ROSES
· from ·
SADI'S GARDEN

ROSES FROM SA'DI'S
GARDEN

Roses from Sadi's Garden

TRANSLATED FROM
"THE GULISTAN" by
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INTRODUCTION

MASLAH-UD-DIN SA'DI AL SHIRAZI

ALTHOUGH there is available more information concerning Shaikh Sa'di, the Nightingale of Shiraz, than about most of the Persian poets who lived prior to his time, there is yet so much uncertainty that one who attempts to follow his career along the byways of fragmentary and conflicting biographies is apt, finally, to abandon hope of definitive truth.

When subjected to analysis, however, most of these uncertainties may be seen to arise from a dispute over the date of his birth. That this event took place at Shiraz is conceded by all, but the time is set by different authorities at anywhere

from 1175 to 1195 A. D. There is also some, but not so much, difference concerning the date of his death, which is variously stated to have occurred in different years from 1290 to 1293. Sir Edwin Arnold makes the positive statements that he was born in 1193 and that he died in 1292, but he throws a shadow upon the authenticity of his information by saying, in the same sentence in which he records the date of the poet's death, "the legend is that he had reached the wonderful age of one hundred and eight years."

The fact is that during the latter part of his life he was a very famous man of letters, so that his death no doubt created a profound impression and was recorded by a number of persons; we may feel reasonably sure, then, that 1292 is the actual date of his demise. But, although his father is said to have been a person of some social stand-

ing, it is probable that not much note was taken of the child's birth, and that few suspected, for a good many years, the presence in their midst of an "inglorious Milton" who was yet to become a master of song, bearing the laurel of more than a Milton's prestige and popularity. Small wonder, then, that a trifle of twenty years of doubt exists as to when he made his entrance upon the world's stage, or that a decade of this disputed score pursues and plagues us whenever we attempt to decide his age at any epoch of his life. For instance, we know that he went through an extensive course of study at the great College of Bagdad, where, according to Mohammedan custom, he devoted much of his attention to a thorough instruction in the religion and laws laid down in the Koran and its commentaries; but we do not know his age at entrance, or exactly how long he remained a student.

SA'DI'S LITERARY PERIOD

We shall better appreciate his work, perhaps, if we remember the state and distribution of the world's culture in the period during which he wrote. For six centuries Europe had been sunk in the darkness of ignorance and barbarity that followed Rome's downfall, while, during the same time, Arabian and Persian science and art flamed and flourished at their best. Persian poets had been singing in strains of unexampled beauty, and Sa'di was a representative of the period when his country's literature was upon the verge of its great decline; but in Europe there were only faint stirrings of the beginning of a new literature that was to build itself, slowly and painfully, with a varied and strange architecture, upon the ruins of the glories of Greece. Sa'di was at the zenith of his power when Dante was born, and it was a cen-

tury later when Chaucer wrote the first real poetry in the English tongue. If we keep in mind the frightful intolerance of European religious opinion of that day, and the dramatic picture Dante offered us of Heaven and Hell—undoubtedly a reflection, in its best form, of the views then generally held—and compare these with the views offered us by Sa'di, we shall certainly come to the conclusion that the Persian was a man of very advanced and liberal intelligence—quite a modern, as we would now phrase it.

From Bagdad, while yet a student, he made a number of pilgrimages to Mecca, and finally embarked upon a career of travel that carried him over all western Asia and most of northern Africa. At the time of beginning these travels his age is stated by some to have been forty, and by others thirty. A little reflection will indicate that the latter

is probably the more nearly correct.

He was the Marco Polo of the East, and a great deal more beside. In his wanderings he traversed all the various provinces of Persia, and the foreign lands of Palestine, Syria, Armenia, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, North Africa, Egypt, Arabia, and India; and when, at last, he returned to his native city, he was an old man. Just how old is, again, a matter for dispute. Some say he was over sixty—others over seventy. Either computation is made from his own statement that he spent thirty years in travel.

