

Classic Poetry Series

Omar Khayyam

- poems -

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The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

<i>Translated into English in 1859 by Edward FitzGerald</i>

I.
Awake! for Morning in the Bowl of Night
Has flung the Stone that puts the Stars to Flight:
And Lo! the Hunter of the East has caught
The Sultan's Turret in a Noose of Light.

II.
Dreaming when Dawn's Left Hand was in the Sky
I heard a voice within the Tavern cry,
"Awake, my Little ones, and fill the Cup
Before Life's Liquor in its Cup be dry."

III.
And, as the Cock crew, those who stood before
The Tavern shouted -- "Open then the Door!
You know how little while we have to stay,
And, once departed, may return no more."

IV.
Now the New Year reviving old Desires,
The thoughtful Soul to Solitude retires,
Where the White Hand of Moses on the Bough
Puts out, and Jesus from the Ground suspires.

V.
Iram indeed is gone with all its Rose,
And Jamshyd's Sev'n-ring'd Cup where no one Knows;
But still the Vine her ancient ruby yields,
And still a Garden by the Water blows.

VI.
And David's Lips are lock't; but in divine
High piping Pehlevi, with "Wine! Wine! Wine!
Red Wine!" -- the Nightingale cries to the Rose
That yellow Cheek of hers to incarnadine.

VII.
Come, fill the Cup, and in the Fire of Spring
The Winter Garment of Repentance fling:
The Bird of Time has but a little way
To fly -- and Lo! the Bird is on the Wing.

VIII.
Whether at Naishapur or Babylon,
Whether the Cup with sweet or bitter run,
The Wine of Life keeps oozing drop by drop,
The Leaves of Life kep falling one by one.

IX.
Morning a thousand Roses brings, you say;
The leaves are falling, and the buds decay:

Yes, but where leaves the Rose of Yesterday?
And this first Summer month that brings the Rose
Shall take Jamshyd and Kaikobad away.

X.
But come with old Khayyam, and leave the Lot
Of Kaikobad and Kaikhosru forgot:
Let Rustum lay about him as he will,
Or Hatim Tai cry Supper -- heed them not.

XI.
With me along the strip of Herbage strown
That just divides the desert from the sown,
Where name of Slave and Sultan is forgot --
And Peace is Mahmud on his Golden Throne!

XII.
A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread, -- and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness --
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!

XIII.
Some for the Glories of This World; and some
Sigh for the Prophet's Paradise to come;
Ah, take the Cash, and let the Promise go,
Nor heed the rumble of a distant Drum!

XIV.
Were it not Folly, Spider-like to spin
The Thread of present Life away to win --
What? for ourselves, who know not if we shall
Breathe out the very Breath we now breathe in!

XV.
Look to the Rose that blows about us -- "Lo,
Laughing," she says, "into the World I blow:
At once the silken Tassel of my Purse
Tear, and its Treasure on the Garden throw."

XVI.
The Worldly Hope men set their Hearts upon
Turns Ashes -- or it prospers; and anon,
Like Snow upon the Desert's dusty Face
Lighting a little Hour or two -- is gone.

XVII.
And those who husbanded the Golden Grain,
And those who flung it to the Winds like Rain,
Alike to no such aureate Earth are turn'd
As, buried once, Men want dug up again.

XVIII.

Think, in this batter'd Caravanserai
Whose Doorways are alternate Night and Day,
How Sultan after Sultan with his Pomp
Abode his Hour or two and went his way.

XIX.

They say the Lion and the Lizard keep
The Courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep:
And Bahram, that great Hunter -- the Wild Ass
Stamps o'er his Head, but cannot break his Sleep.

XX.

I sometimes think that never blows so red
The Rose as where some buried Caesar bled;
That every Hyacinth the Garden wears
Dropt in its Lap from some once lovely Head.

XXI.

And this delightful Herb whose tender Green
Fledges the River's Lip on which we lean --
Ah, lean upon it lightly! for who knows
From what once lovely Lip it springs unseen!

XXII.

Ah, my Beloved, fill the Cup that clears
To-day of past Regrets and future Fears --
To-morrow? -- Why, To-morrow I may be
Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n Thousand Years.

