Family, or Friend!'—  
In sooth no easy Bow for Birds to bend!—  
Even while he spoke, how many Wings and Crests  
Had slunk away to distant Woods and Nests;  
Others again in Preparation spent

1310

What little Strength they had, and never went:  
And others, after preparation due—  
When up the Veil of that first Valley drew  
From whose waste Wilderness of Darkness blew  
A Sarsar, whether edged of Flames or Snows,  
That through from Root to Tip their Feathers froze—

Up went a Multitude that overhead  
A moment darken'd, then on all sides fled,  
Dwindling the World-assembled Caravan  
To less than half the Number that began.

1320

Of those who fled not, some in Dread and Doubt  
Sat without stirring: others who set out  
With frothy Force, or stupidly resign'd,  
Before a League, flew off or fell behind.  
And howsoever the more Brave and Strong  
In Courage, Wing, or Wisdom push'd along,  
Yet League by League the Road was thicklier spread  
By the fast falling Foliage of the Dead:  
Some spent with Travel over Wave and Ground;  
Scorcht, frozen, dead for Drought, or drinking drown'd.

1330

Famisht, or poison'd with the Food when found:  
By Weariness, or Hunger, or Affright  
Seduced to stop or stray, become the Bite  
Of Tiger howling round or hissing Snake,  
Or Crocodile that eyed them from the Lake:  
Or raving Mad, or in despair Self-slain:  
Or slaying one another for a Grain:—

Till of the mighty Host that fledged the Dome  
Of Heav'n and Floor of Earth on leaving Home,  
A Handful reach'd and scrambled up the Knees

1340

Of Kaf whose Feet dip in the Seven Seas;  
And of the few that up his Forest-sides  
Of Light and Darkness where *The Presence* hides,  
But *Thirty*—thirty desperate draggled Things,

Half-dead, with scarce a Feather on their Wings,  
Stunn'd, blinded, deafen'd with the Crash and Craze  
Of Rock and Sea collapsing in a Blaze  
That struck the Sun to Cinder—fell upon  
The Threshold of the Everlasting *One*,  
With but enough of Life in each to cry,

1350

On THAT which all absorb'd—

And suddenly

Forth flash'd a winged Harbinger of Flame  
And Tongue of Fire, and 'Who?' and 'Whence they came?'  
And 'Why?' demanded. And the Tajidar  
For all the Thirty answer'd him—'We are  
Those Fractions of the Sum of Being, far  
Dis-spent and foul disfigured, that once more  
Strike for Admission at the Treasury Door.'  
To whom the Angel answer'd—'Know ye not  
That He you seek recks little who or what

1360

Of Quantity and Kind—himself the Fount  
Of Being Universal needs no Count  
Of all the Drops o'erflowing from his Urn,  
In what Degree they issue or return?

Then cried the Spokesman, 'Be it even so:  
Let us but see the Fount from which we flow,  
'And, seeing, lose Ourselves therein!' and, Lo!  
Before the Word was utter'd, or the Tongue  
Of Fire replied, or Portal open flung.  
They were *within*—they were before the *Throne*,

1370

Before the Majesty that sat thereon,  
But wrapt in so insufferable a Blaze  
Of Glory as beat down their baffled Gaze.  
Which, downward dropping, fell upon a Scroll  
That, Lightning-like, flash'd back on each the whole  
Past half-forgotten Story of his Soul:  
Like that which Yusuf in his Glory gave  
His Brethren as some Writing he would have  
Interpreted; and at a Glance, behold  
Their own Indenture for their Brother sold!

1380

And so with these poor Thirty: who, abasht  
In Memory all laid bare and Conscience lasht,  
By full Confession and Self-loathing flung  
The Rags of carnal Self that round them clung;  
And, their old selves self-knowledged and self-loathed,  
And in the Soul's Integrity re-clothed,  
Once more they ventured from the Dust to raise  
Their Eyes—up to the Throne—into the Blaze,  
And in the Centre of the Glory there  
Beheld the Figure of—*Themselves*—as 'twere

1390

Transfigured—looking to Themselves, beheld  
The Figure on the Throne en-miracled,  
Until their Eyes themselves and That between  
Did hesitate which *Sëer* was, which *Seen*;  
They That, That They: Another, yet the Same:  
Dividual, yet One: from whom there came  
A Voice of awful Answer, scarce discern'd  
From *which* to Aspiration *whose* return'd  
They scarcely knew; as when some Man apart  
Answers aloud the Question in his Heart—

1400

'The Sun of my Perfection is a Glass  
Wherein from *Seeing* into *Being* pass  
All who, reflecting as reflected see  
Themselves in Me, and Me in Them: not Me,  
But all of Me that a contracted Eye  
Is comprehensive of Infinity:  
Nor yet *Themselves*: no Selves, but of The All  
Fractions, from which they split and whither fall.  
As Water lifted from the Deep, again  
Falls back in individual Drops of Rain

1410

Then melts into the Universal Main.  
All you have been, and seen, and done, and thought,  
Not *You* but *I*, have seen and been and wrought:  
I was the Sin that from Myself rebell'd:  
I the Remorse that tow'rd Myself compell'd:  
I was the Tajidar who led the Track:  
I was the little Briar that pull'd you back:  
Sin and Contrition—Retribution owed,  
And cancell'd—Pilgrim, Pilgrimage, and Road,  
Was but Myself toward Myself: and Your

1420

Arrival but *Myself* at my own Door:  
Who in your Fraction of Myself behold  
Myself within the Mirror Myself hold  
To see Myself in, and each part of Me  
That sees himself, though drown'd, shall ever see.  
Come you lost Atoms to your Centre draw,  
And *be* the Eternal Mirror that you saw:  
Rays that have wander'd into Darkness wide  
Return, and back into your Sun subside.'—

This was the Parliament of Birds: and this

1430

The Story of the Host who went amiss,  
And of the Few that better Upshot found;  
Which being now recounted, Lo, the Ground  
Of Speech fails underfoot: But this to tell—  
Their Road is thine—Follow—and Fare thee well.

1435

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