At any rate, he settled down in a little house to which was attached a garden that was his heart's delight, and it was there he wrote most of the books and verses that have been handed down to us as the Master's work. Although, as an old man, he was always ready to meet The Guest, Death did not claim him for

many years, and the venerable man became truly the object of the love and veneration of his people, and of the admiration and envy of kings.

'Aside from matters of date and age, for which we look in vain in the chronicles of others, Sa'di has told us enough of himself that we can set down a few things further as facts. For long he found a congenial home at Damascus, and at that period was an enthusiastic expounder of the gospel of Mohammed; but, whether due to the changing of his own religious views or, as he intimates, to growing disgust with the materialism and unresponsiveness of his audience, he at last took offense, he says, with the society of his friends at Damascus, and retired into the wilderness of Palestine, where he sought only the companionship of wild animals.

CAPTURED BY CRUSADERS

At that time the Crusaders were operating about Jerusalem, and Sa'di had the misfortune to fall into their hands. They were not gentle hands, and he was packed off and set to digging, as a slave, in the trenches of Tripoli in Syria, where an old friend from Aleppo discovered him and ransomed him for the sum of ten dinars, to his immediate great delight and subsequent vexation. This friend took him into his home and shortly married him to his daughter, with whom went a dowry of a hundred dinars. The poet does not say with what readiness he entered into the compact, but under the circumstances there could be no rejection of such a proposal.

Poor Sa'di found that his flight had indeed carried him from the frying-pan to the fire.

"The damsel," said he, "turned out a termagant, and displayed so

perverse a nature and so sharp a tongue as to destroy all my domestic comfort. A scolding woman in the house of a quiet man is his hell. Save us, O Lord, and protect us from such a fiery torture!"

In a tirade, one day, she taunted him: "Are you not the fellow my father ransomed from the Franks for ten dinars?"

"Yes," he replied, "I am that same he ransomed for ten dinars and enslaved for a hundred."

This marriage is one of the few things over which he displayed a real bitterness of spirit, and as everything else we know of him indicates that he was one of the gentlest of souls, his trial must, indeed, have been a grievous one. However, he seems to have been able in some way to release himself from his bondage and, later, while sojourning in Arabia, proved that he was not altogether daunted by his previous matrimonial experience by marry-

ing a woman of Sanaa, the capital of Yemen. That this union was probably a peaceful one appears from the fact that he had little to say of it except with regard to the birth and death of a child, over the loss of which he mourned deeply.

He discountenanced all extravagant pretensions, and condemned everything savoring of fraud and hypocrisy. Not only does this appear in what he has to say of his associates and fellow believers, but his actions showed that he was fearlessly ready to attack such falsity wherever he found it. Once, while traveling in India, he visited a temple in which was an image that moved its arms, apparently without exterior aid, greatly to the awe of all beholders. Sa'di's suspicions being aroused by this alleged miracle, he concealed himself at a point from which he could watch proceedings, and discovered a priest manipulating the limbs by means of a rope. Sa'di

was so angry at the deception that he overturned the image and tumbled the priest into a well, but he barely escaped with his life from the rage of the temple occupants and its faithful devotees.

SA'DI'S WRITINGS

Sa'di left a considerable body of literature in both prose and verse, but it was as a poet that he made the greatest impression upon his contemporaries, and that he will go furthest and live longest among us. At the same time, he wins our respect as a sage and a philosopher.

His poetry covers a wide range. Much of it is beautifully lyrical, and shows, in his earlier years, a certain struggle against what he must have felt, as an Iranian, to be the unnatural repressions of Islamism as administered by the dominating Arab thought. Later, when he embraced Sufism, as was inevit-

able to a man of his broad and warm-hearted views, he was no pretender, nor was he ever carried off his feet by the senseless enthusiasms into which some members of the sect precipitated themselves. He impartially condemned both the hypocritical pretenders whose robes of blue were but cover for licentiousness, and the enthusiastic ecstatics who permitted their excess of zeal to carry them into all sorts of extravagance.