XXIII.

Lo! some we loved, the loveliest and best
That Time and Fate of all their Vintage prest,
Have drunk their Cup a Round or two before,
And one by one crept silently to Rest.

XXIV.

And we, that now make merry in the Room
They left, and Summer dresses in new Bloom,
Ourselves must we beneath the Couch of Earth
Descend, ourselves to make a Couch -- for whom?

XXV.

Ah, make the most of what we may yet spend,
Before we too into the Dust descend;
Dust into Dust, and under Dust, to lie;
Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and -- sans End!

XXVI.

Alike for those who for To-day prepare,
And those that after some To-morrow stare,
A Muezzin from the Tower of Darkness cries

"Fools! Your Reward is neither Here nor There!"

XXVII.

Why, all the Saints and Sages who discuss'd
Of the Two Worlds so learnedly, are thrust
Like foolish Prophets forth; their Works to Scorn
Are scatter'd, and their Mouths are stopt with Dust.

XXVIII.

Oh, come with old Khayyam, and leave the Wise
To talk; one thing is certain, that Life flies;
One thing is certain, and the Rest is Lies;
The Flower that once has blown forever dies.

XXIX.

Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint, and heard great Argument
About it and about; but evermore
Came out by the same Door as in I went.

XXX.

With them the Seed of Wisdom did I sow,
And with my own hand labour'd it to grow:
And this was all the Harvest that I reap'd --
"I came like Water and like Wind I go."

XXXI.

Into this Universe, and Why not knowing,
Nor Whence, like Water willy-nilly flowing:
And out of it, as Wind along the Waste,
I know not Whither, willy-nilly blowing.

XXXII.

Up from Earth's Centre through the Seventh Gate
I rose, and on the Throne of Saturn sate,
And many Knots unravel'd by the Road;
But not the Master-Knot of Human Fate.

XXXIII.

There was the Door to which I found no Key:
There was the Veil through which I could not see:
Some little talk awhile of Me and Thee
There was -- and then no more of Thee and Me.

XXXIV.

Then to the rolling Heav'n itself I cried,
Asking, "What Lamp had Destiny to guide
Her little Children stumbling in the Dark?"
And -- "A blind Understanding!" Heav'n replied.

XXXV.

Then to the Lip of this poor earthen Urn

I lean'd, the secret Well of Life to learn:
And Lip to Lip it murmur'd -- "While you live,
Drink! -- for, once dead, you never shall return."

XXXVI.
I think the Vessel, that with fugitive
Articulation answer'd, once did live,
And merry-make, and the cold Lip I kiss'd,
How many Kisses might it take -- and give!

XXXVII.
For in the Market-place, one Dusk of Day,
I watch'd the Potter thumping his wet Clay:
And with its all obliterated Tongue
It murmur'd -- "Gently, Brother, gently, pray!"

XXXVIII.
And has not such a Story from of Old
Down Man's successive generations roll'd
Of such a clod of saturated Earth
Cast by the Maker into Human mould?

XXXIX.
Ah, fill the Cup: -- what boots it to repeat
How Time is slipping underneath our Feet:
Unborn To-morrow, and dead Yesterday,
Why fret about them if To-day be sweet!

XL.
A Moment's Halt -- a momentary taste
Of Being from the Well amid the Waste --
And Lo! the phantom Caravan has reach'd
The Nothing it set out from -- Oh, make haste!

XLI.
Oh, plagued no more with Human or Divine,
To-morrow's tangle to itself resign,
And lose your fingers in the tresses of
The Cypress-slender Minister of Wine.

XLII.
Waste not your Hour, nor in the vain pursuit
Of This and That endeavor and dispute;
Better be merry with the fruitful Grape
Than sadden after none, or bitter, fruit.

XLIII.
You know, my Friends, with what a brave Carouse
I made a Second Marriage in my house;
Divorced old barren Reason from my Bed,
And took the Daughter of the Vine to Spouse.

XLIV.

And lately, by the Tavern Door agape,
Came stealing through the Dusk an Angel Shape
Bearing a Vessel on his Shoulder; and
He bid me taste of it; and 'twas -- the Grape!

XLV.

