

**RUBAIYAT OF OMAR  
KHAYYAM. CRITIC  
PAMPHLET NO. 3**

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Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. Critic pamphlet No. 3 by Omar Khayyam & Edward FitzGerald

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**OMAR KHAYYAM & EDWARD FITZGERALD**

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EDWARD FITZGERALD.

Rubaiyat  
of  
Omar Khayyam

Translated by Edward FitzGerald

*(Fourth Edition, 1879)*

*Introduction by the Hon. John Hay*

*Critic Pamphlet, No. 3*

1898  
New York  
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## The Hon. John Hay on Omar Khayyám

THE HON. JOHN HAY'S address at the Omar Khayyam Club's dinner in London, in December, 1897, has been pronounced a "masterpiece of literary oratory." Every lover of the Khayyam-FitzGerald "Rubaiyát" will be glad to add it to his collection of Omariana. Col. Hay, who was the guest of the evening, said :—

I cannot sufficiently thank you for the high and unmerited honor you have done me to-night. I feel keenly that on such an occasion, with such company, my place is below the salt ; but as you kindly invited me, it was not in human nature for me to refuse.

Although in knowledge and comprehension of the two great poets whom you are met to commemorate I am the least among you, there is no one who regards them with greater admiration, or reads them with more enjoyment, than myself. I can never forget my emotions when I first saw FitzGerald's translations of the Quatrains. Keats, in his sublime ode on Chapman's Homer, has described the sensation once for all :—

"Then felt I like some watcher of the skies,  
When a new planet swims into his ken."

The exquisite beauty, the faultless form, the singular grace of those amazing stanzas, were not more wonderful than the depth and breadth of their profound philosophy, their knowledge of

life, their dauntless courage, their serene facing of the ultimate problems of life and of death. Of course the doubt did not spare me, which has assailed many as ignorant as I was of the literature of the East, whether it was the poet or his translator to whom was due this splendid result. Was it, in fact, a reproduction of an antique song, or a mystification of a great modern, careless of fame, and scornful of his time? Could it be possible that in the eleventh century, so far away as Khorassan, so accomplished a man-of-letters lived, with such distinction, such breadth, such insight, such calm disillusion, such cheerful and jocund despair? Was this Weltschmerz, which we thought a malady of our day, endemic in Persia in 1100? My doubt only lasted till I came upon a literal translation of the Rubaiyát, and I saw that not the least remarkable quality of FitzGerald's poem was its fidelity to the original.

In short, Omar was a FitzGerald before the latter, or FitzGerald was a reincarnation of Omar. It is not to the disadvantage of the later poet that he followed so closely in the footsteps of the earlier. A man of extraordinary genius had appeared in the world; had sung a song of incomparable beauty and power in an environment no longer worthy of him, in a language of narrow range; for many generations the song was virtually lost; then by a miracle of creation, a poet, a twin-brother in the spirit to the first, was born, who took up the forgotten poem and sang it anew with all its original melody



and force, and with all the accumulated refinement of ages of art. It seems to me idle to ask which was the greater master; each seems greater than his work. The song is like an instrument of precious workmanship and marvelous tone, which is worthless in common hands, but when it falls, at long intervals, into the hands of the supreme master, it yields a melody of transcendent enchantment to all that have ears to hear.

If we look at the sphere of influence of the two poets, there is no longer any comparison. Omar sang to a half barbarous province; FitzGerald to the world. Wherever the English speech is spoken or read, the Rubaiyát have taken their place as a classic. There is not a hill-post in India, nor a village in England, where there is not a coterie to whom Omar Khayyam is a familiar friend and a bond of union. In America he has an equal following, in many regions and conditions. In the Eastern States his adepts form an esoteric set; the beautiful volume of drawings by Mr. Vedder is a centre of delight and suggestion wherever it exists. In the cities of the West you will find the Quatrains one of the most thoroughly read books in every club library. I heard them quoted once in one of the most lonely and desolate spots of the high Rockies. We had been camping on the Great Divide, our "roof of the world," where in the space of a few feet you may see two springs, one sending its waters to the Polar solitudes, the other to the eternal Carib summer. One morning at sunrise, as we

were breaking camp, I was startled to hear one of our party, a frontiersman born, intoning these words of sombre majesty :—

“’Tis but a tent where takes his one day’s rest  
A Sultán to the realm of death address ;  
The Sultán rises, and the dark Ferrásh  
Strikes and prepares it for another guest.”

I thought that sublime setting of primeval forest and pouring cañon was worthy of the lines ; I am sure the dewless, crystalline air never vibrated to strains of more solemn music. Certainly, our poet can never be numbered among the great popular writers of all time. He has told no story ; he has never unpacked his heart in public ; he has never thrown the reins on the neck of the winged horse, and let his imagination carry him where it listed. “Ah ! the crowd must have emphatic warrant,” as Browning sang. Its suffrages are not for the cool, collected observer, whose eyes no glitter can dazzle, no mist suffuse. The many cannot but resent that air of lofty intelligence, that pale and subtle smile. But he will hold a place forever among that limited number who, like Lucretius and Epicurus,—without rage or defiance, even without unbecoming mirth,—look deep into the tangled mysteries of things ; refuse credence to the absurd, and allegiance to arrogant authority ; sufficiently conscious of fallibility to be tolerant of all opinions ; with a faith too wide for doctrine and a benevolence untrammelled by creed , too wise to be wholly poets, and yet too surely poets to be implacably wise.

FITZGERALD'S TRANSLATION OF THE RUBAIYAT \*

*(Fourth Edition)*

I

WAKE! For the Sun who scatter'd into flight  
The Stars before him from the Field of Night,  
Drives Night along with them from Heav'n, and strikes  
The Sultan's Turret with a Shaft of Light.

II

Before the phantom of False morning died,  
Methought a Voice within the Tavern cried,  
"When all the Temple is prepared within,  
Why nods the drowsy Worshipper outside?"

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."

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\* By courtesy of the Macmillan Co.