The Alchemy of Happiness
Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī

The Conference of the Birds
Farīd al-Dīn Attār

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Solomon succeeded David. And he said: "O people! We have been taught the language of birds, and we have been given (abundance) of all things. This surely is evident favor (from God)." —Quran 27:16

And the birds assembled: all were turned to God (in devotion and glorification). —Quran 38:19

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Introduction

"Knowledge of a part is better than ignorance of the whole." —Abu al-Feda

Know, O beloved, that man was not created in jest or at random, but marvellously made and for some great end. Although he is not from everlasting, yet he lives for ever; and though his body is mean and earthly, yet his spirit is lofty and divine. When in the crucible of abstinence he is purged from carnal passions he attains to the highest, and in place of being a slave to lust and anger becomes endued with angelic qualities. Attaining that state, he finds his heaven in the contemplation of Eternal Beauty, and no longer in fleshly delights. The spiritual alchemy which operates this change in him, like that which transmutes base metals into gold, is not easily discovered, nor to be

found in the house of every old woman. It is to explain that alchemy and its methods of operation that the author has undertaken this work, which he has entitled, The Alchemy of Happiness. Now the treasuries of God, in which this alchemy is to be sought, are the hearts of the prophets, and he, who seeks it elsewhere will be disappointed and bankrupt on the day of judgment, when he hears the words, "We have lifted the veil from off thee, and thy sight today is keen."

God has sent on earth a hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets[1] to teach men the prescription of this alchemy, and how to purify their hearts from baser qualities in the crucible of abstinence. This alchemy may be briefly described as turning away from the world to God, and its constituents are four:

1. The knowledge of self.
2. The knowledge of God.
3. The knowledge of this world as it really is.
4. The knowledge of the next world as it really is.

We shall now proceed to expound these four constituents in order.

1. This is the fixed number of the prophets according to Islamic tradition.

Chapter 1
Knowledge of Self

Knowledge of self is the key to the knowledge of God, according to the saying: "He who knows himself knows God,"[2] and, as it is Written in the Quran, "We will show them Our signs in the world and in themselves, that the truth may be manifest to them." Now nothing is nearer to thee than thyself, and if thou knowest not thyself how canst thou know anything else? If thou sayest "I know myself," meaning thy outward shape, body, face, limbs, and so forth, such knowledge can never be a key to the knowledge of God. Nor, if thy knowledge as to that which is within only extends so far, that when thou art hungry thou eatest, and when thou art angry thou attackest some one, wilt thou progress any further in this path, for the beasts are thy partners in this? But real self-knowledge consists in knowing the following things: What art thou in thyself, and from whence hast thou come?

2. A traditional saying of the Prophet.

Whither art thou going, and for what purpose hast thou come to tarry here awhile, and in what does thy real happiness and misery consist? Some of thy attributes are those of animals, some of devils, and some of angels, and thou hast to find out which of these attributes are accidental and which essential. Until thou knowest this, thou canst not find out where thy real happiness lies. The occupation of animals is eating, sleeping, and fighting; therefore, if thou art an animal, busy thyself in these things. Devils are busy in stirring up mischief, and in guile and deceit; if thou belongest to them, do their work. Angels contemplate the beauty of God, and are entirely free from animal qualities; if thou art of angelic nature, then strive towards thine origin, that thou mayest know and contemplate the Most High, and be delivered from the thraldom of lust and anger. Thou shouldest also discover why thou hast been created with these two animal instincts: whether that they should subdue and lead thee captive, or whether that thou shouldest subdue them, and, in thy upward progress, make of one thy steed and of the other thy weapon.

The first step to self-knowledge is to know that thou art composed of an outward shape, called the body, and an inward entity called the heart, or soul. By "heart" I do not mean the piece of flesh situated in the left of our bodies, but that which uses all the other faculties as its instruments and servants. In truth it does not belong to the visible world, but to the invisible, and has come into this world as a traveller visits a foreign country for the sake of merchandise, and will presently return to its native land. It is the knowledge of this entity and its attributes which is the key to the knowledge of God.

Some idea of the reality of the heart, or spirit, may be obtained by a man closing his eyes and forgetting everything around except his individuality. He will thus also obtain a glimpse of the unending nature of that individuality. Too close inquiry, however, into the essence of spirit is forbidden by the Law. In the Quran it is written: "They will question thee concerning the spirit. Say: 'The Spirit comes by the command of my Lord.'" This much is known of it that it is an indivisible essence belonging to the world of decrees, and that it is not from everlasting, but created. An exact philosophical knowledge of the spirit is not a necessary preliminary to walking in the path of religion, but comes rather as the result of self-discipline and perseverance in that path, as it is said in the Quran: "Those who strive in Our way, verily We will guide them to the right paths."

For the carrying on of this spiritual warfare by which the knowledge of oneself and of God is to be obtained, the body may be figured as a kingdom, the soul as its king, and the different senses and faculties as constituting an army. Reason may be called the vizier, or prime minister, passion the revenue-collector, and anger the police-officer. Under the guise of collecting revenue, passion is continually prone to plunder on its own account, while resentment is always inclined to harshness and extreme severity. Both of these, the revenue-collector and the police-officer, have to be kept in due subordination to the king, but not killed or expelled, as they have their own proper functions to fulfil. But if passion and resentment master reason, the ruin of the soul infallibly ensues. A soul which allows its lower faculties to dominate the higher is as one who should hand over an angel to the

power of a dog or a Muslim to the tyranny of an unbeliever. The cultivation of demonic, animal, or angelic qualities results in the production of corresponding characters, which in the Day of Judgment will be manifested in visible shapes, the sensual appearing as swine, the ferocious as dogs and wolves, and the pure as angels. The aim of moral discipline is to purify the heart from the rust of passion and resentment, until, like a clear mirror, it reflects the light of God.

Some one may here object, "But if man has been created with animal and demonic qualities as well as angelic, how are we to know that the latter constitute his real essence, while the former are merely accidental and transitory?" To this I answer that the essence of each creature is to be sought in that which is highest in it and peculiar to it. Thus the horse and the ass are both burden-bearing animals, but the superiority of the horse to the ass consists in its being adapted for use in battle. If it fails in this, it becomes degraded to the rank of burden-bearing animals. Similarly with man: the highest faculty in him is reason, which fits him for the contemplation of God. If this predominates in him, when he dies, he leaves behind him all tendencies to passion and resentment, and becomes capable of association with angels. As regards his mere animal qualities, man is inferior to many animals, but reason makes him superior to them, as it is written in the Quran: "To man We have subjected all things in the earth." But if his lower tendencies have triumphed, after death he will ever be looking towards the earth and longing for earthly delights.

Now the rational soul in man abounds in marvels, both of knowledge and power. By means of it he mas-

ters arts and sciences, can pass in a flash from earth to heaven and back again, can map out the skies and measure the distances between the stars. By it also he can draw the fish from the sea and the birds from the air, and can subdue to his service animals, like the elephant, the camel, and the horse. His five senses are like five doors opening on the external world; but, more wonderful than this, his heart has a window which opens on the unseen world of spirits. In the state of sleep, when the avenues of the senses are closed, this window is opened and man receives impressions from the unseen world and sometimes foreshadowings of the future. His heart is then like a mirror which reflects what is pictured in the Tablet of Fate. But, even in sleep, thoughts of worldly things dull this mirror, so that the impressions it receives are not clear. After death, however, such thoughts vanish and things are seen in their naked reality, and the saying in the Quran is fulfilled: "We have stripped the veil from off thee and thy sight today is keen."

This opening of a window in the heart towards the unseen also takes place in conditions approaching those of prophetic inspiration, when intuitions spring up in the mind unconveyed through any sense-channel. The more a man purifies himself from fleshly lusts and concentrates his mind on God, the more conscious will he be of such intuitions. Those who are not conscious of them have no right to deny their reality.

Nor are such intuitions confined only to those of prophetic rank. Just as iron, by sufficient polishing, can be made into a mirror, so any mind by due discipline can be rendered receptive of such impressions. It was at this truth the Prophet hinted when he said, "Every child is born with a predisposition toward

Islam; then his parents make a Jew, or a Christian, or a star-worshipper of him." Every human being has in the depths of his consciousness heard the question "Am I not your Lord?" and answered "Yes" to it. But some hearts are like mirrors so befouled with rust and dirt that they give no clear reflections, while those of the prophets and saints, though they are men "of like passions with us," are extremely sensitive to all divine impressions.

Nor is it only by reason of knowledge acquired and intuitive that the soul of man holds the first rank among created things, but also by reason of power. Just as angels preside over the elements, so does the soul rule the members of the body. Those souls which attain a special degree of power not only rule their own body but those of others also. If they wish a sick man to recover he recovers, or a person in health to fall ill he becomes ill, or if they will the presence of a person he comes to them. According as the effects produced by these powerful souls are good or bad they are termed miracles or sorceries. These souls differ from common folk in three ways: (1) what others only see in dreams they see in their waking moments. (2) While others' wills only affect their own bodies, these, by will-power, can move bodies extraneous to themselves. (3) The knowledge which others acquire by laborious learning comes to them by intuition.

These three, of course, are not the only marks which differentiate them from common people, but the only ones that come within our cognisance. Just as no one knows the real nature of God but God Himself, so no one knows the real nature of a prophet but a prophet. Nor is this to be wondered at, as in everyday matters we see that it is impossible to explain the

charm of poetry to one whose ear is insusceptible of cadence and rhythm, or the glories of color to one who is stone-blind. Besides mere incapacity, there are other hindrances to the attainment of spiritual truth. One of these is externally acquired knowledge. To use a figure, the heart may be represented as a well, and the five senses as five streams which are continually conveying water to it. In order to find out the real contents of the heart these streams must be stopped for a time, at any rate, and the refuse they have brought with them must be cleared out of the well. In other words, if we are to arrive at pure spiritual truth, we must put away, for the time, knowledge which has been acquired by external processes and which too often hardens into dogmatic prejudice.

A mistake of an opposite kind is made by shallow people who, echoing some phrases which they have caught from Sufi teachers, go about decrying all knowledge. This is as if a person who was not an adept in alchemy were to go about saying, "Alchemy is better than gold," and were to refuse gold when it was offered to him. Alchemy is better than gold, but real alchemists are very rare, and so are real Sufis. He who has a mere smattering of Sufism is not superior to a learned main, any more than he who has tried a few experiments in alchemy has ground for despising a rich man.

Anyone who will look into the matter will see that happiness is necessarily linked with the knowledge of God. Each faculty of ours delights in that for which it was created: lust delights in accomplishing desire, anger in taking vengeance, the eye in seeing beautiful objects, and the ear in hearing harmonious sounds. The highest function of the soul of man is the percep-

tion of truth; in this accordingly it finds its special delight. Even in trifling matters, such as learning chess, this holds good, and the higher the subject matter of the knowledge obtained the greater the delight. A man would be pleased at being admitted into the confidence of a prime minister, but how much more if the king makes an intimate of him and discloses state secrets to him!

An astronomer who, by his knowledge, can map the stars and describe their courses, derives more pleasure from his knowledge than the chess player from his. Seeing, then, that nothing is higher than God, how great must be the delight which springs from the true knowledge of Him!

A person in whom the desire for this knowledge has disappeared is like one who has lost his appetite for healthy food, or who prefers feeding on clay to eating bread. All bodily appetites perish at death with the organs they use, but the soul dies not, and retains whatever knowledge of God it possesses; nay, increases it.

An important part of our knowledge of God arises from the study and contemplation of our own bodies, which reveal to us the power, wisdom, and love of the Creator. His power, in that from a mere drop He has built up the wonderful frame of man; His wisdom is revealed in its intricacies and the mutual adaptability of its parts; and His love is shown by His not only supplying such organs as are absolutely necessary for existence, as the liver, the heart, and the brain, but those which are not absolutely necessary, as the hand, the foot, the tongue, and the eye. To these He has added, as ornaments, the blackness of the hair, the redness of lips, and the curve of the eyebrows.

Man has been truly termed a "microcosm," or little world in himself, and the structure of his body should be studied not only by those who wish to become doctors, but by those who wish to attain to a more intimate knowledge of God, just as close study of the niceties and shades of language in a great poem reveals to us more and more of the genius of its author.

But, when all is said, the knowledge of the soul plays a more important part in leading to the knowledge of God than the knowledge of our body and its functions. The body may be compared to a steed and the soul to its rider; the body was created for the soul, the soul for the body. If a man knows not his own soul, which is the nearest thing to him, what is the use of his claiming to know others? It is as if a beggar who has not the wherewithal for a meal should claim to be able to feed a town.

In this chapter we have attempted, in some degree, to expound the greatness of man's soul. He who neglects it and suffers its capacities to rust or to degenerate must necessarily be the loser in this world and the next. The true greatness of man lies in his capacity for eternal progress, otherwise in this temporal sphere he is the weakest of all things, being subject to hunger, thirst, heat, cold, and sorrow. Those things he takes most delight in are often the most injurious to him, and those things which benefit him are not to be obtained without toil and trouble. As to his intellect, a slight disarrangement of matter in his brain is sufficient to destroy or madden him; as to his power, the sting of a wasp is sufficient to rob him of ease and sleep; as to his temper, he is upset by the loss of a sixpence; as to his beauty, he is little more than nauseous matter covered with a fair skin. With-

out frequent washing he becomes utterly repulsive and disgraceful.

In truth, man in this world is extremely weak and contemptible; it is only in the next that he will be of value, if by means of the "alchemy of happiness" he rises from the rank of beasts to that of angels. Otherwise his condition will be worse than the brutes, which perish and turn to dust. It is necessary for him, at the same time that he is conscious of his superiority as the climax of created things, to learn to know also his helplessness, as that too is one of the keys to the knowledge of God.

Chapter 2
Knowledge of God

It is a well-known saying of the Prophet that "He who knows himself, knows God;" that is, by contemplation of his own being and attributes man arrives at some knowledge of God. But since many who contemplate themselves do not find God, it follows that there must be some special way of doing so. As a matter of fact, there are two methods of arriving at this knowledge, but one is so abstruse that it is not adapted to ordinary intelligences, and therefore is better left unexplained. The other method is as follows: When a man considers himself he knows that there was a time when he was non-existent, as it is written in the Quran: "Does it not occur to man that there was a time when he was nothing?" Further, he knows that he was made out of a drop of water in which there was neither intellect, nor hearing, sight, head, hands, feet, etc. From this it is obvious that whatever degree

of perfection he may have arrived at, he did not make himself, nor can he now make a single hair.

How much more helpless, then, was his condition when he was a mere drop of water! Thus, as we have seen in the first chapter, he finds in his own being reflected in miniature, so to speak, the power, wisdom and love of the Creator. If all the sages of the world were assembled, and their lives prolonged for an indefinite time, they could not effect any improvement in the construction of a single part of the body.

For instance, in the adaptation of the front and side-teeth to the mastication of food, and in the construction of the tongue, salivating glands, and the throat for its digestion, we find a contrivance which cannot be improved upon. Similarly, whoever considers his hand, with its five fingers of unequal lengths, four of them with three joints and the thumb with only two, and the way in which it can be used for grasping, or for carrying, or for smiting, will frankly acknowledge that no amount of human wisdom could better it by altering the number and arrangement of the fingers, or in any other way.

When a man further considers how his various wants of food, lodging, etc., are amply supplied from the storehouse of creation, he becomes aware that God's mercy is as great as His power and wisdom, as He has Himself said, "My mercy is greater than My wrath," and according to the Prophet's saying, "God is more tender to His servants than a mother to her suckling-child." Thus from his own creation man comes to know God's existence, from the wonders of his bodily frame God's power and wisdom, and from the ample provision made for his various needs God's

love. In this way the knowledge of oneself becomes a key to the knowledge of God.

