THE WAYSIDE SERIES. FLOWERS FROM PERSIAN GARDENS: SELECTIONS FROM THE POEMS OF SAADI, HAFIZ, OMAR KHAYYAM, AND OTHERS

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The Wayside Series. Flowers from Persian Gardens: Selections from the Poems of Saadi, Hafiz, Omar Khayyám, and Others by Edward S. Holden

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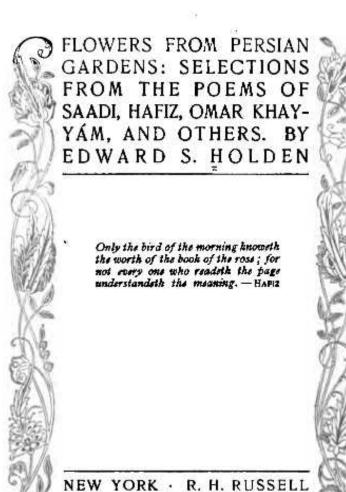
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EDWARD S. HOLDEN

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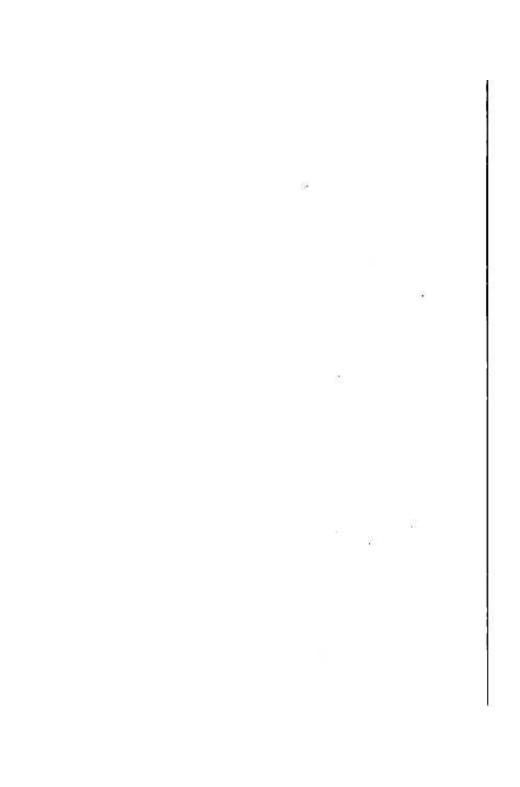
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INTRODUCTION

HE selections that follow have been chosen

mostly from well-known books. sole criterion for each choice has been that the words of the translation should happily set forth the poet's meaning. Oriental words and names are here printed as they are found in the sources from which they are taken. To do otherwise would be pure pedantry in a book which is not addressed to scholars, but to general readers. A few specimens of translation into Greek, Latin, German, and French have been chosen. They are instructive in many respects, and each one is, in its way, famous. One word may be spoken on the matter of translating Oriental poetry luto the languages of the West. One must seek, as Professor Charles Eliot Norton has well said, "not a translation but the re-delivery of a poetic inspiration." Orientals are human beings like unto ourselves. They have our own wants, hopes, fears, delights; and they seek their satisfactions in like fashion. Any graphic and veracious recital of human feeling interests and excites. While the form of the poetry of the Persians is as alien to us as that of the Tartars, the feelings struggling for expression are not

foreign. We are of Aryan blood as they are,

1

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and thousands of years of different race-experience have not shut the door between us. During all those centuries the culture of the East has, in one way or another, touched the West. Their Art, their Architecture, their Chivalry, - transformed, it is true, - have

Alexander the Great destroyed at Persepolis buildings more magnificent than any others ever seen on the round world, not excepting the

influenced our own most intimately.

monuments of Athens. The looms of Persia made imperial Constantinople splendid. Chemistry is a Persian word, and the Arabs borrowed their knowledge of the art from Iran. All the drugs of Hippocrates and of the ancient Greeks have Persian names. The Persians transmitted the immortal fables and apologues of India to the Arabs, and through them to the West. The works of a Persian sage — Avicenna — were text-books in the University of Paris so late as the time of Louis the Fourteenth. When Benjamin Franklin was seeking for a new chapter of our Bible, he found it in Saadi's parable of Abraham and the Fire-worshipper. Our little children are bred up on the tales of the Arabian Nights, a great part of which are of Persian origin. In a thousand unacknowledged ways the West has been taught by the East. When Eng-

land was a wilderness, inhabited by savages, Persia was polite, cultivated, ingenious, learned

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we have learned much from them, and our thoughts still respond to theirs.

It is only the form of their thoughts, and especially of their poetic thoughts, that is alien. It is worth while to dwell a little on this point. One of the odes of Hafiz begins, in the Persian, as follows (the Persian is written in italics and necessary words are supplied in parentheses):

(The) entrance (of my) face (that is) my eye (is) the nest:

(With) courtesy increasing, sit down (in this) bouse (it is) thy bouse.

The meaning of Hafiz must, here as elsewhere, be reached by a series of approximations. At each step we must come nearer to occidental forms, always preserving the Oriental feeling—if we can. Hafiz would certainly have accepted the following couplet as his own:

The vestibule of my face (my eye) is a nest for you:

Be gracious, ob, sit down; my bouse is your bouse.

The learned editor of Hafiz — Rosenzweig has versified this in German:

> Meines Auges Halle will Ich Dir zum Neste weih'n Sass' in ihr dich gnädig nieder, Denn das Haus ist dein!

This ode has also been made part of an English sonnet: