

**SALAMAN AND
ABSAL; AN
ALLEGORY**

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Salaman and Absal; an allegory by Jami . & Edward Fitzgerald

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JAMI . & EDWARD FITZGERALD

**SALAMAN AND
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25/5

Charles Salaman
June 5. 1865

SALÁMÁN AND ABSÁL.

AN ALLEGORY.

TRANSLATED FROM THE PERSIAN

OR

* J Á M I.

by
Edward Fitzgerald

LONDON:

J. W. PARKER AND SON, WEST STRAND.

MDCCCLVI.

* Nuruddin Abdurrahman.

His Takhtalus, or poetic name is "Jami"

JOHN CHILDS AND SON, BUNGAY.

MY DEAR COWELL,

Two years ago, when we began (I for the first time) to read this Poem together, I wanted you to translate it, as something that should interest a few who are worth interesting. You, however, did not see the way clear then, and had Aristotle pulling you by one Shoulder and Prakrit Vararuchi by the other, so as indeed to have hindered you up to this time completing a Version of Hafiz' best Odes which you had then happily begun. So, continuing to like old Jámi more and more, I must try my hand upon him; and here is my reduced Version of a small Original. What Scholarship it has is yours, my Master in Persian and so much beside; who are no further answerable for *all* than by well liking and wishing published what you may scarce have Leisure to find due fault with.

Had all the Poem been like Parts, it would have been all translated, and in such Prose lines as you measure Hafiz in, and such as any one should adopt who does not feel himself so much of a Poet as him he translates and some he translates for—before whom it is best to lay the raw material as genuine as may be, to work up to their own better Fancies. But, unlike Hafiz' best—(whose Sonnets are sometimes as close packt as Shakespeare's, which they resemble in more

ways than one)—Jámi, you know, like his Countrymen generally, is very diffuse in what he tells and his way of telling it. The very structure of the Persian Couplet—(here, like people on the Stage, I am repeating to you what you know, with an Eye to the small Audience beyond)—so often ending with the same Word, or Two Words, if but the foregoing Syllable secure a lawful Rhyme, so often makes the Second Line but a slightly varied Repetition, or Modification of the First, and gets slowly over Ground often hardly worth gaining. \times This iteration is common indeed to the Hebrew Psalms and Proverbs—where, however, the Value of the Repetition is different. In your Hafiz also, not Two only, but Eight or Ten Lines perhaps are tied to the same Close of Two—or *Three*—words; a verbal Ingenuity as much valued in the East as better Thought. And how many of all the Odes called his, more and fewer in various Copies, do you yourself care to deal with?—And in the better ones how often some lines, as I think for this reason, unworthy of the Rest—interpolated perhaps from the Mouths of his many Devotees, Mystical and Sensual—or crept into Manuscripts of which he never arranged or corrected one from the First?

This, together with the confined Action of Persian Grammar, whose organic simplicity seems to me its difficulty when applied, makes the Line by Line Translation of a Poem not line by line precious tedious in proportion to its

length. Especially—(what the Sonnet does not feel)—in the Narrative; which I found when once eased in its Collar, and yet missing somewhat of rhythmical Amble, somehow, and not without resistance on my part, swerved into that “easy road” of Verse—easiest as unbeset with any exigencies of Rhyme. Those little Stories, too, which you thought untractable, but which have their Use as well as Humour by way of quaint Interlude Music between the little Acts, felt ill at ease in solemn Lowth-Isaiah Prose, and had learn’d their tune, you know, before even Hiawatha came to teach people to quarrel about it. Till, one part drawing on another, the Whole grew to the present form.

As for the much bodily omitted—it may be readily guessed that an Asiatic of the 15th Century might say much on such a subject that an Englishman of the 19th would not care to read. Not that our Jāmi is ever *licentious* like his Contemporary Chaucer, nor like Chaucer’s Posterity in Times that called themselves more Civil. But better Men will not now endure a simplicity of Speech that Worse men abuse. Then the many more, and foolisher, Stories—preliminary To Deums to Allah and Allah’s-shadow Sháh—very much about Alef Noses, Eyebrows like inverted Núys, drunken Narcissus Eyes—and that eternal Moon Face which never wanes from Persia—of all which there is surely enough in this Glimpse of the Original. No doubt some Oriental character escapes—the Story sometimes becomes

too Skin and Bone without due interval of even Stupid and Bad. Of the two Evils?—At least what I have chosen is least in point of bulk; scarcely in proportion with the length of its Apology which, as usual, probably discharges one's own Conscience at too great a Price; people at once turning against you the Arms they might have wanted had you not laid them down. However it may be with this, I am sure a complete Translation—even in Prose—would not have been a readable one—which, after all, is a useful property of most Books, even of Poetry.

In studying the Original, you know, one gets contentedly carried over barren Ground in a new Land of Language—excited by chasing any new Game that will but show Sport; the most worthless to win asking perhaps all the sharper Energy to pursue, and so far yielding all the more Satisfaction when run down. Especially, cheer'd on as I was by such a Huntsman as poor Dog of a Persian Scholar never hunted with before; and moreover—but that was rather in the Spanish Sierras—by the Presence of a Lady in the Field, silently brightening about us like Aurora's Self, or chiming in with musical Encouragement that all we started and ran down must be Royal Game!

Ah, happy Days! When shall we Three meet again—when dip in that unreturning Tide of Time and Circumstance!—In those Meadows far from the World, it seemed, as Salámán's Island—before an Iron Railway broke the

Heart of that Happy Valley whose Gossip was the Mill-wheel, and Visitors the Summer Airs that momentarily ruffled the sleepy Stream that turned it as they chased one another over to lose themselves in Whispers in the Copse beyond. Or returning—I suppose you remember whose Lines they are—

When Winter Skies were ting'd with Crimson still
 Where Thornbush nestles on the quiet hill,
 And the live Amber round the setting Sun,
 Lighting the Labourer home whose Work is done,
 Burn'd like a Golden Angel-ground above
 The solitary Home of Peace and Love—

at such an hour drawing home together for a fireside Night of it with Æschylus or Calderon in the Cottage, whose walls, modest almost as those of the Poor who cluster'd—and with good reason—round, make to my Eyes the Tower'd Crown of Oxford hanging in the Horizon, and with all Honour won, but a dingy Vapour in Comparison. And now, should they beckon from the terrible Ganges, and this little Book begun as a happy Record of past, and pledge perhaps of Future, Fellowship in Study, darken already with the shadow of everlasting Farewell!

But to turn from you Two to a Public—nearly as numerous—(with whom, by the way, this Letter may die without a name that *you* know very well how to supply),—here is the best I could make of Jâmi's Poem—“Ouvrage de peu d'étendue,” says the Biographie Universelle, and, whatever