Not only are man's attributes a reflection of God's attributes, but the mode of existence of man's soul affords some insight into God's mode of existence. That is to say, both God and the soul are invisible, indivisible, unconfined by space and time, and outside the categories of quantity and quality; nor can the ideas of shape, color, or size attach to them. People find it hard to form a conception of such realities as are devoid of quality and quantity, etc., but a similar difficulty attaches to the conception of our everyday feelings, such as anger, pain, pleasure, or love. They are thought-concepts, and cannot be cognised by the senses; whereas quality, quantity, etc., are sense-concepts. Just as the ear cannot take cognisance of color, nor the eye of sound, so, in conceiving of the ultimate realities, God and the soul, we find ourselves in a region in which sense-concepts can bear no part. So much, however, we can see, that, as God is Ruler of the universe, and, being Himself beyond space and time, quantity and quality, governs things that are so conditioned, so the soul rules the body and its members, being itself invisible, indivisible, and unlocated in any special part. For how can the indivisible be located in that which is divisible? From all this we see how true is the saying of the Prophet, "God created man in His own likeness."

And, as we arrive at some knowledge of God's essence and attributes from the contemplation of the soul's essence and attributes, so we come to understand God's method of working and government and delegation of power to angelic forces, etc., by observing how each of us governs his own little kingdom. To

take a simple instance: suppose a man wishes to write the name of God. First of all the wish is conceived in his heart, it is then conveyed to the brain by the vital spirits, the form of the word "God" takes shape in the thought-chambers of the brain, thence it travels by the nerve-channels, and sets in motion the fingers, which in their turn set in motion the pen, and thus the name "God" is traced on paper exactly as it had been conceived in the writer's brain. Similarly, when God wills a thing it appears in the spiritual plane, which in the Quran is called "The Throne;"[3] from the throne it passes, by a spiritual current, to a lower plane called "The Chair;"[4] then the shape of it appears on the "Tablet of Destiny;"[5] whence, by the mediation of the forces called "angels," it assumes actuality, and appears on the earth in the form of plants, trees, and animals, representing the will and thought of God, as the written letters represent the wish conceived in the heart and the shape present in the brain of the writer.

No one can understand a king but a king therefore God has made each of us a king in miniature, so to speak, over a kingdom which is an infinitely reduced copy of His own. In the, kingdom of man God's "throne" is represented by the soul, the Archangel by the heart, "the chair" by the brain, "the tablet" by the treasure-chamber of thought. The soul, itself unlocated and indivisible, governs the body as God governs the universe. In short, each of us is entrusted with a little kingdom, and charged not to be careless in the administration of it.

As regards the recognition of God's providence,

3. Al-Arsh
4. Al-Kursi
5. Al-Lawh al-Mahfuz

there are many degrees of Knowledge. The mere physicist is like an ant who, crawling on a sheet of paper and observing black letters spreading over it, should refer the cause to the pen alone. The astronomer is like an ant of somewhat wider vision who should catch sight of the fingers moving the pen, i.e., he knows that the elements are under the power of the stars, but he does not know that the stars are under the power of the angels. Thus, owing to the different degrees of perception in people, disputes must arise in tracing effects to causes. Those whose eyes never see beyond the world of phenomena are like those who mistake servants of the lowest rank for the king. The laws of phenomena must be constant, or there could be no such thing as science; but it is a great error to mistake the slaves for the master.

As long as this difference in the perceptive faculty of observers exists, disputes must necessarily go on. It is as if some blind men, hearing that an elephant had come to their town, should go and examine it. The only knowledge of it which they can obtain comes through the sense of touch: so one handles the animal's leg, another his tusk, another his ear, and, according to their several perceptions, pronounce it to be a column, a thick pole, or a quilt, each taking a part for the whole. So the physicist and astronomer confound the laws they perceive with the Lawgiver. A similar mistake is attributed to Abraham in the Quran, where it is related that he turned successively to stars, moon, and sun as the objects of his worship, until grown aware of Him who made all these, he exclaimed, "I love not them that set."[6]

6. Quran, chapter 6.

We have a common instance of this referring to second causes what ought to be referred to the First Cause in the case of so-called illness. For instance, if a man ceases to take any interest in worldly matters, conceives a distaste for common pleasures, and appears sunk in depression, the doctor will say, "This is a case of melancholy, and requires such and such a prescription." The physicist will say, "This is a dryness of the brain caused by hot weather and cannot be relieved until the air becomes moist." The astrologer will attribute it to some particular conjunction or opposition of planets. "Thus far their wisdom reaches," says the Quran. It does not occur to them that what has really happened is this: that the Almighty has a concern for the welfare of that man, and has therefore commanded His servants, the planets or the elements, to produce such a condition in him that he may turn away from the world to his Maker. The knowledge of this fact is a lustrous pearl from the ocean of inspirational knowledge, to which all other forms of knowledge are as islands in the sea.

The doctor, physicist, and astrologer are doubtless right each in his particular branch of knowledge, but they do not see that illness is, so to speak, a cord of love by which God draws to Himself the saints concerning whom He has said, "I was sick and ye visited Me not." Illness itself is one of those forms of experience by which man arrives at the knowledge of God, as He says by the mouth of His Prophet, "Sicknesses themselves are My servants, and are attached to My chosen."

The foregoing remarks may enable us to enter a little more fully into the meaning of those exclamations so often on the lips of the Faithful: "God is

holy," "Praise be to God," "There is no God but God," "God is great." Concerning the last we may say that it does not mean that God is greater than creation, for creation is His manifestation as light manifests the sun, and it would not be correct to say that the sun is greater than its own light. It rather means that God's greatness immeasurably transcends our cognitive faculties, and that we can only form a very dim and imperfect idea of it. If a child asks us to explain to him the pleasure which exists in wielding sovereignty, we may say it is like the pleasure he feels in playing bat and ball, though in reality the two have nothing in common except that they both come under the category of pleasure. Thus, the exclamation "God is great" means that His greatness far exceeds all our powers of comprehension. Moreover, such imperfect knowledge of God as we can attain to is not a mere speculative knowledge, but must be accompanied by devotion and worship. When a man dies he has to do with God alone, and if we have to live with a person, our happiness entirely depends on the degree of affection we feel towards him. Love is the seed of happiness, and love to God is fostered and developed by worship. Such worship and constant remembrance of God implies a certain degree of austerity and curbing of bodily appetites. Not that a man is intended altogether to abolish these, for then the human race would perish. But strict limits must be set to their indulgence, and as a man is not the best judge in his own case as to what these limits should be, he had better consult some spiritual guide on the subject. Such spiritual guides are the prophets, and the laws which they have laid down under divine inspiration prescribe the limits which must be observed in these

matters. He who transgresses these limits "wrongs his own soul," as it is written in the Quran.

Notwithstanding this clear pronouncement of the Quran there are those who, through their ignorance of God, do transgress these limits, and this ignorance may be due to several different causes. Firstly, there are some who, failing to find God by observation, conclude that there is no God and that this world of wonders made itself, or existed from everlasting. They are like a man who, seeing a beautifully written letter, should suppose that it had written itself without a writer, or had always existed. People in this state of mind are so far gone in error that it is of little use to argue with them. Such are some of the physicists and astronomers to whom we referred above.

Some, through ignorance of the real nature of the soul, repudiate the doctrine of a future life, in which man will be called to account and be rewarded or punished. They regard themselves as no better than animals or vegetables, and equally perishable. Some, on the other hand, believe in God and a future life but with a weak belief. They say to themselves, "God is great and independent of us; our worship or abstinence from worship is a matter of entire indifference to Him." Their state of mind is like that. of a sick man who, when prescribed a certain regime by his doctor should say, "Well, if I follow it or don't follow it, what does it matter to the doctor?" It certainly does not matter to the doctor, but the patient may destroy himself by his disobedience. Just as surely as, unchecked sickness of body ends in bodily death, so does uncured disease of the soul end in future misery, according to the saying of the Quran, "Only those shall be saved who come to God with a sound heart."

A fourth kind of unbelievers are those who say, "The Law tells us to abstain from anger, lust, and hypocrisy. This is plainly impossible, for man is created with these qualities inherent in him. You might as well tell us to make black white." These foolish people ignore the fact that the law does not tell us to uproot these passions, but to restrain them within due limits, so that, by avoiding the greater sins, we may obtain forgiveness of the smaller ones. Even the Prophet of God said, "I am a man like you, and get angry like others;" and in the Quran it is written, "God loves those who swallow down their anger," not those who have no anger at all.

A fifth class lay stress on the beneficence of God, and ignore His justice, saying to themselves, "Well, whatever we do, God is merciful." They do not consider that, though God is merciful, thousands of human beings perish miserably in hunger and disease. They know that whosoever wishes for a livelihood, or for wealth, or learning, must not merely say, "God is merciful," but must exert himself. Although the Quran says, "Every living creature's support comes from God," it is also written, "Man obtains nothing except by striving." The fact is, such teaching is really from the devil, and such people only speak with their lips and not with their heart.

A sixth class claim to have reached such a degree of sanctity that sin cannot affect them. Yet, if you treat one of them with disrespect, he will bear a grudge against you for years, and if one of them be deprived of a morsel of food which he thinks his due, the whole world will appear dark and narrow to him. Even if any of them do really conquer their passions, they have no right to make such a claim, for the prophets, the

highest of human kind, constantly confessed and bewailed their sins. Some of them had such a dread of sin that they even abstained from lawful things; thus, it is related of the Prophet that, one day, when a date had been brought to him he would not eat it, as he was not sure that it had been lawful by obtained. Whereas these free-livers will swallow gallons of wine and claim (I shudder as I write) to be superior to the Prophet whose sanctity was endangered by a date, while theirs is unaffected by all that wine! Surely they deserve that the devil should drag them down to perdition. Real saints know that he who does not master his appetites does not deserve the name of a man, and that the true Muslim is one who will cheerfully acknowledge the limits imposed by the Law. He who endeavours, on whatever pretext, to ignore its obligations is certainly under Satanic influence, and should be talked to, not with a pen, but with a sword. These pseudo-mystics sometimes pretend to be drowned in a sea of wonder, but if you ask them what they are wondering at they do not know. They should be told to wonder as much as they please, but at the same time to remember that the Almighty is their Creator and that they are His servants.

Chapter 3
Knowledge of This World

This world is a stage or marketplace passed by pilgrims on their way to the next. It is here that they are to provide themselves with provisions for the way; or, to put it plainly, man acquires here, by the use of his bodily senses, some knowledge of the works of God, and through them, of God Himself, the sight of whom will constitute his future beatitude. It is for the acquirement of this knowledge that the spirit of man has descended into this world of water and clay. As long as his senses remain with him he is said to be "in this world;" when they depart, and only his essential attributes remain, he is said to have gone to "the next world."

While man is in this world, two things are necessary for him: first, the protection and nurture of his soul; secondly, the care and nurture of his body. The proper nourishment of the soul, as above shown, is

the knowledge and love of God, and to be absorbed in the love of anything but God is the ruin of the soul. The body, so to speak, is simply the riding-animal of the soul, and perishes while the soul endures. The soul should take care of the body, just as a pilgrim on his way to Mecca takes care of his camel; but if the pilgrim spends his whole time in feeding and adorning his camel, the caravan will leave him behind, and he will perish in the desert.

Man's bodily needs are simple, being comprised under three heads: food, clothing, and a dwelling-place; but the bodily desires which were implanted in him with a view to procuring these are apt to rebel against reason, which is of later growth than they. Accordingly, as we saw above, they require to be curbed and restrained by the divine laws promulgated by the prophets.

Considering the world with which we have for a time to do, we find it divided into three departments—animal, vegetable, and mineral. The products of all three are continually needed by man and have given rise to three principal occupations—those of the weaver, the builder, and the worker in metal. These, again, have many subordinate branches, such as tailors, masons, smiths, etc. None can be quite independent of others; this gives rise to various business connections and relations and these too frequently afford occasions, for hatred, envy, jealousy, and other maladies of the soul. Hence come quarrels and strife, and the need of political and civil government and knowledge of law.

Thus the occupations and businesses of the world have become more and more complicated and troublesome, chiefly owing to the fact that men have

forgotten that their real necessities are only three—clothing, food, and shelter, and that these exist only with the object of making the body a fit vehicle for the soul in its journey towards the next world. They have fallen into the same mistake as the pilgrim to Mecca, mentioned above, who, forgetting the object of his pilgrimage and himself, should spend his whole time in feeding and adorning his camel. Unless a man maintains the strictest watch he is certain to be fascinated and entangled by the world, which, as the Prophet said, is "a more potent sorcerer than Harut and Marut."[7]

The deceitful character of the world comes out in the following ways. In the first place, it pretends that it will always remain with you, while as a matter of fact, it is slipping away from you, moment by moment, and bidding you farewell, like a shadow which seems stationary, but is actually always moving. Again, the world presents itself under the guise of a radiant but immoral sorceress, pretends to be in love with you, fondles you, and then goes off to your enemies, leaving you to die of chagrin and despair. Jesus (upon whom be peace!) saw the world revealed in the form of an ugly old hag. He asked her how many husbands she had possessed; she replied that they were countless. He asked whether they had died or been divorced; she said that she had slain them all. "I marvel," he said, "at the fools who see what you have done to others and still desire you."

This sorceress decks herself out in gorgeous and jewelled apparel and veils her face. Then she goes forth to seduce men, too many of whom follow her to

7. Two fallen angels.

their own destruction. The Prophet has said that in the Judgment Day the world will appear in the form of a hideous witch with green eyes and projecting teeth. Men beholding her will say, "Mercy on us! who is this?" The angels will answer, "This is the world for whose sake you quarrelled and fought and embittered one another's lives." Then she will be cast into hell, whence she will cry out, "O Lord! where are those, my former lovers?" God will then command that they be cast after her.

Whoever will seriously contemplate the past eternity during which the world was not in existence, and the future eternity during which it will not be in existence, will see that it is essentially like a journey, in which the stages are represented by years, the leagues by months, the miles by days, and the steps by moments. What words, then, can picture the folly of the man who endeavours to make it his permanent abode, and forms plans ten years ahead regarding things he may never need, seeing that very possibly he may be under the ground in ten days!

Those who have indulged without limit in the pleasures of the world, at the time of death will be like a man who has gorged himself to repletion on delicious foods, and then vomits them up. The deliciousness has gone, but the disgrace remains. The greater the abundance of the possessions which they have enjoyed in the shape of gardens, male and female slaves, gold, silver, etc., the more keenly they will feel the bitterness of parting from them. This is a bitterness which will outlast death, for the soul which has contracted covetousness as a fixed habit will necessarily in the next world suffer from the pangs of unsatisfied desire.

Another dangerous property of worldly things is that they at first appear as mere trifles, but each of these so-called "trifles" branches out into countless ramifications until they swallow up the whole of a man's time and energy. Jesus (on whom be peace!) said, "The lover of the world is like a man drinking sea-water; the more he drinks, the more thirsty he gets, until at last he perishes with thirst unquenched." The Prophet said, "You can no more mix with the world without being contaminated by it than you can go into water without getting wet."

The world is like a table spread for successive relays of guests who come and go. There are gold and silver dishes, abundance of food and perfumes. The wise guest eats as much as is sufficient for him, smells the perfumes, thanks his host, and departs. The foolish guest, on the other hand, tries to carry off some of the gold and silver dishes, only to find them wrenched out of his hands and himself thrust forth, disappointed and disgraced.

We may close these illustrations of the deceitfulness of the world with the following short parable. Suppose a ship to arrive at a certain well-wooded island. The captain of the ship tells the passengers he will stop a few hours there, and that they can go on shore for a short time, but warns them not to delay too long. Accordingly the passengers disembark and stroll in different directions. The wisest, however, return after a short time, and, finding the ship empty, choose the most comfortable places in it. A second band of the passengers spend a somewhat longer time on the island, admiring the foliage of the trees and listening to the song of the birds. Coming on board, they find the best places in the ship already

occupied, and have to content themselves with the less comfortable ones. A third party wander still farther, and, finding some brilliantly colored stones, carry them back to the ship. Their lateness in coming on board compels them to stow themselves away in the lower parts of the ship, where they find their loads of stones, which by this time have lost all their brilliancy, very much in their way. The last group go so far in their wanderings that they get quite out of reach of the captain's voice calling them to come on board, and at last he has to sail away without them. They wander about in a hopeless condition and finally either perish of hunger or fall a prey to wild beasts.