His best known works, both at home and abroad, are The Bustan and The Gulistan. These, taken as a whole, are somewhat didactic in character. Along with his Pand Nameh, they are, therefore, much used as books of instruction in the schools of both Persia and India, and in the former country there is scarce a school-boy who is not familiar with their contents. What is so valuable to his countrymen must surely be of some worth to us.

THE GULISTAN

The Gulistan (The Rose-Garden) is the work with which we are here chiefly concerned. It was written during the author's old age, in Shiraz, after he had returned from his world-wandering and retired to his little hermitage, to live out the remainder of his days surrounded by peace and beauty, and to give to others the benefit of his experience and his observations during his journeys, upon which, he says, "I communed with many strangers, found something profitable in every corner, and drew a blade from every sheaf of knowledge." Sa'di the traveler was now Sa'di the sage and the prophet, his remaining object in life being to give to others all he could of what he had learned. He was not one, however, to offer his lessons as so many doses of medicine; although there are sometimes a few bitter herbs, they are all

sugar-coated with the poet's natural wit and good humor. He was never a man of gloom or severity. In his youth he had not put aside available hours of mirth, in his maturity he had deprecated all braying of either hell or heaven, and his age was but a ripening and mellowing of his earlier years.

Still, it is unlikely that The Gulistan in its complete and original form could achieve any sort of popularity among us. A mélange of prose and verse, it is divided into Gates, or Chapters, each of which includes a number of lesser divisions that have a general, although sometimes a very remote, bearing upon the subject for which the Chapter is named; and, as is the custom of Persian authors, things are scattered very much at hazard, with but little attempt to keep up a connected and orderly chain of thought or expression in either chapter or book. Usually, each of the lesser divisions consists

of an anecdote related in prose, often manifestly from Sa'di's personal experience, followed by some lines of poetry that either repeat the sense of the story or set forth a moral to be drawn therefrom. Sometimes several verses follow the prose relation, and sometimes these contain much the stronger expression, the prose appearing only to amplify and illustrate the leading thought. These verses are constructed upon various metrical forms, some being couplets and some quatrains. There is much repetition of the same, or very similar, thought, in varying language—another characteristic of the Persian and Arabian author—and sometimes an appearance of contradiction that is apt to seem to us pure inconsequence. Persian and Arab alike are greatly given to proverb-mongering, and there is somewhat too much of that for our tastes.

Let us suppose, now, that we were

offered a purely Persian table diet. Of however high a class the food might be, and however much it might be recommended for its benefits to the stomach, it is probable that our tongues and palates would find it far from pleasing. Nevertheless, that would not justify us in rejecting, forthwith, all articles of Persian food; indeed, we have actually found many of these delicious when properly selected and prepared according to our own recipes.

In precisely the same way, if offered a purely Persian literature—a literal translation, let us say, of their masterpieces, with all their forms and figures of speech preserved—we would find it really distasteful to eye and ear, so different are their likes and dislikes from those to which we have been educated. Yet we should not arbitrarily reject all Persian literature, as has been the unfortunate tendency

of the undiscriminating past, which has ignorantly regarded it with a superior contempt. These Oriental peculiarities may be so modified that the old Persian's soul shall shine just as clearly through his poetry as it did the day he intoned it in his rose garden of Shiraz, or inscribed it, with painstaking care, upon his tablets, and yet its singing may be in a voice with which our ears are more in tune; and so it will be the more likely to reach our hearts.

Now, in the work of every poet, whether he so design or no, there is a certain record of his life and a certain index of his true self. Leaving aside all extraneous matter and all that is non-vital and superfluous, however much good may be so excluded, I have sought for this record and this index in Sa'di's Garden; and at last I believe I have been able to find and identify them by culling some of his roses and

transplanting them into a garden of my own.