The Grape that can with Logic absolute
The Two-and-Seventy jarring Sects confute:
The subtle Alchemest that in a Trice
Life's leaden Metal into Gold transmute.

XLVI.

Why, be this Juice the growth of God, who dare
Blaspheme the twisted tendril as Snare?
A Blessing, we should use it, should we not?
And if a Curse -- why, then, Who set it there?

XLVII.

But leave the Wise to wrangle, and with me
The Quarrel of the Universe let be:
And, in some corner of the Hubbub couch'd,
Make Game of that which makes as much of Thee.

XLVIII.

For in and out, above, about, below,
'Tis nothing but a Magic Shadow-show,
Play'd in a Box whose Candle is the Sun,
Round which we Phantom Figures come and go.

XLIX.

Strange, is it not? that of the myriads who
Before us pass'd the door of Darkness through
Not one returns to tell us of the Road,
Which to discover we must travel too.

L.

The Revelations of Devout and Learn'd
Who rose before us, and as Prophets burn'd,
Are all but Stories, which, awoke from Sleep,
They told their fellows, and to Sleep return'd.

LI.

Why, if the Soul can fling the Dust aside,
And naked on the Air of Heaven ride,
Is't not a shame -- Is't not a shame for him
So long in this Clay suburb to abide?

LII.

But that is but a Tent wherein may rest
A Sultan to the realm of Death address;
The Sultan rises, and the dark Ferrash

Strikes, and prepares it for another guest.

LIII.

I sent my Soul through the Invisible,
Some letter of that After-life to spell:
And after many days my Soul return'd
And said, "Behold, Myself am Heav'n and Hell."

LIV.

Heav'n but the Vision of fulfill'd Desire,
And Hell the Shadow of a Soul on fire,
Cast on the Darkness into which Ourselves,
So late emerg'd from, shall so soon expire.

LV.

While the Rose blows along the River Brink,
With old Khayyam and ruby vintage drink:
And when the Angel with his darker Draught
Draws up to Thee -- take that, and do not shrink.

LVI.

And fear not lest Existence closing your
Account, should lose, or know the type no more;
The Eternal Saki from the Bowl has pour'd
Millions of Bubbles like us, and will pour.

LVII.

When You and I behind the Veil are past,
Oh but the long long while the World shall last,
Which of our Coming and Departure heeds
As much as Ocean of a pebble-cast.

LVIII.

'Tis all a Chequer-board of Nights and Days
Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays:
Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays,
And one by one back in the Closet lays.

LIX.

The Ball no Question makes of Ayes and Noes,
But Right or Left, as strikes the Player goes;
And he that toss'd Thee down into the Field,
He knows about it all -- He knows -- HE knows!

LX.

The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

LXI.

For let Philosopher and Doctor preach

Of what they will, and what they will not -- each
Is but one Link in an eternal Chain
That none can slip, nor break, nor over-reach.

LXII.
And that inverted Bowl we call The Sky,
Whereunder crawling coop't we live and die,
Lift not thy hands to it for help -- for It
Rolls impotently on as Thou or I.

LXIII.
With Earth's first Clay They did the Last Man knead,
And then of the Last Harvest sow'd the Seed:
Yea, the first Morning of Creation wrote
What the Last Dawn of Reckoning shall read.

LXIV.
Yesterday This Day's Madness did prepare;
To-morrow's Silence, Triumph, or Despair:
Drink! for you know not whence you came, nor why:
Drink! for you know not why you go, nor where.

LXV.
I tell You this -- When, starting from the Goal,
Over the shoulders of the flaming Foal
Of Heav'n Parwin and Mushtari they flung,
In my predestin'd Plot of Dust and Soul.

LXVI.
The Vine has struck a fiber: which about
If clings my Being -- let the Dervish flout;
Of my Base metal may be filed a Key,
That shall unlock the Door he howls without.

LXVII.
And this I know: whether the one True Light,
Kindle to Love, or Wrath -- consume me quite,
One Glimpse of It within the Tavern caught
Better than in the Temple lost outright.

LXVIII.
What! out of senseless Nothing to provoke
A conscious Something to resent the yoke
Of unpermitted Pleasure, under pain
Of Everlasting Penalties, if broke!