The first group represents the faithful who keep aloof from the world altogether and the last group the infidels who care only for this world and nothing for the next. The two intermediate classes are those who preserve their faith, but entangle themselves more or less with the vanities of things present.

Although we have said so much against the world, it must be remembered that there are some things in the world which are not of it, such as knowledge and good deeds. A man carries what knowledge he possesses with him into the next world, and, though his good deeds have passed, yet the effect of them remains in his character. Especially is this the case with acts of devotion, which result in the perpetual remembrance and love of God. These are among "those good things" which, as the Quran says, "pass not away."

Other good things there are in the world, such as marriage, food, clothing, etc., which a wise man uses just in proportion as they help him to attain to the next world. Other things, which engross the mind, caus-

ing it to cleave to this world and to be careless of the next, are purely evil and were alluded to by the Prophet when he said, “The world is a curse, and all which is in it is a curse, except the remembrance of God, and that which aids it.”

Chapter 4
Knowledge of the Next World

As regards the joys of heaven and the pains of hell which will follow this life, all believers in the Quran and the Traditions are sufficiently informed. But it often escapes them that there is also a spiritual heaven and hell, concerning the former of which God said to His Prophet, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which are prepared for the righteous." In the heart of the enlightened man there is a window opening on the realities of the spiritual world, so that he knows, not by hearsay or traditional belief, but by actual experience, what produces wretchedness or happiness in the soul just as clearly and decidedly as the physician knows what produces sickness or health in the body. He recognises that knowledge of God and worship are medicinal, and that ignorance and sin are deadly poisons for the soul. Many even so-called "learned" men, from blindly following others'

opinions, have no real certainty in their beliefs regarding the happiness or misery of souls in the next world, but he who will attend to the matter with a mind unbiased by prejudice will arrive at clear convictions on this matter.

The effect of death on the composite nature of man is as follows: Man has two souls, an animal soul and a spiritual soul, which latter is of angelic nature. The seat of the animal soul is the heart, from which this soul issues like a subtle vapour and pervades all the members of the body, giving the power of sight to the eye, the power of hearing to the ear, and to every member the faculty of performing its own appropriate functions. It may be compared to a lamp carried about within a cottage, the light of which falls upon the walls wherever it goes. The heart is the wick of this lamp, and when the supply of oil is cut off for any reason, the lamp dies. Such is the death of the animal soul. With the spiritual, or human soul, the case is different. It is indivisible, and by it man knows God. It is, so to speak, the rider of the animal soul, and when that perishes it still remains, but is like a horseman who has been dismounted, or like a hunter who has lost his weapons. That steed and those weapons were granted the human soul that by means of them it might pursue and capture the Phœnix of the love and knowledge of God. If it has effected that capture, it is not a grief but rather a relief to be able to lay those weapons aside, and to dismount from that weary steed. Therefore the Prophet said, "Death is a welcome gift of God to the believer." But alas for that soul which loses its steed and hunting-weapons before it has captured the prize! Its misery and regret will be indescribable.

A little further consideration will show how entirely distinct the human soul is from the body and its members. Limb after limb may be paralysed and cease working, but the individuality of the soul is unimpaired. Further, the body which you have now is no longer the body which you had as a child, but entirely different, yet your Personality now is identical with your personality then. It is therefore easy to conceive of it as persisting when the body is done with altogether, along with its essential attributes which were independent of the body, such as the knowledge and love of God. This is the meaning of that saying of the Quran, "The good things abide." But if, instead of carrying away with you knowledge, you depart in ignorance of God, this ignorance also is an essential attribute, and will abide as darkness of soul and the seed of misery. Therefore the Quran says, "He who is blind in this life, will be blind in the next life, and astray from the path."

The reason of the human spirit seeking to return to that upper world is that its origin was from thence, and that it is of angelic nature. It was sent down into this lower sphere against its will to acquire knowledge and experience, as God said in the Quran: "Go down from hence, all of you; there will come to you instruction from Me, and they who obey the instruction need not fear, neither shall they be grieved." The verse, "I breathed into man of My spirit," also points to the celestial origin of the human soul. Just as the health of the animal soul consists in the equilibrium of its component parts, and this equilibrium is restored, when impaired, by appropriate medicine, so the health of the human soul consists in a moral equilibrium which

is maintained and repaired, when needed, by ethical instruction and moral precepts.

As regards its future existence, we have already seen that the human soul is essentially independent of the body. All objections to its existence after death based on the supposed necessity of its recovering its former body fall, therefore, to the ground. Some theologians have supposed that the human soul is annihilated after death and then restored, but this is contrary both to reason and to the Quran. The former shows us that death does not destroy the essential individuality of a man, and the Quran says, "Think not that those who are slain in the path of God are dead; nay, they are alive, rejoicing in the presence of their Lord, and in the grace bestowed on them." Not a word is said in the Law about any of the dead, good or bad, being annihilated. Nay, the Prophet is said to have questioned the spirits of slain infidels as to whether they had found the punishments with which he had threatened them, real or not. When his followers asked him what was the good of questioning them, he replied, "They hear my words better than you do."

Some Sufis have had the unseen world of heaven and hell revealed to them when in a state of death-like trance. On their recovering consciousness their faces betray the nature of the revelations they have had by marks of joy or terror. But no visions are necessary to prove what will occur to every thinking man, that when death has stripped him of his senses and left him nothing but his bare personality, if while on earth he has too closely attached himself to objects perceived by the senses, such as wives, children, wealth, lands, slaves, male and female, etc., he must necessarily suffer when bereft of those objects. Whereas,

on the contrary, if he has as far as possible turned his back on all earthly objects and fixed his supreme affection upon God, he will welcome death as a means of escape from worldly entanglements, and of union with Him whom he loves. In his case the Prophet's sayings will be verified: "Death is a bridge which unites friend to friend," and "The world is a paradise for infidels, but a prison for the faithful."

On the other hand, the pains which souls suffer after death all have their source in excessive love of the world. The Prophet said that every unbeliever, after death, will be tormented by ninety-nine snakes, each having nine heads. Some simple-minded people have examined the unbelievers' graves and wondered at failing to see these snakes. They do not understand that these snakes have their abode within the unbeliever's spirit, and that they existed in him even before he died, for they were his own evil qualities symbolised, such as jealousy, hatred, hypocrisy, pride, deceit, etc., every one of which springs, directly or remotely, from love of the world. Such is the doom of those who, in the words of the Quran, "set their hearts on this world rather than on the next." If those snakes were merely external they might hope to escape their torment, if it were but for a moment; but, being their own inherent attributes, how can they escape?

Take, for instance, the case of a man who has sold a slave girl without knowing how much he was attached to her until she is quite out of his reach. Then the love of her, hitherto dormant, wakes up in him with such intensity as to amount to torture, stinging him like a snake, so that he would fain cast himself into fire or water to escape it. Such is the effect of love of the world, which those who have it often suspect

not until the world is taken from them, and then the torment of vain longing is such that they would gladly exchange it for any number of mere external snakes and scorpions.

Every sinner thus carries with him into the world beyond death the instruments of his own punishment; and the Quran says truly, "Verily you shall see hell; you shall see it with the eye of certainty," and "hell surrounds the unbelievers." It does not say "will surround them," for it is round them even now.

Some may object, "If such is the case, then who can escape hell, for who is not more or less bound to the world by various ties of affection and interest?" To this we answer that there are some, notably the faqirs, who have entirely disengaged themselves from love of the world. But even among those who have worldly possessions such as wife, children, houses, etc., there are those, who, though they have some affection for these, love God yet more. Their case is like that of a man who, though he may have a dwelling which he is fond of in one city, when he is called by the king to take up a post of authority in another city, does so gladly, as the post of authority is dearer to him than his former dwelling. Such are many of the prophets and saints.

Others there are, and a great number, who have some love to God, but the love of the world so preponderates in them that they will have to suffer a good deal of pain after death before they are thoroughly weaned from it. Many profess to love God, but a man may easily test himself by watching which way the balance of his affection inclines when the commands of God come into collision with some of his desires.

The profession of love to God which is insufficient to restrain from disobedience to God is a lie.

We have seen above that one kind of spiritual hell is the forcible separation from worldly things to which the heart cleaved too fondly. Many carry about within them the germs of such a hell without being aware of it; hereafter they will feel like some king who, after living in luxury, has been dethroned and made a laughing-stock. The second kind of spiritual hell is that of shame, when a man wakes up to see the nature of the actions he committed in their naked reality. Thus he who slandered will see himself in the guise of a cannibal eating his dead brother's flesh, and he who envied as one who cast stones against a wall, which stones, rebounding, put out the eyes of his own children.

This species of hell, i.e., of shame, may be symbolised by the following short parable: Suppose a certain king has been celebrating his son's marriage. In the evening the young man goes off with some companions and presently returns to the palace (as he thinks) intoxicated. He enters a chamber where a light is burning and lies down, as he supposes, by his bride. In the morning, when soberness returns, he is aghast to find himself in a mortuary of fire-worshippers, his couch a bier, and the form which he mistook for that of his bride the corpse of an old woman beginning to decay. On emerging from the mortuary with his garments all soiled, what is his shame to see his father, the king, approaching with a retinue of soldiers! Such is a feeble picture of the shame those will feel in the next world who in this have greedily abandoned themselves to what they thought were delights.

The third spiritual hell is that of disappointment and failure to reach the real objects of existence.

Man was intended to mirror forth the light of the knowledge of God, but if he arrives in the next world with his soul thickly coated with the rust of sensual indulgence he will entirely fail of the object for which he was made. His disappointment may be figured in the following way: Suppose a man is passing with some companions through a dark wood. Here and there, glimmering on the ground, lie variously colored stones. His companions collect and carry these and advise him to do the same. "For," say they "we have heard that these stones will fetch a high price in the place whither we are going." He, on the other hand, laughs at them and calls them fools for loading themselves in the vain hope of gain, while he walks free and unencumbered. Presently they emerge into the full daylight and find that these colored stones are rubies, emeralds, and other jewels of priceless value. The man's disappointment and chagrin at not having gathered some when so easily within his reach may be more easily imagined than described. Such will be the remorse of those hereafter, who, while passing through this world, have been at no pains to acquire the jewels of virtue and the treasures of religion.

This journey of man through the world may be divided into four stages—the sensuous, the experimental, the instinctive, the rational. In the first he is like a moth which, though it has sight, has no memory, and will singe itself again and again at the same candle. In the second stage he is like a dog which, having once been beaten, will run away at the sight of a stick. In the third he is like a horse or a sheep, both of which instinctively fly at the sight of a lion or a wolf, their natural enemies, while they will not fly from a camel or a buffalo, though these last are much greater in size.

In the fourth stage man altogether transcends the limits of the animals and becomes capable, to some extent, of foreseeing and providing for the future. His movements at first may be compared to ordinary walking on land, then to traversing the sea in a ship, then, on the fourth plane, where he is conversant with realities, to walking on the sea, while beyond this plane there is a fifth, known to the prophets and saints, whose progress may be compared to flying through the air.

Thus man is capable of existing on several different planes, from the animal to the angelic, and precisely in this lies his danger, i.e., of falling to the very lowest. In the Quran it is written, "We proposed the burden (i.e., responsibility or free will) to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they refused to undertake it. But man took it upon himself: Verily he is ignorant." Neither animals nor angels can change their appointed rank and place. But man may sink to the animal or soar to the angel, and this is the meaning of his undertaking that "burden" of which the Quran speaks. The majority of men choose to remain in the two lower stages mentioned above, and the stationary are always hostile to the travellers or pilgrims, whom they far outnumber.

Many of the former class, having no fixed convictions about the future world, when mastered by their sensual appetites, deny it altogether. They say that hell is merely an invention of theologians to frighten people. and they regard theologians themselves with thinly veiled contempt. To argue with fools of this kind is of very little use. This much, however, may be said to such a man, with the possible result of making him pause and reflect: "Do you really think that the hun-

dred and twenty-four thousand[8] prophets and saints who believed in the future life were all wrong, and you are right in denying it?" If he replies, "Yes! I am as sure as I am that two are more than one, that there is no soul and no future life of joy and penalty," then the case of such a man is hopeless; all one can do is to leave him alone, remembering the words of the Quran, "Though thou call them to instruction, they will not be instructed."

But, should he say that a future life is possible but that the doctrine is so involved in doubt and mystery that it is impossible to decide whether it be true or not, then one may say to him: "Then you had better give it the benefit of the doubt! Suppose you are about to eat food and someone tells you a serpent has spat venom on it, you would probably refrain and rather endure the pangs of hunger than eat it, though your informant may be in jest or lying. Or suppose you are ill and a charm-writer says, 'Give me a rupee and I will write a charm which you can tie round your neck and which will cure you,' you would probably give the rupee on the chance of deriving benefit from the charm. Or if an astrologer say, 'When the moon has entered a certain constellation, drink such and such a medicine, and you will recover,' though you may have very little faith in astrology, you very likely would try the experiment on the chance that he might be right. And do you not think that, reliance is as well placed on the words of all the prophets, saints, and holy men, convinced as they were of a future life, as on the promise of a charm-writer or an astrologer? People take perilous voyages in ships for the sake of merely

8. The number of prophets according to Islamic tradition.

probable profit, and will you not suffer a little pain of abstinence now for the sake of eternal joy hereafter?"

The Lord Ali once, in arguing with an unbeliever, said, "If you are right, then neither of us will be any the worse in the future; but if we are right, then we shall escape, and you will suffer." This he said not because he himself was in any doubt, but merely to make an impression on the unbeliever. From all that we have said it follows that man's chief business in this world is to prepare for the next. Even if he is doubtful about a future existence, reason suggests that he should act as if there were one, considering the tremendous issues at stake. Peace be on those who follow the instruction!

Chapter 5
Concerning Music and Dancing as Aids to the Religious Life

The heart of man has been so constituted by the Almighty that, like a flint, it contains a hidden fire which is evoked by music and harmony, and renders man beside himself with ecstasy. These harmonies are echoes of that higher world of beauty which we call the world of spirits; they remind man of his relationship to that world, and produce in him an emotion so deep and strange that he himself is powerless to explain it. The effect of music and dancing is deeper in proportion to the natures on which they act; they fan into a flame whatever love is already dormant in the heart, whether it be earthly and sensual, or divine and spiritual.

Accordingly there has been much dispute among theologians as to the lawfulness of music and dancing regarded as religious exercises. One sect, the

Zahirites,[9] holding that God is altogether incommensurable with man, deny the possibility of man's really feeling love to God, and say that be can only love those of his own species. If he does feel what he thinks is love to his Creator they say it is a mere projection, or shadow cast by his own fantasy, or a reflection of love to the creature; music and dancing, according to them, have only to do with creature love, and are therefore unlawful as religious exercises. If we ask them what is the meaning of that "love to God" which is enjoined by the religious law, they reply that it means obedience and worship. This is an error which we hope to confute in a later chapter dealing with the love of God. At present we content ourselves with saying that music and dancing do not put into the heart what is not there already, but only fan into a flame dormant emotions. Therefore if a man has in his heart that love to God which the Law enjoins, it is perfectly lawful, nay, laudable in him to take part in exercises which promote it. On the other hand, if his heart is full of sensual desires, music and dancing will only increase them, and are therefore unlawful for him. While, if he listens to them merely as a matter of amusement, they are neither lawful nor unlawful, but indifferent. For the mere fact that they are pleasant does not make them unlawful, anymore than the pleasure of listening to the singing of birds or looking at green grass and running water is unlawful. The innocent character of music and dancing, regarded merely as a pastime, is also corroborated by an authentic tradition which we have from Aisha bint Abi Bakr,[10]

9. Literally, "Outsiders."
10. One of the Prophet's wives.

who narrates: "One festival day some Black Africans were performing in a mosque. The Prophet said to me, 'Do you wish to see them?' I replied, 'Yes.' Accordingly he lifted me up with his own blessed hand, and I looked on so long that he said more than once, 'Haven't you had enough?'" Another tradition from Aisha is as follows: "One festival day, two girls came to my house and began to play and sing. The Prophet came in and lay down on the couch, turning his face away. Presently Abu Bakr[11] entered, and, seeing the girls playing, exclaimed, 'What! the pipe of Satan in the Prophet's house!' Whereupon the Prophet turned and said, 'Let them alone, Abu Bakr, for this is a festival day.'"