Our work must be either all verse or all prose. I have, therefore, omitted all prose, except that in two or three instances, where the idea was essential or the expression peculiarly apt, I have versified a few lines of prose and incorporated them into the poetical body. It was necessary to adopt a single metrical system, and, as a few of Sa'di's verses had the ruba'i form, now familiar to western readers and almost considered as peculiarly Omarian, I adopted it for all, although in fact the greater number are shaped in other molds. It commended itself as most appropriate because it fittingly carries the average music of the originals, and is certainly best adapted to their terse and epigrammatic expression of comprehensive thought. Instead of seeking to keep a remnant of the old order, I have tried so to adjust the sequence of

the quatrains as to obtain the greatest continuity of subject matter, with the most smoothly flowing method of presentation.

So long as the desired effect could be secured, I have followed closely the language of the originals, but I have not hesitated, when it seemed best to do so, to sacrifice literalness to results, provided always that what I conceived to be the author's thought was adequately reproduced. Excepting the first quatrain, which seemed necessary to relieve the abrupt opening of the story, I have included nothing that is wholly my own invention; all the rest may be found in Sa'di's work. And even in this first quatrain the idea is at least suggested by Sa'di in his prose introduction to The Gulistan, telling of the night spent in a garden with a friend, when he announced to the latter that he was engaged in planting a garden with roses whose "blossoms shall not fade with the falling

of the years." Almost boastful language it seems, but time has proved that he correctly estimated the value of his work.

Undoubtedly Sa'di was, from middle life to old age, a thorough Sufi, but his belief was tempered by intellectual and worldly wisdom. He was no ecstatic, like Jellal-ud-din Rumi. Occasionally he gave expression to the uncertainty that must exist in every reflecting mind, but he did not entertain the demon Despair or counsel banishing him by unlimited resort to the wine-cup, as did Omar in his earlier quatrains. We see in him only a little of the sensualism that obtrudes itself through the music of Hafiz. He was none of these; and yet, being none, he was something of them all. Jellal-ud-din is an evangel, suited to our moments of rare devotion; Hafiz lives with us in our hours of ease, of freedom and indulgence; Omar storms the outworks of faith,

occupies the citadel of our intellect, rules us with the inevitableness of his conclusions—and leaves us with a vague chill when we attempt to take over again the functions of our own government; but Sa'di has furnished poetry suited to all our life's occasions; he is the friend and the counsellor of all, and a guide that no man need be afraid or ashamed to follow.

USE OF SYMBOLISM

Along with most of the exaggerations and perversions of Sufism, Sa'di rejected, or used but sparingly, its language of symbolism—of the wine and the cup—of the lover and the Belovèd—and where he used such terms he did so in a manner to leave little room for controversy. For instance, in the quatrains from seven to sixteen, follow-

ing, it appears to me a straining after whimsical theories to contend that he meant anything but a real, live, flesh-and-blood girl; although there are advocates for the substitution of "God," "divine spirit," and such fanciful terms in even these passages. On the other hand, in quatrains fifty-four and fifty-five, while there is a possibility that he spoke here, too, of a woman, I am of the opinion that he used his terms as symbols of The Divinity. As to quatrain sixty-four, there can be no doubt at all that, in the original, he spoke of God under the guise of a beloved woman. However, as the retention of his symbols would have caused a confusion of imagery in this and the immediately preceding and following quatrains, because of my rearrangement of their order, I have paraphrased the language for the sake of consistency in the picture, so that this appears with a greater literalness

of expression than it had as Sa'di wrote it.*

* Mr. Cranmer-Byng's translation of this quatrain is,

My love is nearer me than is myself,
Yet I am still estranged from her heart.
What can I do? To whom shall it be said,
She bides with him, and he lies far apart?

Inasmuch, however, as it is found in an account of a sermon delivered at Damascus by Sa'di, the text for which was the line from the Koran—"We are nearer unto Him than the vein of His neck"—Sir Edwin Arnold has given a more appropriate, if less exact, translation, as follows:

A friend more near than I myself to me,
And yet—most wonderful!—I cannot see,
Nor hear, nor know, nor speak one word to Him
Who yet lives in my blood, bone, vein and limb.

He continues, nevertheless, in Sa'di's language of Sufi symbolism:

"I was intoxicated with the wine of mine own discourse, and the dregs of the holy cup were at my lips, etc."