LXIX.
What! from his helpless Creature be repaid
Pure Gold for what he lent us dross-allay'd --
Sue for a Debt we never did contract,
And cannot answer -- Oh the sorry trade!

LXX.

Nay, but for terror of his wrathful Face,
I swear I will not call Injustice Grace;
Not one Good Fellow of the Tavern but
Would kick so poor a Coward from the place.

LXXI.

Oh Thou, who didst with pitfall and with gin
Beset the Road I was to wander in,
Thou will not with Predestin'd Evil round
Enmesh me, and impute my Fall to Sin?

LXXII.

Oh, Thou, who Man of baser Earth didst make,
And who with Eden didst devise the Snake;
For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man
Is blacken'd, Man's Forgiveness give -- and take!

LXXIII.

Listen again. One Evening at the Close
Of Ramazan, ere the better Moon arose,
In that old Potter's Shop I stood alone
With the clay Population round in Rows.

LXXIV.

And, strange to tell, among that Earthen Lot
Some could articulate, while others not:
And suddenly one more impatient cried --
"Who is the Potter, pray, and who the Pot?"

LXXV.

Then said another -- "Surely not in vain
My Substance from the common Earth was ta'en,
That He who subtly wrought me into Shape
Should stamp me back to common Earth again."

LXXVI.

Another said -- "Why, ne'er a peevish Boy,
Would break the Bowl from which he drank in Joy;
Shall He that made the vessel in pure Love
And Fancy, in an after Rage destroy?"

LXXVII.

None answer'd this; but after Silence spake
A Vessel of a more ungainly Make:
"They sneer at me for leaning all awry;
What! did the Hand then of the Potter shake?"

LXXVIII:

"Why," said another, "Some there are who tell
Of one who threatens he will toss to Hell
The luckless Pots he marred in making -- Pish!

He's a Good Fellow, and 'twill all be well."

LXXIX.

Then said another with a long-drawn Sigh,
"My Clay with long oblivion is gone dry:
But, fill me with the old familiar Juice,
Methinks I might recover by-and-by!"

LXXX.

So while the Vessels one by one were speaking,
The Little Moon look'd in that all were seeking:
And then they jogg'd each other, "Brother! Brother!
Now for the Porter's shoulder-knot a-creaking!"

LXXXI.

Ah, with the Grape my fading Life provide,
And wash my Body whence the Life has died,
And in a Windingsheet of Vine-leaf wrapt,
So bury me by some sweet Garden-side.

LXXXII.

That ev'n my buried Ashes such a Snare
Of Perfume shall fling up into the Air,
As not a True Believer passing by
But shall be overtaken unaware.

LXXXIII.

Indeed the Idols I have loved so long
Have done my Credit in Men's Eye much wrong:
Have drown'd my Honour in a shallow Cup,
And sold my Reputation for a Song.

LXXXIV.

Indeed, indeed, Repentance oft before
I swore -- but was I sober when I swore?
And then, and then came Spring, and Rose-in-hand
My thread-bare Penitence apieces tore.

LXXXV.

And much as Wine has play'd the Infidel,
And robb'd me of my Robe of Honor -- well,
I often wonder what the Vintners buy
One half so precious as the Goods they sell.

LXXXVI.

Alas, that Spring should vanish with the Rose!
That Youth's sweet-scented Manuscript should close!
The Nightingale that in the Branches sang,
Ah, whence, and whither flown again, who knows!

LXXXVII.

Would but the Desert of the Fountain yield

One glimpse -- If dimly, yet indeed, reveal'd
To which the fainting Traveller might spring,
As springs the trampled herbage of the field!

LXXXVIII.

Ah Love! could thou and I with Fate conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits -- and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!

LXXXIX.

Ah, Moon of my Delight who know'st no wane,
The Moon of Heav'n is rising once again:
How oft hereafter rising shall she look
Through this same Garden after me -- in vain!

XC.

And when like her, oh Saki, you shall pass
Among the Guests star-scatter'd on the Grass,
And in your joyous errand reach the spot
Where I made one -- turn down an empty Glass!

TAMAM SHUD

Omar Khayyam