Passing over the cases where music and dancing rouse into a flame evil desires already dormant in the heart, we come to those cases where they are quite lawful. Such are those of the pilgrims who celebrate the glories of the House of God at Mecca in song, and thus incite others to go on pilgrimage, and of minstrels whose music and songs stir up martial ardour in the breasts of their auditors and incite them to fight against the infidels. Similarly, mournful music which, excites sorrow for sin and failure in the religious life is lawful; of this nature was the music of David. But dirges which increase sorrow for the dead are not lawful, for it is written in the Quran, "Despair not over what you have lost." On the other hand, joyful music at weddings and feasts and on such occasions as a circumcision or the return from a journey is lawful.

We come now to the purely religious use of music and dancing: such is that of the Sufis, who by this

11. Subsequently the first caliph.

means stir up in themselves greater love towards God, and, by means of music, often obtain spiritual visions and ecstasies, their heart becoming in this condition as clean as silver in the flame of a furnace, and attaining a degree of purity which could never be attained by any amount of mere outward austerities. The Sufi then becomes so keenly aware of his relationship to the spiritual world that he loses all consciousness of this world, and often falls down senseless.

It is not, however, lawful for the aspirant to Sufism to take part in this mystical dancing without the permission of his "Pir," or spiritual director. It is related of the Sheikh Abu'l Qasim Girgani that, when one of his disciples requested leave to take part in such a dance, he said, "Keep a strict fast for three days; then let them cook for you tempting dishes; if, then, you still prefer the 'dance,' you may take part in it." The disciple, however, whose heart is not thoroughly purged from earthly desires, though he may have obtained some glimpse of the mystics' path, should be forbidden by his director to take part in such dances, as they will do him more harm than good.

Those who deny the reality of the ecstasies and other spiritual experiences of the Sufis merely betray their own narrow-mindedness and shallow insight. Some allowance, however, must be made for them, for it is as difficult to believe in the reality of states of which one has no personal experience as it is for a blind man to understand the pleasure of looking at green, grass and running water, or for a child to comprehend the pleasure of exercising sovereignty. A wise man, though he himself may have no experience of those states, will not therefore deny their reality,

for what folly can be greater than his who denies the reality of a thing merely because he himself has not experienced it! Of such people it is written in the Quran, "Those who have not the guidance will say, 'This is a manifest imposture.'"

As regards the erotic poetry which is recited in Sufi gatherings, and to which people sometimes make objection, we must remember that, when in such poetry mention is made of separation from or union with the beloved, the Sufi, who is an adept in the love of God, applies such expressions to separation from or union with Him. Similarly, "dark locks" are taken to signify the darkness of unbelief; "the brightness of the face," the light of faith, and drunkenness the Sufi's ecstasy. Take, for instance, the verse:

"Thou may'st measure out thousands of measures of wine, but until thou drink it, no joy is thine."

By this the writer means that the true delights of religion cannot be reached by way of formal instruction, but by felt attraction and desire. A man may converse much and write volumes concerning love, faith, piety, and so forth, and blacken paper to any extent, but until he himself possesses these attributes all this will do him no good. Thus, those who find fault with the Sufis for being powerfully affected, even to ecstasy, by these and similar verses, are merely shallow and uncharitable. Even camels are sometimes so powerfully affected by the Arabic songs of their drivers that they will run rapidly, bearing heavy burdens, until they fall down in a state of exhaustion.

The Sufi hearer, however, is in danger of blasphemy if he applies some of the verses which he hears to God. For instance, if he hears such a verse as "Thou art changed from thy former inclination," he must

not apply it to God, who cannot change, but to himself and his own variations of mood. God is like the sun, which is always shining, but sometimes for us His light is eclipsed by some object which intervenes between us and Him.

Regarding some adepts it is related that they attain to such a degree of ecstasy that they lose themselves in God. Such was the case with Sheikh Abu'l Hassan Nuri, who, on hearing a certain verse, fell into an ecstatic condition, and, coming into a field full of stalks of newly cut sugar-canes, ran about until his feet were wounded and bleeding, and, not long afterwards, expired. In such cases some have supposed that there occurs an actual descent of Deity into humanity, but this would be as great a mistake as that of one who, having for the first time seen his reflection in a mirror, should suppose that, somehow or other, he had become incorporated with the mirror, or that the red-and-white hues which the mirror reflects were qualities inherent in it.

The states of ecstasy into which the Sufis fall vary according to the emotions which predominate in them—love, fear, desire, repentance, etc. These states, as we have mentioned above, are often the result not only of hearing verses of the Quran, but erotic poetry. Some have objected to the reciting of poetry, as well as of the Quran, on these occasions; but it should be remembered that all the verses of the Quran are not adapted to stir the emotions—such, for instance, as that which commands that a man should leave his mother the sixth part of his property and his sister the half, or that which orders that a widow must wait four months after the death of her husband before becoming espoused to another man. The natures

which can be thrown in to religious ecstasy by the recital of such verses are peculiarly sensitive and very rare.

Another reason for the use of poetry as well as of the Quran on these occasions is that people are so familiar with the Quran, many even knowing it by heart, that the effect of it has been dulled by constant repetition. One cannot be always quoting new verses of the Quran as one can of poetry. Once, when some wild Arabs were hearing the Quran for the first time and were strongly moved by it, Abu-Bakr said to them, "We were once like you, but our hearts have grown hard," meaning that the Quran loses some of its effect on those familiar with it. For the same reason the Caliph Omar used to command the pilgrims to Mecca to leave it quickly, "For," he said, "I fear if you grow too familiar with the Holy City the awe of it will depart from your hearts."

There is, moreover, something pertaining to the light and frivolous, at least in the eyes of the common people, in the use of singing and musical instruments, such as the pipe and drum, and it is not befitting that the majesty of the Quran should be, even temporarily, associated with these things. It is related of the Prophet that once, when he entered the house of Rabia, the daughter of Mauz, some singing-girls who were there began extemporising in his honor. He abruptly bade them cease, as the praise of the Prophet was too sacred a theme to be treated in that way. There is also some danger, if verses of the Quran are exclusively used, that, the hearers should attach to them some private interpretation of their own, and this is unlawful. On the other hand, no harm attaches to interpreting lines of poetry in various ways, as it is

not necessary to apply to a poem the same meaning which the author had.

Other features of these mystic dances are the bodily contortions and tearing of clothes with which they are sometimes accompanied. If these are the result of genuine ecstatic conditions there is nothing to be said against them, but if they are self-conscious and deliberate on the part of those who wish to appear "adepts," then they are merely acts of hypocrisy. In any case the more perfect adept is he who controls himself until he is absolutely obliged to give vent to his feelings. It is related of a certain youth who was a disciple of the Sheikh Junaid that, on hearing singing commence in an assembly of the Sufis, he could not restrain himself, but began to shriek in ecstasy. Junaid said to him, "If you do that again, don't remain in my company." After this the youth used to restrain himself on such occasions, but at last one day his emotions were so powerfully stirred that, after long and forcible repression of them, he uttered a shriek and died.

To conclude: in holding these assemblies, regard must be had to time and place, and that no spectators come from unworthy motives. Those who participate in them should sit in silence, not looking at one another, but keeping their heads bent, as at prayer, and concentrating their minds on God. Each should watch for whatever may be revealed to his own heart, and not make any movements from mere self-conscious impulse. But if anyone of them stands up in a state of genuine ecstasy all the rest should stand up with him, and if anyone's turban fall off, the others should also lay their turbans down.

Although these matters are comparative novelties in Islam and have not been received from the first followers of the Prophet, we must remember that all novelties are not forbidden, but only those which directly contravene the Law. For instance, the "Tarawih," or night-prayer, was first instituted by the Caliph Omar. The Prophet said, "Live with each man according to his habits and disposition," therefore it is right to fall in with usages that please people, when non-conformity would vex them. It is true that the Companions were not in the habit of rising on the entrance of the Prophet, as they disliked this practice; but where it has become established, and abstaining from it would cause annoyance, it is better to conform to it. The Arabs have their own customs, and the Persians have theirs, and God knoweth which is best.

Chapter 6
Concerning Self-Examination and the Recollection of God

Know, O brother, that in the Quran God hath said, "We will set up a just balance on the day of resurrection, and no soul shall be wronged in anything." Whosoever has wrought a grain of good or ill shall then behold it. In the Quran it is also written, "Let every soul see what it sends on before it for the day of account." It was a saying of the Caliph Omar's, "Call yourselves to account before ye be called to account;" and God says, "O ye believers, be patient and strive against your natural desires, and maintain the strife manfully." The saints have always understood that they have come into this world to carry on a spiritual traffic, the resulting gain or loss of which is heaven or hell. They have, therefore, always kept a jealous eye upon the flesh, which, like a treacherous partner in business, may cause them great loss. He, therefore, is a wise man who, after his morning prayer,

spends a whole hour in making a spiritual reckoning, and says to his soul, "O my soul, thou hast only one life; no single moment that has passed can be recovered, for in the counsel of God the number of breaths allotted thee is fixed, and cannot be increased. When life is over no further spiritual traffic is possible for thee; therefore what thou dost, do now; treat this day as if thy life had been already spent, and this were an extra day granted thee by the special favour of the Almighty, What can be greater folly than to lose it?"

At the resurrection a man will find all the hours of his life arranged like a long series of treasure chests. The door of one will be opened, and it will be seen to be full of light: it represents an hour which he spent in doing good. His heart will be filled with such joy that even a fraction of it would make the inhabitants of hell forget the fire. The door of a second will be opened; it is pitch dark within, and from it issues such an evil odour as will cause every one to hold his nose: it represents an hour which he spent in ill-doing, and he will suffer such terror that a fraction of it would embitter Paradise for the blessed. The door of a third treasure chest will be opened; it will be seen to be empty and neither light nor dark within: this represents the hour in which he did neither good nor evil. Then he will feel remorse and confusion like that of a man who has been the possessor of a great treasure and wasted it or let it slip from his grasp. Thus the whole, series of the hours of his life will be displayed, one by one, to his gaze. Therefore a man should say to his soul every morning, "God has given thee twenty-four treasures; take heed lest thou lose anyone of them, for thou wilt not be able to endure the regret that will follow such loss."

The saints have said, "Even suppose God should forgive thee after a wasted life, thou wilt not attain to the ranks of the righteous and must deplore thy loss; therefore keep a strict, watch over thy tongue, thine eye, and each of thy seven members, for each of these is, as it were, a possible gate to hell. Say to thy flesh, 'If thou art rebellious, verily I will punish thee;' for, though the flesh is headstrong, it is capable of receiving instruction, and can be tamed by austerity." Such, then, is the aim of self-examination, and the Prophet had said, "Happy is he who does now that which will benefit him after death."

We come now to the recollection of God. This consists in a man's remembering that God observes all his acts and thoughts. People only see the outward, while God sees both the outer and the inner man. He who really believes this will have both his outer and inner being well disciplined. If he disbelieve it, he is an infidel, and if, while believing it, he acts contrary to that belief, he is guilty of the grossest presumption. One day a Black African came to the Prophet and said, "O Prophet of God! I have committed much sin. Will my repentance be accepted, or not?" The Prophet said "Yes." Then the man said, "O Prophet of God, all the time I was committing sin, did God really behold it?" "Yes," was the answer. The African uttered a cry and fell lifeless. Until a man is thoroughly convinced of the fact that he is always under God's observation it is impossible for him to act rightly.

A certain sheikh once had a disciple whom he favoured above his other disciples, thus exciting their envy. One day the sheikh gave each of them a fowl and told each to go and kill it in a place where no one

could see him. Accordingly each killed his fowl in some retired spot and brought it back, with the exception of the sheikh's favourite disciple, who brought his back alive, saying, "I have found no such place, for God sees everywhere." The sheikh said to the others, "You see now this youth's real rank; he has attained to the constant remembrance of God."

When Zuleikha tempted Joseph she cast a cloth over the face of the idol she used to worship. Joseph said to her, "O Zuleikha, thou art ashamed before a block of stone, and should I not be ashamed before Him who created the seven heavens and the earth?" A man once came to the saint Junaid and said, "I cannot keep my eyes from casting lascivious looks. How shall I do so?" "By remembering," Junaid answered, "that God sees you much more clearly than you see anyone else." In the traditions it is written that God has said, "Paradise is for those who intend to commit some sin and then remember that My eye is upon them and forbear." Abdullah Ibn Dinar relates, "Once I was walking with the Caliph Omar near Mecca when we met a shepherd's slave-boy driving his flock. Omar said to him, "Sell me a sheep." The boy answered, "They are not mine, but my master's." Then, to try him, Omar said, "Well, you can tell him that a wolf carried one off, and he will know nothing about it." "No, he won't," said the boy, "but God will." Omar then wept, and, sending for the boy's master, purchased him and set him free, exclaiming, "For this saying thou art free in this world and shalt be free in the next."

There are two degrees of this recollection of God. The first degree is that of those saints whose thoughts are altogether absorbed in the contemplation of the majesty of God, and have no room in their

hearts for anything else at all. This is the lower degree of recollection, for when a man's heart is fixed, and his limbs are so controlled by his heart that they abstain from even lawful actions, he has no need of any device or safeguard against sins. It was to this kind of recollection that the Prophet referred when he said, "He who rises in the morning with only God in his mind, God shall look after him, both in this world and the next."

Some of these recollectors of God are so absorbed in the thought of Him that, if people speak to them they do not hear, or walk in front of them they do not see, but stumble as if they collided with a wall. A certain saint relates as follows: "One day I passed by a place where archers were having a shooting-match. Some way off a man was sitting alone. I approached him and attempted to engage him in talk, but he replied, "The remembrance of God is better than talk." I said, "Are you not lonely?" "No," he answered, "God and two angels are with me." Pointing to the archers, I asked, Which of these has carried off the prize?" "That one," was his reply, "to whom God has allotted it." Then I inquired, "Where does this road come from?" Upon which, lifting up his eyes to heaven, he rose and departed, saying, "O Lord! many of Thy creatures hold one back from the remembrance of Thee!"

The saint Shibli one day went to see the Sufi Thaury; he found him sitting so still in contemplation that not a hair of his body moved. He asked him, "From whom didst thou learn to practise such fixity of contemplation?" Thaury answered, "From a cat which I saw waiting at a mouse-hole in an attitude of even greater fixity than this." Ibn Hanif relates: "I was informed that in the city of Sur a sheikh and his disci-

ple were always sitting lost in the recollection of God. I went there and found them both sitting with their faces turned in the direction of Mecca. I saluted them thrice, but they gave no answer. I said, 'I adjure you, by God, to return my salutation.'[12] The Youth raised his head and replied, 'O Ibn Hanif! The world lasts but for a little time, and of this little time only a little is remaining. Thou art hindering us by requiring us to return thy salutation.' He then bent his head again and was silent. I was hungry and thirsty at the time, but the sight of those two quite carried me out of myself. I remained standing and prayed with them the afternoon and evening prayer. I then asked them for some spiritual advice. The younger replied, 'O Ibn Hanif, we are afflicted; we do not possess that tongue which gives advice.' I remained standing there three days and nights; no word passed between us and none of us slept. Then I said within myself, 'I will adjure them by God to give me some counsel.' The younger, divining my thoughts, again raised his head: 'Go and seek such a man, the visitation of whom wilt bring God to thy remembrance and infix His fear in thy heart, and he will give thee that counsel which is conveyed by silence and not by speech.'"