I have consulted a number of translations with the object of correcting or reinforcing my own interpretations of Sa'di's meanings, but it was from the condensed and succinct little volume by L. Cranmer-Byng and S. A. Kapadia that I caught the idea, and afterward derived great assistance in working out the plan for what I conceive to be a sort of résumé of Sa'di's intellectual and spiritual life, as it is supplied for us, however undesignedly, in his own work.

Beginning with some introductory quatrains, it relates the natural experience of the youth, his love, his despair at the loss of his mistress, and the pessimism into which adolescence falls at the other extremity of its ecstasy of passion. Proceeding, then, with his conclusions regarding the mutability of worldly power as exemplified by king and courtier, he pictures what must have been the result of his observations

in the petty and turbulent courts of western Asia, in which Persian, Arab and Mongol contended, with violence and treachery, for the mastery, and passed in rapid succession through their most unstable and unprofitable periods of rulership.

Next is portrayed the application of a critical and philosophical mind to the problems of religion—a questioning of the narrow faith of orthodoxy—a stage of agnosticism—a gradual acceptance of the universalism of the Sufic philosophy—the middle-aged man shedding a worn-out shell and slowly settling, almost in spite of himself, into one more commodious and suitable for the spirit that is to inhabit it. For a while he is not fully at home, and we see him uneasily exploring its more remote and unfamiliar chambers.

Finally, the old man, contented and at peace with all the world and with his God, having absorbed what-

ever knowledge he could during a long and rational life, now devotes himself to giving to the world, impressing upon us the simplicity of the secret of his contentment; secure of the past, satisfied with the present, and confident of the future. We may all take from his Garden the lesson that to work, to be honest, to gain and to make our own all we can of knowledge that is truth, to be just, to be unselfish, and to give to the world all we can of the best that is in us, is to obtain immortality —like Sa'di, to live again in every flower that blows.

ROSES FROM SA'DI'S
GARDEN

I

Come! fellow-dreamer; on the mountain's brow
A shadow-purple finger [1] moved but now;
And soon shall pass into our view the hand
That there is writing; you shall read, and bow.[2]

II

Is't not enough to breathe the odors sweet
Within these groves, forget the moments fleet,
Witched into Dreamland by the nightingale,
And by these Ormazd pearls beneath our feet?

III

With jewelled nets our robes the wind has strung;
About our feet the streams have shackles flung,
And o'er the vines, to tempt our straying hands,
The clusters of the Pleiades are hung.

IV

Why fill your skirts with basil and with rose?
Shall guest the Gardener rob? Too well He knows
The folly of your never-ending quest—
The frail impermanence of all that grows.

V

But with my pen I'll plant a virgin field
With roses that shall need no other shield
'Gainst Winter frost or desert heat than they
Beneath their crimson robes may bear concealed.

VI

Take but a blossom from my Gulistan,
And wear it, fadeless, for thy mortal span;
So Ardib'hist[3] shall come, for us, to be
A new, although a lesser, Ramazan.

* * * * * * *

VII

Once, in my youth, I plodded down
a street
That lay, an oven, 'neath my aching
feet,
And fell, at length, beside a gar-
den wall,
Well-nigh to fainting of the Summer
heat.

VIII

When lo! from out some hidden por-
tal stept
One like the Dawn when Rainbow
Light has slept,
With eyes two fountains of the
Draught of Life
Aglow within a cavern's dusky
depth.

IX

Between her hands she bore a silver bowl,
Snow-cooled and sweet, with perfumes rare that stole,
With strange device of magic to distil,
From out her golden heart the Rose's soul.

X

Attar of roses, have I said—but stay!
Perchance the roses of her own cheek may
Have dipped therein. What subtle charm it held
A Peri brought from Paradise that day.

XI

One drunk of wine awakes at early
dawn,
To find the sparkle of the wine-cup
gone,
To stagger, contrite, from the
tavern door—
I'm drunken of the bearer—I dream
on.