Such is the "recollection" of the saints which consists in being entirely absorbed in the contemplation of God. The second degree of the recollection of God is that of "the companions of the right hand."[13] These are aware that God knows all about them, and feel abashed in His presence, yet they are not carried out of themselves by the thought of His

12. A Muslim is bound by the Quran to return the salutation of another Muslim.
13. Quranic phrase for the righteous.

majesty, but remain clearly conscious of themselves and of the world. Their condition is like that of a man who should be suddenly surprised in a state of nakedness and should hastily cover himself, while the other class resemble one who suddenly finds himself in the presence of the King and is confused and awestruck. The former subject every project which enters their minds to a thorough scrutiny, for at the Last Day three questions will be asked respecting every action: the first, "Why did you do this?" the second, "In what way did you do this?" the third, "For what purpose did you do this?" The first will be asked because a man should act from divine and not merely Satanic or fleshly impulse. If this question is satisfactorily answered, the second will test in what way the action was done, wisely, or carelessly and negligently, and the third, whether it was done simply to please God, or to gain the approval of men. If a man understands the meaning of these questions he will be very watchful over the state of his heart, and how he entertains thoughts which are likely to end in action. Rightly to discriminate among such thoughts is a very difficult and delicate matter, and he who is not capable of it should attach himself to some spiritual director, intercourse with whom may illuminate his heart. He should avoid with the utmost care the merely worldly learned man who is an agent of Satan. God said to David, "O David! ask no questions of the learned man who is intoxicated with love of the world, for he will rob thee of My love," and the Prophet said: "God loves that man who is keen to discern in doubtful things, and who suffers not his reason to be swayed by the assaults of passion." Reason and discrimination are closely con-

nected, and he in whom reason does not rule passion will not be keen to discriminate.

Besides such cautious discrimination before acting a man should call himself strictly to account for his past actions. Every evening he should examine his heart as to what he has done to see whether he has gained or lost in his spiritual capital. This is the more necessary as the heart is like a treacherous business partner, always ready to cajole and deceive; sometimes it presents its own selfishness under the guise of obedience to God, so that a man supposes he has gained, whereas he has really lost.

A certain saint named Amiya, sixty years of age, counted up the days of his life. He found they amounted to twenty-one thousand six hundred days. He said to himself, "Alas! if I have committed one sin every day, how can I escape from the load of twenty-one thousand six hundred sins?" He uttered a cry and fell to the ground; when they came to raise him they found him dead. But most people are heedless, and never think of calling themselves to account. If for every sin a man committed he placed a stone in an empty house, he would soon find that house full of stones; if his recording angels[14] demanded wages of him for writing down his sins, all his money would soon be gone. People count on their rosaries[15] with self-satisfaction the numbers of times they have recited the name of God, but they keep no rosary for reckoning the numberless idle words they speak. Therefore the Caliph Omar said, "Weigh well your words and deeds before they be weighed at the Judgment." He himself

14. Two of these are attached to every man.
15. Islamic prayer beads consists of ninety–nine beads, each representing a name of God.

before retiring for the night, used to strike his feet with a scourge and exclaim, "What hast thou done today?" Abu Talha was once praying in a palm grove, when the sight of a beautiful bird which flew out of it caused him to make a mistake in counting the number of prostrations he had made. To punish himself for his inattention, he gave the palm grove away. Such saints knew that their sensual nature was prone to go astray, therefore they kept a strict watch over it, and punished it for each transgression.

If a man finds himself sluggish and averse from austerity and self-discipline he should consort with one who is a proficient in such practices so as to catch the contagion of his enthusiasm. One saint used to say, "When I grow lukewarm in self-discipline, I look at Muhammad Ibn Wasi, and the sight of him rekindles my fervor for at least a week." If one cannot find such a pattern of austerity close at hand, then it is a good thing to study the lives of the saints; he should also exhort his soul somewhat in the following way: "O my soul! thou thinkest thyself intelligent and art angry at being called a fool, and yet what else art thou, after all? Thou preparest clothing to shield thee from the cold of winter, yet makest no preparation for the after-life. Thy state is like that of a man who in mid-winter should say, 'I will wear no warm clothing, but trust to God's mercy to shield me from the cold. He forgets that God, at the same time that He created cold, showed man the way to make clothing to protect himself from it, and provided the material for that clothing. Remember this also, O soul, that thy punishment hereafter will not be because God is angry with thy disobedience; and say not, 'How can my sin hurt God?' It is thy lusts themselves which will

have kindled the flames of a hell within thee; just as from eating unwholesome food disease is caused in a man's body, and not because his doctor is vexed with him for disobeying his orders.

"Shame upon thee, O soul, for thy overweening love of the world! If thou dost not believe in heaven or hell, at any rate thou believes in death, which will snatch from thee all worldly delights and cause thee to feel the pangs of separation from them, which will be intenser just in proportion as thou hast attached thyself to them. Why art thou mad after the world? If the whole of it, from East to West, were thine and worshipped thee, yet it would all, in a brief space, turn to dust along with thyself, and oblivion would blot out thy name, as those of ancient kings before thee. But now, seeing thou hast only a very small fragment of the world, and that a defiled one, wilt thou be so mad as to barter eternal joy for it, a precious jewel for a broken cup of earthenware, and make thyself the laughingstock of all around thee?"

Chapter 7
Love of God

The love of God is the highest of all topics, and is the final aim to which we have been tending hitherto. We have spoken of spiritual dangers as they hinder the love of God in a man's heart, and we have spoken of various good qualities as being the necessary preliminaries to it. Human perfection resides in this, that the love of God should conquer a man's heart and possess it wholly, and even if it does not possess it wholly it should predominate in the heart over the love of all other things. Nevertheless, rightly to understand the love of God is so difficult a matter that one sect of theologians have altogether denied that man can love a Being who is not of his own species, and they have defined the love of God as consisting merely in obedience. Those who hold such views do not know what real religion is.

All Muslims are agreed that the love of God is a duty. God says concerning the believers, "He loves them and they love Him,"[16] and the Prophet said, "Until a man loves God and His Prophet more than anything else he has not the right faith." When the angel of death came to take the soul of Abraham the latter said, "Have you ever seen a friend take his friend's life?" God answered him, "Have you ever seen a friend unwilling to see his friend?" Then Abraham said, "O Azrael! take my soul!" The following prayer was taught by the Prophet to his companions, "O God, grant me to love Thee and to love those who love Thee, and whatsoever brings me nearer to Thy love, and make Thy love more precious to me than cold water to the thirsty." Hassan Basri used to say, "He who knows God loves Him, and he who knows the world hates it."

We come now to treat of love in its essential nature. Love may be defined as an inclination to that which is pleasant. This is apparent in the case of the five senses, each of which may be said to love that which gives it delight; thus the eye loves beautiful forms, the ear music, etc. This is a kind of love we share with the animals. But there is a sixth sense, or faculty of perception, implanted in the heart, which animals do not possess, through which we become aware of spiritual beauty and excellence. Thus, a man who is only acquainted with sensuous delights cannot understand what the Prophet meant when he said he loved prayer more than perfumes or women, though the last two were also pleasant to him. But he whose inner eye is opened to behold the beauty and perfec-

16 Quran 5:54

tion of God will despise all outward sights in comparison, however fair they may be.

The former kind of man will say that beauty resides in red-and-white complexions, well-proportioned limbs, and so forth, but he will be blind to moral beauty, such as men refer to when they speak of such and such a man as possessing a "beautiful" character. But those possessed of inner perception find it quite possible to love the departed great, such as the Caliphs Omar and Abu Bakr, on account of their noble qualities, though their bodies have long been mingled with the dust. Such love is directed not towards any outward form, but towards the inner character. Even when we wish to excite love in a child towards anyone, we do not describe their outward beauty of form, etc., but their inner excellences.

When we apply this principle to the love of God we shall find that He alone is worthy of our love, and that, if anyone loves Him not, it is because he does not know Him. Whatever we love in anyone we love because it is a reflection of Him. It is for this reason that we love Muhammad, because he is the Prophet and the Beloved of God, and the love of learned and pious men is really the love of God. We shall see this more clearly if we consider what are the causes which excite love.

The first cause is this, that man loves himself and the perfection of his own nature. This leads him directly to the love of God, for man's very existence and man's attributes are nothing else but the gift of God, but for whose grace and kindness man would never have emerged from behind the curtain of non-existence into the visible world. Man's preservation and eventual attainment to perfection are also entirely

dependent upon the grace of God. It would indeed be a wonder, if one should take refuge from the heat of the sun under the shadow of a tree and not be grateful to the tree, without which there would be no shadow at all. Precisely in the same way, were it not for God, man would have no existence nor attributes at all; wherefore, then, should he not love God, unless he be ignorant of Him? Doubtless fools cannot love Him, for the lover of Him springs directly from the knowledge of Him, and whence should a fool have knowledge?

The second cause of this love is that man loves his benefactor, and in truth his only Benefactor is God, for whatever kindness he receives from any fellow-creature is due to the immediate instigation of God. Whatever motive may have prompted the kindness he receives from another, whether the desire to gain religious merit or a good name, God is the Agent who set that motive to work.

The third cause is the love that is aroused by contemplation of the attributes of God, His power and wisdom, of which human power and wisdom are but the feeblest reflections. This love is akin to that we feel to the great and good men of the past, such as the Imam Malik and the Imam al-Shafi'i,[17] though we never expect to receive any personal benefits from them, and, is therefore a more disinterested kind of love. God said to the Prophet David, "That servant is dearest to Me who does not seek Me from fear of punishment or hope of reward, but to pay the debt due to My Deity." And in the Psalms it is written, "Who is a greater transgressor than he who worships Me from

17. Two of the four "great imams;" founders of the Maliki and Shafii schools of fiqh (Islamic law).

fear of hell or hope of heaven? If I had created neither, should I not then have deserved to be worshipped?"

The fourth cause of this love is the affinity between man and God, which is referred to in the saying of the Prophet, "Verily God created man in His own likeness." Furthermore, God has said, "My servant seeks proximity to Me, that I may make him My friend, and when I have made him My friend I become his ear, his eye, his tongue." Again, God said to Moses, "I was sick, and thou didst not visit Me?" Moses replied, "O God! Thou art Lord of heaven and earth: how couldest Thou be sick?"

God said, "A certain servant of Mine was sick; hadst thou visited, him, thou wouldst have visited Me."

This is a somewhat dangerous topic to dwell upon, as it is beyond the understanding of common people, and even intelligent men have stumbled in treating of it, and come to believe in incarnation and union with God. Still, the affinity which does exist between man and God disposes of the objection of those theologians mentioned above, who maintain that man cannot love a Being who is not of his own species. However great the distance between them, man can love God because of the affinity indicated in the saying, "God created man in His own likeness."

The Vision of God

All Muslims profess to believe that the Vision of God is the summit of human felicity, because it is so stated in the Law; but with many this is a mere lip-profession which arouses no emotion in their hearts. This is quite, natural, for how can a man long for a thing of which he has no knowledge? We will endeavour your

to show briefly why the Vision of God is the greatest happiness to which a man can attain.

In the first place, every one of man's faculties has its appropriate function which it delights to fulfil. This holds good of them all, from the lowest bodily appetite to the highest form of intellectual apprehension. But even a comparatively low form of mental exertion affords greater pleasure than the satisfaction of bodily appetites. Thus, if a man happens to be absorbed in a game of chess, he will not come to his meal, though repeatedly summoned. And the higher the subject-matter of our knowledge, the greater is our delight in it; for instance, we would take more pleasure in knowing the secrets of a king than the secrets of a vizier. Seeing, then, that God is the highest possible object of knowledge, the knowledge of Him must afford more delight than any other. He who knows God, even in this world, dwells, as it were, in a paradise, "the breadth of which is as the breadth of the heavens and the earth,"[18] a paradise, the fruits of which no envy can prevent him plucking, and the extent of which is not narrowed by the multitude of those who occupy it.

But the delight of knowledge still falls short of the delight of vision, just as our pleasure in thinking of those we love is much less than the pleasure afforded by the actual sight of them. Our imprisonment in bodies of clay and water, and entanglement in the things of sense constitute a veil which hides the Vision of God from us, although it does not prevent our attaining to some knowledge of Him. For this reason God

18. Quran 57:21

said to Moses on Mount Sinai, "Thou shalt not see Me."[19]

The truth of the matter is this, that just as the seed of man becomes a man, and a buried datestone becomes a palm tree, so the knowledge of God acquired on earth will in the next world change into the Vision of God, and he who has never learnt the knowledge will never have the Vision. This Vision will not be shared alike by all who know, but their discernment of it will vary exactly as their knowledge. God is one, but He will be seen in many different ways, just as one object is reflected in different ways by different mirrors, some showing it straight, and some distorted, some clearly and some dimly. A mirror may be so crooked as to make even a beautiful form appear misshapen, and a man may carry into the next world a heart so dark and distorted that the sight which will be a source of peace and joy to others will be to him a source of misery. He in whose heart the love of God has prevailed over all else will derive more joy from this vision than he in whose heart it has not so prevailed; just as in the case of two men with equally powerful eyesight, gazing on a beautiful face, he who already loves the possessor of that face will rejoice in beholding it more than he who does not. For perfect happiness mere knowledge is not enough, unaccompanied by love, and the love of God cannot take possession of a man's heart until it be purified from love of the world, which purification can only be effected by abstinence and austerity. While he is in this world a man's condition with regard to the Vision of God is like that of a lover who should see his Beloved's

19. Quran 7:143

face in the twilight, while his clothes are infested with hornets and scorpions, which continually torment him. But should the sun arise and reveal his Beloved's face in all its beauty, and the noxious vermin leave off molesting him, then the lover's joy will be like that of God's servant, who, released from the twilight and the tormenting trials of this world, beholds Him without a veil. Abu Suleiman said, "He who is busy with himself now will be busy with himself then, and he who is occupied with God now will be occupied with Him then."

Yahya ibn Mu'adh relates, "I watched Abu Yazid al-Bistami at prayer through one entire night. When he had finished he stood up and said, 'O Lord! some of Thy servants have asked and obtained of Thee the power to perform miracles, to walk on the sea, and to fly in the air, but this I do not ask; some have asked and obtained treasures, but these I do not ask.' Then he turned, and, seeing me, said, 'Are you there, Yahya?' I replied, 'Yes.' He asked, 'Since when? I answered, 'For a long time.' I then asked him to reveal to me some of his spiritual experiences. 'I will reveal,' he answered, 'what is lawful to tell you. The Almighty showed me His kingdom, from its loftiest to its lowest; He raised me above the throne and the seat and all the seven heavens. Then He said, "Ask of me whatsoever thing thou desirest." I answered, "Lord! I wish for nothing beside Thee." "'Verily,' He said, 'thou art My servant.'"

On another occasion Bayazid said, "Were God to offer thee the intimacy with Himself of Abraham, the power in prayer of Moses, the spirituality of Jesus, yet keep thy face directed to Him only, for He has treasures surpassing even these." One day a friend

said to him, "For thirty years I have fasted by day and prayed by night and have found none of that spiritual joy of which thou speakest." Bayazid answered, "If you fasted and prayed for three hundred years, you would never find it." "How is that?" asked the other. "Because," said Bayazid, "your selfishness is acting as a veil between you and God." "Tell me, then, the cure." "It is a cure which you cannot carry out." However, as his friend pressed him to reveal it, Bayazid said, "Go to the nearest barber and have your beard shaved; strip yourself of your clothes, with the exception of a girdle round your loins. Take a horse's nosebag full of walnuts, hang it round your neck, go into the bazaar and cry out, 'Any boy who gives me a slap on the nape of my neck shall have a walnut.' Then, in this manner, go where the Cadi and the doctors of the law are sitting." "Bless my soul!" said his friend, "I really can't do that; do suggest some other remedy." "This is the indispensable preliminary to a cure," answered Bayazid, "but, as I told you, you are incurable."

The reason Bayazid indicated this method of cure for want of relish in devotion was that his friend was an ambitious seeker after place and honor. Ambition and pride are diseases which can only be cured in some such way. God said unto Jesus, "O Jesus! when I see in My servants' hearts pure love for Myself unmixed with any selfish desire concerning this world or the next, I act as guardian over that love." Again, when people asked Jesus "What is the highest work of all?" he answered, "To love God and to be resigned to His will." The saint Rabia was once asked whether she loved the Prophet: "The love of the Creator," she said, "has prevented my loving the creature." Ibrahim Ben Adham in his prayers said, "O God! In my eyes

heaven itself is less than a gnat in comparison with the love of Thee and the joy of Thy remembrance which thou hast granted me."

He who supposes that it is possible to enjoy happiness in the next world apart from the love of God is far gone in error, for the very essence of the future life is to arrive at God as at an object of desire long aimed at and attained through countless obstacles. This enjoyment of God is happiness. But if he had no delight in God before, he will not delight in Him then, and if his joy in God was but slight before, it will be but slight then. In brief, our future happiness will be in strict proportion to the degree in which we have loved God here.

But (and may God preserve us from such a doom!) if in a man's heart there has been growing up a love of what is opposed to God, the conditions of the next life will be altogether alien to him, and that which will cause joy to others will to him cause misery.

This may be illustrated by the following anecdote: A certain scavenger went into the perfume-sellers' bazaar, and, smelling the sweet scents, fell down unconscious. People came round him and sprinkled rose-water upon him and held musk to his nose, but he only became worse. At last one came who had been a scavenger himself; he held a little filth under the man's nose and he revived instantly, exclaiming, with a sigh of satisfaction, "Ah! this is perfume indeed!" Thus in the next life a worldling will no longer find the filthy lucre and the filthy pleasures of the world; the spiritual joys of that world will be altogether alien to him and but increase his wretchedness. For the next world is a world of Spirit and of the manifestation of the Beauty of God; happy is that man who

has aimed at and acquired affinity with it. All austerities, devotions, studies have the acquirement of that affinity for their aim, and that affinity is love. This is the meaning of that saying of the Quran, "He who has purified his soul is happy." Sins and lusts directly oppose the attainment of this affinity; therefore the Quran goes on to say, "And he who has corrupted his soul is miserable."[20] Those who are gifted with spiritual insight have really grasped this truth as a fact of experience, and not a merely traditional maxim. Their clear perception of it leads them to the conviction that he by whom it was spoken was a prophet indeed, just as a man who has studied medicine knows when he is listening to a physician. This is a kind of certainty which requires no support from miracles such as the conversion of a rod into a snake, the credit of which may be shaken by apparently equally extraordinary miracles performed by magicians.

The Signs of the Love of God

Many claim to love God, but each should examine himself as to the genuineness of the love which he professes. The first test is this: he should not dislike the thought of death, for no friend shrinks from going to see a friend. The Prophet said, "Whoever wishes to see God, God wishes to see him." It is true a sincere lover of God may shrink from the thought of death coming before he has finished his preparation for the next world, but if he is sincere, he will be diligent in making such preparation.

The second test of sincerity is that a man should be willing to sacrifice his will to God's, should cleave

20. Quran, chapter 91.

to what brings him nearer to God, and should shun what places him at a distance from God. The fact of a man's sinning is no proof that he does not love God at all, but it proves that he does not love Him with his whole heart. The saint Fudhail said to a certain man, "If anyone asks you whether you love God, keep silent; for if you say, 'I do not love Him,' you are an infidel; and if you say, 'I do,' your deeds contradict you."

The third test is that the remembrance of God should always remain fresh in a man's heart without effort, for what a man loves he constantly remembers, and if his love is perfect he never forgets it. It is possible, however, that, while the love of God does not take the first place in a man's heart, the love of the love of God may, for love is one thing and the love of love another.

The fourth test is that he will love the Quran, which is the Word of God, and Muhammad, who is the Prophet of God; if his love is really strong, he will love all men, for all are God's servants, nay, his love will embrace the whole creation, for he who loves anyone loves the works he composes and his handwriting.

The fifth test is, he will be covetous of retirement and privacy for purposes of devotion; he will long for the approach of night, so that he may hold intercourse with his Friend without let or hindrance. If he prefers conversation by day and sleep at night to such retirement, then his love is imperfect. God said to David, "Be not too intimate with men; for two kinds of persons are excluded from My presence: those who are earnest in seeking reward and slack when they obtain it, and those who prefer their own thoughts to the remembrance of Me. The sign of My displeasure is that I leave such to themselves."

In truth, if the love of God really take possession of the heart all other love is excluded. One of the children of Israel was in the habit of praying at night, but, observing that a bird sang in a certain tree very sweetly, he began to pray under that tree, in order to have the pleasure of listening to the bird. God told David to go and say to him, "Thou hast mingled the love of a melodious bird with the love of Me; thy rank among the saints is lowered." On the other hand, some have loved God with such intensity that, while they were engaged in devotion, their houses have caught fire and they have not noticed it.

A sixth test is that worship becomes easy. A certain saint said, "During one space of thirty years I performed my night-devotions with great difficulty, but during a second space of thirty years they became a delight." When love to God is complete no joy is equal to the joy of worship.

The seventh test is that lovers of God will love those who obey Him and hate the infidels and the disobedient, as the Quran says: "They are strenuous against the unbelievers and merciful to each other." The Prophet once asked God and said, "O Lord! who are Thy lovers?" and the answer came, "Those who cleave to Me as a child to its mother, take refuge in the remembrance of Me as a bird seeks the shelter of its nest, and are as angry at the sight of sin as an angry lion who fears nothing."

The Conference of the Birds
by Farīd al-Dīn Attār

Based on the translation by Edward Fitzgerald (New York and London: Macmillan and Co., 1889).

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Part 1
The Conference Assembles

All the birds of the world gather together in a conference, parliament, or colloquy. Thier goal is to discover a governor, king, leader, sovereign, or as Edward Fitzgerald puts it, a "Sultan Khalif." The conference is addressed first by Tajidar the Wise, a Hoopoe bird. The Hoopoe claims to know of a suitable king, the "Symurgh"—a perfect bird-being who makes its home in the Tree of Life. According to Jorge Louis Borges,* Attar's Symurgh is a symbol of the godhead; it also resembles a Phoenix, the medieval symbol of spiritual death and re-birth.

*** Borges, Book of Imaginary Beings, 130–131.**

Once on a time from all the Circles seven
Between the stedfast Earth and rolling Heaven
THE BIRDS, of all Note, Plumage, and Degree,
That float in Air, and roost upon the Tree;
And they that from the Waters snatch their Meat,
And they that scour the Desert with long Feet;
Birds of all Natures, known or not to Man,
Flock'd from all Quarters into full Divan,
On no less solemn business than to find
Or choose, a Sultan Khalif of their kind,
For whom, if never theirs, or lost, they pined.
The Snake had his, 'twas said; and so the Beast
His Lion-lord: and Man had his, at least:
And that the Birds, who nearest were the Skies,
And went apparell'd in its Angel Dyes.
Should be without—under no better Law
Than that which lost all other in the Maw—
Disperst without a Bond of Union—nay,
Or meeting to make each the other's Prey—
This was the Grievance—this the solemn Thing
On which the scatter'd Commonwealth of Wing,
From all the four Winds, flying like to Cloud
That met and blacken'd Heav'n, and Thunder-loud
With Sound of whirring Wings and Beaks that clash'd
Down like a Torrent on the Desert dash'd:
Till by Degrees, the Hubbub and Pell-mell
Into some Order and Precedence fell,
And, Proclamation made of Silence, each
In special Accent, but in general Speech
That all should understand, as seem'd him best,
The Congregation of all Wings addrest.

And first, with Heart so full as from his Eyes
Ran weeping, up rose Tajidar the Wise;

The mystic Mark upon whose Bosom show'd
That He alone of all the Birds THE ROAD
Had travell'd: and the Crown upon his Head
Had reach'd the Goal; and He stood forth and said:
'O Birds, by what Authority divine
I speak you know by His authentic Sign,
And Name, emblazon'd on my Breast and Bill:
Whose Counsel I assist at, and fulfil:
At His Behest I measured as he plann'd
The Spaces of the Air and Sea and Land;
I gauged the secret sources of the Springs
From Cloud to Fish: the Shadow of my Wings
Dream'd over sleeping Deluge: piloted
The Blast that bore Sulayman's Throne: and led
The Cloud of Birds that canopied his Head;
Whose Word I brought to Balkis: and I shared
The Counsel that with Asaf he prepared.
And now you want a Khalif: and I know
Him, and his whereabout, and How to go:
And go alone I could, and plead your cause
Alone for all: but, by the eternal laws,
Yourselves by Toil and Travel of your own
Must for your old Delinquency atone.
Were you indeed not blinded by the Curse
Of Self-exile, that still grows worse and worse,
Yourselves would know that, though you see him not,
He is with you this Moment, on this Spot,
Your Lord through all Forgetfulness and Crime,
Here, There, and Everywhere, and through all Time.
But as a Father, whom some wayward Child
By sinful Self-will has unreconciled,
Waits till the sullen Reprobate at cost
Of long Repentance should regain the Lost;
Therefore, yourselves to see as you are seen,

Yourselves must bridge the Gulf you made between
By such a Search and Travel to be gone
Up to the mighty mountain Kaf, whereon
Hinges the World, and round about whose Knees
Into one Ocean mingle the Sev'n Seas;
In whose impenetrable Forest-folds
Of Light and Dark "Symurgh" his Presence holds;
Not to be reach'd, if to be reach'd at all
But by a Road the stoutest might apal;
Of Travel not of Days or Months, but Years—
Life-long perhaps: of Dangers, Doubts, and Fears
As yet unheard of: Sweat of Blood and Brain
Interminable—often all in vain—
And, if successful, no Return again:
A Road whose very Preparation scared
The Traveller who yet must be prepared.
Who then this Travel to Result would bring
Needs both a Lion's Heart beneath the Wing,
And even more, a Spirit purified
Of Worldly Passion, Malice, Lust, and Pride:
Yea, ev'n of Worldly Wisdom, which grows dim
And dark, the nearer it approaches Him,
Who to the Spirit's Eye alone reveal'd,
By sacrifice of Wisdom's self unseal'd;
Without which none who reach the Place could bear
To look upon the Glory dwelling there.'

One Night from out the swarming City Gate
Stept holy Bajazyd, to meditate
Alone amid the breathing Fields that lay
In solitary Silence leagues away,
Beneath a Moon and Stars as bright as Day.
And the Saint wondering such a Temple were,
And so lit up, and scarce one worshipper,

A voice from Heav'n amid the stillness said:
'The Royal Road is not for all to tread,
Nor is the Royal Palace for the Rout,
Who, even if they reach it, are shut out.
The Blaze that from my Harim window breaks
With fright the Rabble of the Roadside takes;
And ev'n of those that at my Portal din,
Thousands may knock for one that enters in.'

Thus spoke the Tajidar: and the wing'd Crowd,
That underneath his Word in Silence bow'd,
Clapp'd Acclamation: and their Hearts and Eyes
Were kindled by the Firebrand of the Wise.
They felt their Degradation: they believed
The word that told them how to be retrieved,
And in that glorious Consummation won
Forgot the Cost at which it must be done.
'They only long'd to follow: they would go
Whither he led, through Flood, or Fire, or Snow'—
So cried the Multitude. But some there were
Who listen'd with a cold disdainful air,
Content with what they were, or grudging Cost
Of Time or Travel that might all be lost;
These, one by one, came forward, and preferr'd
Unwise Objection: which the wiser Word
Shot with direct Reproof, or subtly round
With Argument and Allegory wound.
The Pheasant first would know by what pretence
The Tajidar to that pre-eminence
Was raised—a Bird, but for his lofty Crest
(And such the Pheasant had) like all the Rest—
Who answer'd—'By no Virtue of my own
Sulayman chose me, but by His alone:
Not by the Gold and Silver of my Sighs

Made mine, but the free Largess of his Eyes.
Behold the Grace of Allah comes and goes
As to Itself is good: and no one knows
Which way it turns: in that mysterious Court
Not he most finds who furthest travels for't.
For one may crawl upon his knees Life-long,
And yet may never reach, or all go wrong:
Another just arriving at the Place
He toil'd for, and—the Door shut in his Face:
Whereas Another, scarcely gone a Stride,
And suddenly—Behold he is Inside!—
But though the Runner win not, he that stands,
No Thorn will turn to Roses in his Hands:
Each one must do his best and all endure,
And all endeavour, hoping but not sure.
Heav'n its own Umpire is; its Bidding do,
And Thou perchance shalt be Sulayman's too.'

One day Shah Mahmud, riding with the Wind
A-hunting, left his Retinue behind,
And coming to a River, whose swift Course
Doubled back Game and Dog, and Man and Horse,
Beheld upon the Shore a little Lad
A-fishing, very poor, and Tatter-clad
He was, and weeping as his Heart would break.
So the Great Sultan, for good humour's sake
Pull'd in his Horse a moment, and drew nigh,
And after making his Salam, ask'd why
He wept—weeping, the Sultan said, so sore
As he had never seen one weep before.
The Boy look'd up, and 'O Amir,' he said,
'Sev'n of us are at home, and Father dead,
And Mother left with scarce a Bit of Bread:
And now since Sunrise have I fish'd—and see!

Caught nothing for our Supper—Woe is Me!'
The Sultan lighted from his horse. 'Behold,'
Said he, 'Good Fortune will not be controll'd:
And, since Today yours seems to turn from you,
Suppose we try for once what mine will do,
And we will share alike in all I win.'
So the Shah took, and flung his Fortune in,
The Net; which, cast by the Great Mahmud's Hand,
A hundred glittering Fishes brought to Land.
The Lad look'd up in Wonder—Mahmud smiled
And vaulted into Saddle. But the Child
Ran after—'Nay, Amir, but half the Haul
Is yours by Bargain'—'Nay, Today take all,'
The Sultan cried, and shook his Bridle free—
'But mind—Tomorrow All belongs to Me—'
And so rode off. Next morning at Divan
The Sultan's Mind upon his Bargain ran,
And being somewhat in a mind for sport
Sent for the Lad: who, carried up to Court,
And marching into Royalty's full Blaze
With such a Catch of Fish as yesterday's,
The Sultan call'd and set him by his side,
And asking him, 'What Luck?' The Boy replied,
'This is the Luck that follows every Cast,
Since o'er my Net the Sultan's Shadow pass'd.'

Part 2
Excuses are Made

Many of the assembled birds begin to make excuses; they are unwilling to make an effort to find Symurgh, the king. Tajidar the Hoopoe answers each of the hesitant birds, encouraging them to undertake the journey.

. . .

Then came The Nightingale, from such a Draught
Of Ecstasy that from the Rose he quaff'd
Reeling as drunk, and ever did distil
In exquisite divisions from his Bill
To inflame the Hearts of Men—and thus sang He—
'To me alone, alone, is giv'n the Key
Of Love; of whose whole Mystery possesst,
When I reveal a little to the Rest,
Forthwith Creation listening forsakes
The Reins of Reason, and my Frenzy takes:
Yea, whosoever once has quaint this wine

He leaves unlisten'd David's Song for mine.
In vain do Men for my Divisions strive,
And die themselves making dead Lutes alive:
I hang the Stars with Meshes for Men's Souls:
The Garden underneath my Music rolls.
The long, long Morns that mourn the Rose away
I sit in silence, and on Anguish prey:
But the first Air which the New Year shall breathe
Up to my Boughs of Message from beneath
That in her green Harim my Bride unveils,
My Throat bursts silence and her Advent hails,
Who in her crimson Volume registers
The Notes of Him whose Life is lost in hers.
The Rose I love and worship now is here;
If dying, yet reviving, Year by Year;
But that you tell of, all my Life why waste
In vainly searching; or, if found, not taste?'

So with Division infinite and Trill
On would the Nightingale have warbled still,
And all the World have listen'd; but a Note
Of sterner Import check'd the lovesick Throat.