XII

Pray hold your warnings! Why
should I attend
Upon the words you say are wisdom
when
My Happiness and I are lip to
lip?
Ho! Lovely Saki, bring the cup
again.

XIII

All Majnun's [4] madness now I understand;
Let any one of this reproving band
Who sits at table when she shall appear
Beware the wounding of his careless hand.[5]

XIV

Seek not to stay me, for if Love should call,
I'd rise and go to her, though I should crawl,
On bleeding hands, adown a way of swords,
That on her threshold I might, dying, fall.

* * * * * * *

XV

Ah! let the roses strive to soften doom.
She who, in playfulness, once spread their bloom
About her for her slumber or her rest,
Sleeps where they cast their petals o'er the tomb.

XVI

Crushed with my anguish, I besought with tears
The ripened counsel of a hundred years.
O Graybeard! show the Way of Rest, I cried;
His answer was an echo of my fears:

XVII

In vain dost thou petition Rest to stay—
The Banquet-Master's jealous of delay;
Scarce are we seated with the motley throng
Of careless feasters, when He cries, "Away!"

XVIII

Behold yon withered dame with lustrous dye
Upon her fading tresses. Can her eye
Make such bold mimic of the youthful fire
That it may lure the moments as they fly?

XIX

The leaden years no charms transmute to gold;
The tender leaflets of the Spring unfold,
But to be withered by the Autumn blast,
And turned by Winter into sodden mold.

* * * * * * *

XX

The lordly lion, king a little day,
Makes mighty havoc with his hapless prey;
But Time despoils his bravest arsenals,
And brings him to the jackal's feast of whey.[6]

XXI

Why seek you, man, the power o'er men to rule?
To plant, like Khosayib,[7] your land with wool?
The crown but seldom sits on Wisdom's brow;
The royal robes too oft adorn a fool.

XXII

By cast of dice is Fortune's favor won;
The sage is by the mimming ape outrun,
And left but wonder to his grief console—
So it has fallen since the world begun.

XXIII

The seer may win but hunger, grief and pain;
The clown be dowered with a golden rain.
What matter if the scale go up or down?
The loss to one is but another's gain.

XXIV

Though woeful want reduce the truly great,
The lamp of honor lights his dismal fate;
Though golden hasps secure his silver door,
The knave's a knave, and cannot change his state.

XXV

Better, with freedom, is a crust for food
Than royal banquets bought by servitude;
Better be tattered, in the garb of toil,
Than golden-girdled, with a courtier brood.

XXVI

This world upbears us for a single tide,
On which we're cradled—and then cast aside;
So lift to none but God appealing hands,
For other succor is at last denied.

XXVII

It wants but little till the days are flown,
And you are called to meet the Guest alone;
What matter if he find you in the dust,
Or come to hale you from a gilded throne?

XXVIII

Mahmoud the Mighty, with his flaming sword,
Left roads as empty as a hollowed gourd,
And stranger kings who honor not his name
Within the palaces where he was lord.

XXIX

The glories of King Nushirwan the Just [8]
Remain forever in his people's trust.
Be generous, O Friend! Your deeds shall live
When you have long since mingled with the dust.

XXX

Gold and dominion are of little worth;
Naked you enter, so must leave the Earth.
Where has Youth traveled, O my Brother? Come!
Pledge us a sequin for an hour of mirth.

XXXI

If you from others would the payment claim
Of such a tribute as a Kisra's [9] fame,
Make no rejoicing at another's fall,
Nor soil the fairness of another's name.

* * * * * * *

XXXII

The mole so long has burrowed in the night
Of underground, away from Heaven's light,
The sun is hideous to his dazzled eyes;
The rose is but a thorn in Envy's sight.

XXXIII

O upstart mummers of pretentious lies,
What boots your sober aping of the wise?
Save turban, girdle and the robe you wear,
There's nothing yours that men do not despise.

XXXIV

Then let us hence to seek some quiet land,
Where, far from all, our hermit cell may stand;
So shall we 'scape a war of futile words,
And all the venom of this howling band.

XXXV

Yet, should I see a pit upon the way
My fellows tread so blindly day by day,
How could I e'er amend the grievous fault
If I should speak no word to bid them stay?

XXXVI

Two knaves at odds without the Pilgrim's booth,
The Muslim swore, to prove his word was truth,
To live henceforth, if it were false, a Jew;
The Jew a Mussulman would be, forsooth!

XXXVII

Who has the truth—these brawlers
of the street,
Or grave scholastics at the Hakim's
feet?
Not one, I fear, would fallacy
confess,
Were Wisdom shrouded in her wind-
ing-sheet.

XXXVIII

Who chooses for his guide the blind
must be
Of little wit. Of what avail a tree
Turned noble torch and borne
aloft to show
The road, if yet the bearer cannot
see?

XXXIX

What use the rosary and Dervish dress,
If they're but cover for licentiousness?
The robe of blue[10] may nought but curses win;
The Tatar sheepskin God Himself may bless.

XL

If he forbear from raven croak of Hell,
When Abu'l Farez[11] brays of Heaven, 'tis well
If ruined Istakhar[12] fall not in dust
Before the fury of his noisy spell.

XLI

Well, let them preach! Such labor
is in vain.
The moths about the candle all are
slain
In ecstasy of seeking; yet it
flames,
Oblivious to their rapture or their
pain.

XLII

Fate will not alter for our prayers
and cries,
And Kismet's heedless of the
widow's sighs;
The Keeper of the Storehouse of
the Winds
Feels no compunction when her lan-
tern dies.

XLIII

The Lord Iskander[13] no Omega knew
Till Death stole in—and all began anew.
O wretched hunter! cease your vain pursuit;
One still more subtle is pursuing you.

XLIV

Should any seek The Loved One's form to know—
What eye has seen Him, and what tongue can show?
The lovers all by Love are slain. Alas!
None stays the ravage of the twanging bow.

XLV

Though for a single word of truth we yearn,
All that we know, all that is ours to learn,
Is that pale Death's the Keeper of the Door,
And from that School no pupil may return.

* * * * * * *

XLVI

Within the palace of Bagdad there rose
A sudden quarrel 'twixt two casual foes—
A silken Curtain and a dusty Flag,
Vexed with fatigue and rent with recent blows.

XLVII

"Why," said the Flag, "should you
be held so dear;
By slender, moon-faced boys be
cherished here,
C a r e s s e d by jasmine-scented
maids, while I
Am reckoned but a piece of soldier's
gear?

XLVIII

"I'm ever foremost in the battle-line,
While you in ease and luxury recline,
Secure from strife and wind and
burning heat,
And all the hardships that are daily
mine.

XLIX

"Yet on the march I'm borne by careless bands
Of raw recruits, by whose irreverent hands
I'm soiled, and wrapped in suffocating folds,
And trailed, head downward, through the desert sands."

L

Then spoke the Curtain: "I have humbly laid
My head foot-level. You have vainly made
Flaunting defiance of the Sun. Whoe'er
Exalts himself is by himself betrayed."

LI

If any shall offend you 'tis but just
To cleanse your heart with pardon.
Since all must
Return again to dust when life is done,
Take warning, Brother—that you be but dust.

LII

Above a russet mound of new-mown hay
I saw a golden flush of roses play,
And thought, "How dare this ragged Mendicant
So flaunt presumption in the face of day?"

LIII

"Brother," it said, "scorn not the lowly things;
All are, to Him, as worthy as the kings
To whom you bow. This Rose His servant is,
And I, the Grass that in His garden springs."

LIV

O God! make me an ant, for men to tread
Beneath their feet; my least desire has fled,
For waspish stings. I only ask of Thee
That great or small may ne'er my presence dread.

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LV

From The Belovèd's hand there came to mine
A bit of plastic clay, of texture fine,
Breathing perfume that stole my sense away;
"Is this," I cried, "of ambergris divine?"

LVI

"Nay, Friend, it is not so," I heard it say;
"I, who for long beside her beauty lay,
Have sipped the Attar of the Rose like wine;
But for Her Essence I were only clay."

LVII

Oh! Thou above all human thought supreme,
Above our every word or deed or dream,
Thy service closes and we quit the Mosque,
Yet of Thy meaning scarce have caught a gleam.

LVIII

To whom from Thy decrees shall I appeal?
Thou art the Judge; Thou bearest sword and seal.
Whom Thou denyest none may ever guide,
But whom Thou guidest no distrust shall feel.

LIX

Before the I that's I had ceased
to be
The senseless germ transformed by
Thee to Me,
Thou gavest mind and reason,
grace and speech,
Judgment and soul, and power to
feel and see.

LX

Ten digit subjects of the ruling head
Thou hast bestowed; yet I, the
debtor, dread,
In beggar faithlessness, Thou
may'st forget
To furnish me, henceforth, my daily
bread.

LXI

To-day, while yet the power of speech is mine,
Through every word let truth and beauty shine;
To-morrow, when the Messenger is here,
He'll not reprieve me for a single line.

LXII

Behold! the payment from the thirsty plain
Is stifling dust for Heaven's cooling rain;
So I, poor vessel, offer only words,
For sound is all the substance I contain.

LXIII

The nightingale proclaims the coming Spring,
And owls the news of dire disaster bring;
Oh! surely I shall not be held to blame
If I refuse the owlet's song to sing.

LXIV

To God's belovèd ev'n the darkest day
Is lighted by the beams that through it play;
Without His aid can any human soul
From out the dark evoke a single ray?

LXV

His Being's nearer me than is my heart,
And yet I know Him not. Oh! would the art
Of words were mine to solve the mystery
That Thee of Me and Me of Thee are part.

LXVI

If The Belovèd Friend shall bid me die,
Think not that for a longer life I'll sigh;
My one appeal shall be that I may know
That deed of mine ne'er gave offense On High.

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LXVII

Each birth-time of the hyacinth and rose
This garden 'round our hearts its witch'ry throws;
Come still, with Spring, O Friend, when I am gone;
Sa'di shall sing in every flower that blows.

LXVIII

I've spent a lifetime in the search for lore,
And now give counsel from the garnered store;
If it should fall upon unwilling ears,
I've given what I have—I can no more.

LXIX

Oh! thou who mayest read The Gulistan,
Pray Allah, if it fit His larger plan,
To grant unto the author and the scribe
Such mercy as He may to erring man.

LXX

Ask that the owner of the book may yet
Forgiveness find, should he The Friend forget
And fall aside upon the way. Thyself—
Request the boon on which thy heart is set.

NOTES

1. The coming dawn.

2. The hour of morning prayer approaches.

3. The month of February in the calendar year beginning at the Vernal Equinox.

4. In Arabian tradition, a character famed for his unreasoning devotion to his mistress, Laila.

5. The story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, as related in the Koran, dwells strongly upon Joseph's physical beauty. Potiphar's wife, finding that the city was filled with gossip concerning the affair, and being twitted by her friends with her failure, gave a feast to which she invited the ladies who had been foremost in the gossiping, and distributed among them plates of fruit and knives with which to eat it. At this juncture Joseph was brought into the hall, and so great was the abstraction of the ladies, as they contemplated his charms, that they all cut their fingers.

6. About Persian camps and farmhouses the whey from curd and cheesemaking is poured upon the ground, and is lapped up at night by jackals and other prowling animals.

7. It is said that Haroun al Raschid was so angered by the extravagant pretensions of the ruler of Egypt that, when he conquered the country, he exhibited his contempt by appointing a negro slave named Khosayib to be his Viceroy. This man was so ignorant that when the people complained that unseasonable rains had destroyed the cotton crop, he replied: "Well, then, why do you not plant wool instead?"

8. In Persian literature the name of King Nushirwan is a synonym for generosity.

9. Another name for King Nushirwan.

10. The garb of the Sufi order.

11. Father of Asses.

12. The ruined city known to us as Persepolis.

13. Alexander the Great.