'O watering with thy melodious Tears
Love's Garden, and who dost indeed the Ears
Of men with thy melodious Fingers mould
As David's Finger Iron did of old:
Why not, like David, dedicate thy Dower
Of Song to something better than a Flower?
Empress indeed of Beauty, so they say,
But one whose Empire hardly lasts a Day,
By Insurrection of the Morning's Breath
That made her hurried to Decay and Death:
And while she lasts contented to be seen,

And worshipt, for the Garden's only Queen,
Leaving thee singing on thy Bough forlorn,
Or if she smile on Thee, perhaps in Scorn.'

Like that fond Dervish waiting in the throng
When some World-famous Beauty went along,
Who smiling on the Antic as she pass'd—
Forthwith Staff, Bead and Scrip away he cast,
And grovelling in the Kennel, took to whine
Before her Door among the Dogs and Swine.
Which when she often went unheeding by,
But one day quite as heedless ask'd him—'Why?'—
He told of that one Smile, which, all the Rest
Passing, had kindled Hope within his Breast—
Again she smiled and said, 'O self-beguiled
Poor Wretch, at whom and not on whom I smiled.'

Then came the subtle Parrot in a coat
Greener than Greensward, and about his Throat
A Collar ran of sub-sulphureous Gold;
And in his Beak a Sugar-plum he troll'd,
That all his Words with luscious Lisping ran,
And to this Tune—'O cruel Cage, and Man
More iron still who did confine me there,
Who else with him whose Livery I wear
Ere this to his Eternal Fount had been,
And drunk what should have kept me ever-green.
But now I know the Place, and I am free
To go, and all the Wise will follow Me.
Some'—and upon the Nightingale one Eye
He leer'd—'for nothing but the Blossom sigh:
But I am for the luscious Pulp that grows
Where, and for which the Blossom only blows:
And which so long as the Green Tree provides

What better grows along Kaf's dreary Sides?
And what more needful Prophet there than He
Who gives me Life to nip it from the Tree?

To whom the Tajidar—'O thou whose Best
In the green leaf of Paradise is drest,
But whose Neck kindles with a lower Fire—
O slip the collar off of base Desire,
And stand apparell'd in Heav'n's Woof entire!
This Life that hangs so sweet about your Lips
But, spite of all your Khizar, slips and slips,
What is it but itself the coarser Rind
Of the True Life withinside and behind,
Which he shall never never reach unto
Till the gross Shell of Carcase he break through?'

For what said He, that dying Hermit, whom
Your Prophet came to, trailing through the Gloom
His Emerald Vest, and tempted—'Come with Me,
And Live.' The Hermit answered—'Not with Thee.
Two Worlds there are, and This was thy Design,
And thou hast got it; but The Next is mine;
Whose Fount is this life's Death, and to whose Side
Ev'n now I find my Way without a Guide.'

Then like a Sultan glittering in all Rays
Of Jewelry, and deckt with his own Blaze,
The glorious Peacock swept into the Ring:
And, turning slowly that the glorious Thing
Might fill all Eyes with wonder, thus said He.
'Behold, the Secret Artist, making me,
With no one Colour of the skies bedeckt,
But from its Angel's Feathers did select
To make up mine withal, the Gabriel
Of all the Birds: though from my Place I fell

In Eden, when Acquaintance I did make
In those blest days with that Sev'n-headed Snake,
And thence with him, my perfect Beauty marr'd
With these ill Feet, was thrust out and debarr'd.
Little I care for Worldly Fruit or Flower,
Would you restore me to lost Eden's Bower,
But first my Beauty making all complete
With reparation of these ugly Feet.'

'Were it,' 'twas answer'd, 'only to return
To that lost Eden, better far to burn
In Self-abasement up thy pluméd Pride,
And ev'n with lamer feet to creep inside—
But all mistaken you and all like you
That long for that lost Eden as the true;
Fair as it was, still nothing but the shade
And Out-court of the Majesty that made.
That which I point you tow'rd, and which the King
I tell you of broods over with his Wing,
With no deciduous leaf, but with the Rose
Of Spiritual Beauty, smells and glows:
No plot of Earthly Pleasance, but the whole
True Garden of the Universal Soul.'

For so Creation's Master-Jewel fell
From that same Eden: loving which too well,
The Work before the Artist did prefer,
And in the Garden lost the Gardener.
Wherefore one Day about the Garden went
A voice that found him in his false Content,
And like a bitter Sarsar of the North
Shrivell'd the Garden up, and drove him forth
Into the Wilderness: and so the Eye
Of Eden closed on him till by and by.

Then from a Ruin where conceal'd he lay
Watching his buried Gold, and hating Day,
Hooted The Owl. —'I tell you, my Delight
Is in the Ruin and the Dead of Night
Where I was born, and where I love to wone
All my Life long, sitting on some cold stone
Away from all your roystering Companies,
In some dark Corner where a Treasure lies;
That, buried by some Miser in the Dark,
Speaks up to me at Midnight like a Spark;
And o'er it like a Talisman I brood,
Companion of the Serpent and the Toad.
What need of other Sovereign, having found,
And keeping as in Prison underground,
One before whom all other Kings bow down,
And with his glittering Heel their Foreheads crown?'

'He that a Miser lives and Miser dies,
At the Last Day what Figure shall he rise?'

A Fellow all his life lived hoarding Gold,
And, dying, hoarded left it. And behold,
One Night his Son saw peering through the House
A Man, with yet the semblance of a Mouse,
Watching a crevice in the Wall—and cried
'My Father?'—'Yes,' the Musulman replied,
'Thy Father!'—'But why watching thus?'—'For fear
Lest any smell my Treasure buried here.'
'But wherefore, Sir, so metamousified?'
'Because, my Son, such is the true outside
Of the inner Soul by which I lived and died.'

'Aye,' said The Partridge, with his Foot and Bill
Crimson with raking Rubies from the Hill,
And clattering his Spurs—'Wherewith the Ground

I stab,' said he, 'for Rubies, that, when found
I swallow; which, as soon as swallow'd, turn
To Sparks which though my beak and eyes do burn.
Gold, as you say, is but dull Metal dead,
And hanging on the Hoarder's Soul like Lead:
But Rubies that have Blood within, and grown
And nourisht in the Mountain Heart of Stone,
Burn with an inward Light, which they inspire,
And make their Owners Lords of their Desire.'

To whom the Tajidar—'As idly sold
To the quick Pebble as the drowsy Gold,
As dead when sleeping in their mountain mine
As dangerous to Him who makes them shine:
Slavish indeed to do their Lord's Commands,
And slave-like aptest to escape his Hands,
And serve a second Master like the first,
And working all their wonders for the worst.'

Never was Jewel after or before
Like that Sulayman for a Signet wore:
Whereby one Ruby, weighing scarce a grain
Did Sea and Land and all therein constrain,
Yea, ev'n the Winds of Heav'n—made the fierce East
Bear his League-wide Pavilion like a Beast,
Whither he would: yea, the Good Angel held
His subject, and the lower Fiend compell'd.
Till, looking round about him in his pride,
He overtax'd the Fountain that supplied,
Praying that after him no Son of Clay
Should ever touch his Glory. And one Day
Almighty God his Jewel stole away,
And gave it to the Div, who with the Ring
Wore also the Resemblance of the King,

And so for forty days play'd such a Game
As blots Sulayman's forty years with Shame.

Then The Shah-Falcon, tossing up his Head
Blink-hooded as it was—'Behold,' he said,
'I am the chosen Comrade of the King,
And perch upon the Fist that wears the Ring;
Born, bred, and nourisht, in the Royal Court,
I take the Royal Name and make the Sport.
And if strict Discipline I undergo
And half my Life am blinded—be it so;
Because the Shah's Companion ill may brook
On aught save Royal Company to look.
And why am I to leave my King, and fare
With all these Rabble Wings I know not where?'—

'O blind indeed'—the Answer was, 'and dark
To any but a vulgar Mortal Mark,
And drunk with Pride of Vassalage to those
Whose Humour like their Kingdom comes and goes;
All Mutability: who one Day please
To give: and next Day what they gave not seize:
Like to the Fire: a dangerous Friend at best,
Which who keeps farthest from does wiseliest.

A certain Shah there was in Days foregone
Who had a lovely Slave he doted on,
And cherish'd as the Apple of his Eye,
Clad gloriously, fed sumptuously, set high,
And never was at Ease were He not by,
Who yet, for all this Sunshine, Day by Day
Was seen to wither like a Flower away.
Which, when observing, one without the Veil
Of Favour ask'd the Favourite—'Why so pale
And sad?' thus sadly answer'd the poor Thing—

‘No Sun that rises sets until the King,
Whose Archery is famous among Men,
Aims at an Apple on my Head, and when
The stricken Apple splits, and those who stand
Around cry “Lo! the Shah’s unerring Hand!”
Then He too laughing asks me “Why so pale
And sorrow-some? as could the Sultan fail,
Who such a master of the Bow confest,
And aiming by the Head that he loves best.”’

Then on a sudden swoop’d The Phoenix down
As though he wore as well as gave The Crown:
And cried—‘I care not, I, to wait on Kings,
Whose crowns are but the Shadow of my Wings!’
‘Aye,’ was the Answer—‘And, pray, how has sped,
On which it lighted, many a mortal Head?’

A certain Sultan dying, his Vizier
In Dream beheld him, and in mortal Fear
Began—‘O mighty Shah of Shahs! Thrice-blest’—
But loud the Vision shriek’d and struck its Breast,
And ‘Stab me not with empty Title!’ cried—
‘One only Shah there is, and none beside,
Who from his Throne above for certain Ends
Awhile some Spangle of his Glory lends
To Men on Earth; but calling in again
Exacts a strict account of every Grain.
Sultan I lived, and held the World in scorn:
O better had I glean’d the Field of Corn!
O better had I been a Beggar born,
And for my Throne and Crown, down in the Dust
My living Head had laid where Dead I must!
O wither’d, wither’d, wither’d, be the Wing
Whose overcasting Shadow made me King!’

Then from a Pond, where all day long he kept,
Waddled the dapper Duck demure, adept
At infinite Ablution, and precise
In keeping of his Raiment clean and nice.
And 'Sure of all the Race of Birds,' said He,
'None for Religious Purity like Me,
Beyond what strictest Rituals prescribe—
Methinks I am the Saint of all our Tribe,
To whom, by Miracle, the Water, that
I wash in, also makes my Praying-Mat.'
To whom, more angrily than all, replied
The Leader, lashing that religious Pride,
That under ritual Obedience
To outer Law with inner might dispense:
For, fair as all the Feather to be seen,
Could one see through, the Maw was not so clean:
But He that made both Maw and Feather too
Would take account of, seeing through and through.

A Shah returning to his Capital,
His subjects drest it forth in Festival,
Thronging with Acclamation Square and Street,
And kneeling flung before his Horse's feet
Jewel and Gold. All which with scarce an Eye
The Sultan superciliously rode by:
Till coming to the public Prison, They
Who dwelt within those grisly Walls, by way
Of Welcome, having neither Pearl nor Gold,
Over the wall chopt Head and Carcase roll'd,
Some almost parcht to Mummy with the Sun,
Some wet with Execution that day done.
At which grim Compliment at last the Shah
Drew Bridle: and amid a wild Hurrah
Of savage Recognition, smiling threw

Silver and Gold among the wretched Crew,
And so rode forward. Whereat of his Train
One wondering that, while others sued in vain
With costly gifts, which carelessly he pass'd,
But smiled at ghastly Welcome like the last;
The Shah made answer—'All that Pearl and Gold
Of ostentatious Welcome only told:
A little with great Clamour from the Store
Of hypocrites who kept at home much more.
But when those sever'd Heads and Trunks I saw—
Save by strict Execution of my Law
They had not parted company; not one
But told my Will not talk'd about, but done.'

Then from a Wood was heard unseen to coo
The Ring-dove—'Yúsuf! Yúsuf! Yúsuf! Yú . . . '
(For thus her sorrow broke her Note in twain,
And, just where broken, took it up again)
' . . . suf! Yúsuf! Yúsuf! Yúsuf!'—But one Note,
Which still repeating, she made hoarse her throat:
Till checkt—'O You, who with your idle Sighs
Block up the Road of better Enterprise;
Sham Sorrow all, or bad as sham if true,
When once the better thing is come to do;
Beware lest wailing thus you meet his Doom
Who all too long his Darling wept, from whom
You draw the very Name you hold so dear,
And which the World is somewhat tired to hear.'

When Yusuf from his Father's Home was torn,
The Patriarch's Heart was utterly forlorn,
And, like a Pipe with but one stop, his Tongue
With nothing but the name of 'Yusuf' rung.
Then down from Heaven's Branches flew the Bird

Of Heav'n and said 'God wearies of that word:
Hast thou not else to do and else to say?'
So Jacob's lips were sealéd from that Day.
But one Night in a Vision, far away
His darling in some alien Field he saw
Binding the Sheaf; and what between the Awe
Of God's Displeasure and the bitter Pass
Of passionate Affection, sigh'd 'Alas—'
And stopp'd—But with the morning Sword of Flame
That oped his Eyes the sterner Angel's came
'For the forbidden Word not utter'd by
Thy Lips was yet sequester'd in that Sigh.'
And the right Passion whose Excess was wrong
Blinded the aged Eyes that wept too long.

Part 3
Tajidar the Wise Explains that Each Individual Bird Has the Potential to Discover a Connection to the Symurgh

Several more birds make excuses, refusing to journey along the path of critical self-examination. Tajidar the Hoopoe explains the relationship each bird has to the Symurgh, an inner, spiritual "king."

. . .

And after these came others—arguing,
Enquiring and excusing—some one Thing,
And some another—endless to repeat,
But, in the Main, Sloth, Folly, or Deceit.
Their Souls were to the vulgar Figure cast
Of earthly Victual not of Heavenly Fast.
At last one smaller Bird, of a rare kind,
Of modest Plume and unpresumptuous Mind,
Whisper'd 'O Tajidar, we know indeed
How Thou both knowest, and would'st help our Need;
For thou art wise and holy, and hast been

Behind the Veil, and there The Presence seen.
But we are weak and vain, with little care
Beyond our yearly Nests and daily Fare—
How should we reach the Mountain? and if there
How get so great a Prince to hear our Prayer?
For there, you say, dwells The Symurgh alone
In Glory, like Sulayman on his Throne,
And we but Pismires at his feet: can He
Such puny Creatures stoop to hear, or see;
Or hearing, seeing, own us—unakin
As He to Folly, Woe, and Death, and Sin?'—

To whom the Tajidar, whose Voice for those
Bewilder'd ones to full Compassion rose
'O lost so long in exile, you disclaim
The very Fount of Being whence you came,
Cannot be parted from, and, will or no,
Whether for Good or Evil must re-flow!
For look—the Shadows into which the Light
Of his pure Essence down by infinite
Gradation dwindles, which at random play
Through Space in Shape indefinite—one Ray
Of his Creative Will into defined
Creation quickens: We that swim the Wind,
And they the Flood below, and Man and Beast
That walk between, from Lion to the least
Pismire that creeps along Sulayman's Wall—
Yea, that in which they swim, fly, walk, and crawl—
However near the Fountain Light, or far
Removed, yet His authentic Shadows are;
Dead Matter's Self but the dark Residue
Exterminating Glory dwindles to.
A Mystery too fearful in the Crowd
To utter—scarcely to Thyself aloud—

But when in solitary Watch and Prayer
Consider'd: and religiously beware
Lest Thou the Copy with the Type confound;
And Deity, with Deity indrown'd,—
For as pure Water into purer Wine
Incorporating shall itself reline
While the dull Drug lies half-resolved below,
With Him and with his Shadows is it so:
The baser Forms, to whatsoever Change
Subject, still vary through their lower Range:
To which the higher even shall decay,
That, letting ooze their better Part away
For Things of Sense and Matter, in the End
Shall merge into the Clay to which they tend.
Unlike to him, who straining through the Bond
Of outward Being for a Life beyond,
While the gross Worldling to his Centre clings,
That draws him deeper in, exulting springs
To merge him in the central Soul of Things.
And shall not he pass home with other Zest
Who, with full Knowledge, yearns for such a Rest,
Than he, who with his better self at strife,
Drags on the weary Exile call'd This Life?—
One, like a child with outstretcht Arms and Face
Upturn'd, anticipates his Sire's Embrace;
The other crouching like a guilty Slave
Till flogg'd to Punishment across the Grave.
And, knowing that His glory ill can bear
The unpurged Eye; do thou Thy Breast prepare:
And the mysterious Mirror He set there,
To temper his reflected Image in,
Clear of Distortion, Doubleness, and Sin:
And in thy Conscience understanding this,
The Double only seems, but The One is,

Thyself to Self-annihilation give
That this false Two in that true One may live.
For this I say: if, looking in thy Heart,
Thou for Self-whole mistake thy Shadow-part,
That Shadow-part indeed into The Sun
Shall melt, but senseless of its Union:
But in that Mirror if with purged eyes
Thy Shadow Thou for Shadow recognise,
Then shalt Thou back into thy Centre fall
A conscious Ray of that eternal All.'

He ceased, and for awhile Amazement quell'd
The Host, and in the Chain of Silence held:
A Mystery so awful who would dare—
So glorious who would not wish—to share?
So Silence brooded on the feather'd Folk,
Till here and there a timid Murmur broke
From some too poor in honest Confidence,
And then from others of too much Pretence;
Whom both, as each unduly hoped or fear'd,
The Tajidar in answer check'd or cheer'd.

Some said their Hearts were good indeed to go
The Way he pointed out: but they were slow
Of Comprehension, and scarce understood
Their present Evil or the promised Good:
And so, tho' willing to do all they could,
Must not they fall short, or go wholly wrong,
On such mysterious Errand, and so long?
Whom the wise Leader bid but Do their Best
In Hope and Faith, and leave to Him the rest,
For He who fix'd the Race, and knew its Length
And Danger, also knew the Runner's Strength.

Shah Mahmud, absent on an Enterprise,
Ayas, the very Darling of his eyes,
At home under an Evil Eye fell sick,
Then cried the Sultan to a soldier 'Quick!
To Horse! to Horse! without a Moment's Stay,—
The shortest Road with all the Speed you may,—
Or, by the Lord, your Head shall pay for it!'—
Off went the Soldier, plying Spur and Bit—
Over the sandy Desert, over green
Valley, and Mountain, and the Stream between,
Without a Moment's Stop for rest or bait,
Up to the City—to the Palace Gate—
Up to the Presence-Chamber at a Stride—
And Lo! The Sultan at his Darling's side!—
Then thought the Soldier—'I have done my Best,
And yet shall die for it.' The Sultan guess'd
His Thought and smiled. 'Indeed your Best you did,
The nearest Road you knew, and well you rid:
And if I knew a shorter, my Excess
Of Knowledge does but justify thy Less.'

And then, with drooping Crest and Feather, came
Others, bow'd down with Penitence and Shame.
They long'd indeed to go; 'but how begin,
Mesh'd and entangled as they were in Sin
Which often-times Repentance of past Wrong
As often broken had but knit more strong?'
Whom the wise Leader bid be of good cheer,
And, conscious of the Fault, dismiss the Fear,
Nor at the very Entrance of the Fray
Their Weapon, ev'n if broken, fling away:
Since Mercy on the broken Branch anew
Would blossom were but each Repentance true.

For did not God his Prophet take to Task?
'Sev'n-times of Thee did Karun Pardon ask;
Which, hadst thou been like Me his Maker—yea,
But present at the Kneading of his Clay
With those twain Elements of Hell and Heav'n,—
One prayer had won what Thou deny'st to Sev'n.'
For like a Child sent with a fluttering Light
To feel his way along a gusty Night
Man walks the World: again and yet again
The Lamp shall be by Fits of Passion slain:
But shall not He who sent him from the Door
Relight the Lamp once more, and yet once more?

When the rebellious Host from Death shall wake
Black with Despair of Judgment, God shall take
Ages of holy Merit from the Count
Of Angels to make up Man's short Amount,
And bid the murmuring Angel gladly spare
Of that which, undiminishing his Share,
Of Bliss, shall rescue Thousands from the Cost
Of Bankruptcy within the Prison lost.

Another Story told how in the Scale
Good Will beyond mere Knowledge would prevail.

In Paradise the Angel Gabriel heard
The Lips of Allah trembling with the Word
Of perfect Acceptation: and he thought
'Some perfect Faith such perfect Answer wrought,
But whose?'—And therewith slipping from the Crypt
Of Sidra, through the Angel-ranks he slipt
Watching what Lip yet trembled with the Shot
That so had hit the Mark—but found it not.
Then, in a Glance to Earth, he threaded through
Mosque, Palace, Cell and Cottage of the True

Belief—in vain; so back to Heaven went
And—Allah's Lips still trembling with assent!
Then the tenacious Angel once again
Threaded the Ranks of Heav'n and Earth—in vain—
Till, once again return'd to Paradise,
There, looking into God's, the Angel's Eyes
Beheld the Prayer that brought that Benison
Rising like Incense from the Lips of one
Who to an Idol bowed—as best he knew
Under that False God worshipping the True.

And then came others whom the summons found
Not wholly sick indeed, but far from sound:
Whose light inconstant Soul alternate flew
From Saint to Sinner, and to both untrue;
Who like a niggard Tailor, tried to match
Truth's single Garment with a worldly Patch.
A dangerous Game; for, striving to adjust
The hesitating Scale of either Lust,
That which had least within it upward flew,
And still the weightier to the Earth down drew,
And, while suspended between Rise and Fall,
Apt with a shaking Hand to forfeit all.

There was a Queen of Egypt like the Bride
Of Night, Full-moon-faced and Canopus-eyed,
Whom one among the meanest of her Crowd
Loved—and she knew it (for he loved aloud),
And sent for him, and said 'Thou lov'st thy Queen:
Now therefore Thou hast this to choose between:
Fly for thy Life: or for this one night Wed
Thy Queen, and with the Sunrise lose thy Head.'
He paused—he turn'd to fly—she struck him dead.
'For had he truly loved his Queen,' said She,

‘He would at once have giv’n his Life for me,
And Life and Wife had carried: but he lied;
And loving only Life, has justly died.’

And then came one who having clear’d his Throat
With sanctimonious Sweetness in his Note
Thus lisp’d—‘Behold I languish from the first
With passionate and unrequited Thirst
Of Love for more than any mortal Bird.
Therefore have I withdrawn me from the Herd
To pine in Solitude. But Thou at last
Hast drawn a line across the dreary Past,
And sure I am by Foretaste that the Wine
I long’d for, and Thou tell’st of, shall be mine.’
But he was sternly checkt. ‘I tell thee this:
Such Boast is no Assurance of such Bliss:
Thou canst not even fill the sail of Prayer
Unless from Him breathe that authentic Air
That shall lift up the Curtain that divides
His Lover from the Harim where He hides—
And the Fulfilment of thy Vows must be,
Not from thy Love for Him, but His for Thee.’

The third night after Bajazyd had died,
One saw him, in a dream, at his Bedside,
And said, ‘Thou Bajazyd? Tell me O Pyr,
How fared it there with Munkar and Nakyr?’
And Bajazyd replied, ‘When from the Grave
They met me rising, and “If Allah’s slave”
Ask’d me, “or collar’d with the Chain of Hell?”
I said “Not I but God alone can tell:
My Passion for his service were but fond
Ambition had not He approved the Bond:
Had He not round my neck the Collar thrown

And told me in the Number of his own;
And that He only knew. What signifies
A hundred Years of Prayer if none replies?"'

'But,' said Another, 'then shall none the Seal
Of Acceptation on his Forehead feel
Ere the Grave yield them on the other Side
Where all is settled?'

But the Chief replied—
'Enough for us to know that who is meet
Shall enter, and with unreprovéd Feet,
(Ev'n as he might upon the Waters walk)
The Presence-room, and in the Presence talk
With such unbridled Licence as shall seem
To the Uninitiated to blaspheme.'

Just as another Holy Spirit fled,
The Skies above him burst into a Bed
Of Angels looking down and singing clear
'Nightingale! Nightingale! thy Rose is here!'
And yet, the Door wide open to that Bliss,
As some hot Lover slights a scanty Kiss,
The Saint cried 'All I sigh'd for come to this?
I who lifelong have struggled, Lord, to be
Not of thy Angels one, but one with Thee!'

Others were sure that all he said was true:
They were extremely wicked, that they knew:
And much they long'd to go at once—but some,
They said, so unexpectedly had come
Leaving their Nests half-built—in bad Repair—
With Children in—Themselves about to pair—
'Might he not choose a better Season—nay,
Better perhaps a Year or Two's Delay,

Till all was settled, and themselves more stout
And strong to carry their Repentance out—
And then'—

'And then, the same or like Excuse,
With harden'd Heart and Resolution loose
With dallying: and old Age itself engaged
Still to shirk that which shirking we have aged:
And so with Self-delusion, till, too late,
Death upon all Repentance shuts the Gate;
Or some fierce blow compels the Way to choose,
And forced Repentance half its Virtue lose.'

As of an aged Indian King they tell
Who, when his Empire with his Army fell
Under young Mahmud's Sword of Wrath, was sent
At sunset to the Conqueror in his Tent;
But, ere the old King's silver head could reach
The Ground, was lifted up—with kindly Speech,
And with so holy Mercy reassured,
That, after due Persuasion, he abjured
His idols, sate upon Mahmud's Divan,
And took the Name and Faith of Musulman.
But when the Night fell, in his Tent alone
The poor old King was heard to weep and groan
And smite his Bosom; which, when Mahmud knew,
He went to him and said 'Lo, if Thou rue
Thy lost Dominion, Thou shalt wear the Ring
Of thrice as large a Realm.' But the dark King
Still wept, and Ashes on his Forehead threw
And cried 'Not for my Kingdom lost I rue:
But thinking how at the Last Day, will stand
The Prophet with The Volume in his Hand,
And ask of me "How was't that, in thy Day

Of Glory, Thou didst turn from Me and slay
My People; but soon as thy Infidel
Before my True Believers' Army fell
Like Corn before the Reaper—thou didst own
His Sword who scoutedst Me." Of seed so sown
What profitable Harvest should be grown?'

Then after cheering others who delay'd,
Not of the Road but of Themselves afraid,
The Tajidar the Troop of those address'd,
Whose uncomplying Attitude confess'd
Their Souls entangled in the old Deceit,
And hankering still after forbidden Meat—
'O ye who so long feeding on the Husk
Forgo the Fruit, and doting on the Dusk
Of the false Dawn, are blinded to the True:
That in the Maidan of this World pursue
The Golden Ball which, driven to the Goal,
Wins the World's Game but loses your own Soul:
Or like to Children after Bubbles run
That still elude your Fingers; or, if won,
Burst in Derision at your Touch; all thin
Glitter without, and empty Wind within.
So as a prosperous Worldling on the Bed
Of Death—"Behold, I am as one," he said,
"Who all my Life long have been measuring Wind,
And, dying, now leave even that behind"—
This World's a Nest in which the Cockatrice
Is warm'd and hatcht of Vanity and Vice:
A false Bazaar whose Wares are all a lie,
Or never worth the Price at which you buy:
A many-headed Monster that, supplied
The faster, faster is unsatisfied;
So as one, hearing a rich Fool one day

To God for yet one other Blessing pray,
Bid him no longer bounteous Heaven tire
For Life to feed, but Death to quench, the Fire.
And what are all the Vanities and Wiles
In which the false World decks herself and smiles
To draw Men down into her harlot Lap?
Lusts of the Flesh that Soul and Body sap,
And, melting Soul down into carnal Lust,
Ev'n that for which 'tis sacrificed disgust:
Or Lust of worldly Glory—hollow more
Than the Drum beaten at the Sultan's Door,
And fluctuating with the Breath of Man
As the Vain Banner flapping in the Van.
And Lust of Gold—perhaps of Lusts the worst;
The mis-created Idol most accurst
That between Man and Him who made him stands:
The Felon that with suicidal hands
He sweats to dig and rescue from his Grave,
And sets at large to make Himself its Slave.

'For lo, to what worse than oblivion gone
Are some the cozening World most doted on.
Pharaoh tried Glory: and his Chariots drown'd:
Karun with all his Gold went underground:
Down toppled Nembroth with his airy Stair:
Schedad among his Roses lived—but where?
'And as the World upon her victims feeds
So She herself goes down the Way she leads.
For all her false allurements are the Threads
The Spider from her Entrail spins, and spreads
For Home and hunting-ground: And by and by
Darts at due Signal on the tangled Fly,
Seizes, dis-wings, and drains the Life, and leaves

The swinging Carcase, and forthwith re-weaves
Her Web: each Victim adding to the store
Of poison'd Entrail to entangle more.
And so She bloats in Glory: till one Day
The Master of the House, passing that way,
Perceives, and with one flourish of his Broom
Of Web and Fly and Spider clears the Room.

'Behold, dropt through the Gate of Mortal Birth,
The Knightly Soul alights from Heav'n on Earth;
Begins his Race, but scarce the Saddle feels,
When a foul Imp up from the distance steals,
And, double as he will, about his Heels
Closer and ever closer circling creeps,
Then, half-invited, on the Saddle leaps,
Clings round the Rider, and, once there, in vain
The strongest strives to thrust him off again.
In Childhood just peeps up the Blade of Ill,
That Youth to Lust rears, Fury, and Self-will:
And, as Man cools to sensual Desire,
Ambition catches with as fierce a Fire;
Until Old Age sends him with one last Lust
Of Gold, to keep it where he found—in Dust.
Life at both ends so feeble and constrain'd
How should that Imp of Sin be slain or chain'd?

'And woe to him who feeds the hateful Beast
That of his Feeder makes an after-feast!
We know the Wolf: by Strategem and Force
Can hunt the Tiger down: but what Resource
Against the Plague we heedless hatch within,
Then, growing, pamper into full-blown Sin
With the Soul's self: ev'n, as the wise man said,
Feeding the very Devil with God's own Bread;

Until the Lord his Largess misapplied
Resent, and drive us wholly from his Side?

‘For should the Greyhound whom a Sultan fed,
And by a jewell’d String a-hunting led,
Turned by the Way to gnaw some nasty Thing
And snarl at Him who twitch’d the silken String,
Would not his Lord soon weary of Dispute,
And turn adrift the incorrigible Brute?

‘Nay, would one follow, and without a Chain,
The only Master truly worth the Pain,
One must beware lest, growing over-fond
Of even Life’s more consecrated Bond,
We clog our Footsteps to the World beyond.
Like that old Arab Chieftain, who confess’d
His soul by two too Darling Things possess’d—
That only Son of his: and that one Colt
Descended from the Prophet’s Thunderbolt.
“And I might well bestow the last,” he said,
“On him who brought me Word the Boy was dead.”
‘And if so vain the glittering Fish we get,
How doubly vain to dote upon the Net,
Call’d Life, that draws them, patching up this thin
Tissue of Breathing out and Breathing in,
And so by husbanding each wretched Thread
Spin out Death’s very terror that we dread—
For as the Raindrop from the sphere of God
Dropt for a while into the Mortal Clod
So little makes of its allotted Time
Back to its Heav’n itself to re-sublime,
That it but serves to saturate its Clay
With Bitterness that will not pass away.’

One day the Prophet on a River Bank,
Dipping his Lips into the Channel, drank
A Draught as sweet as Honey. Then there came
One who an earthen Pitcher from the same
Drew up, and drank: and after some short stay
Under the Shadow, rose and went his Way.
Leaving his earthen Bowl. In which, anew
Thirsting, the Prophet from the River drew,
And drank from: but the Water that came up
Sweet from the Stream, drank bitter from the Cup.
At which the Prophet in a still Surprise
For Answer turning up to Heav'n his Eyes,
The Vessel's Earthen Lips with Answer ran—
'The Clay that I am made of once was Man,
Who dying, and resolved into the same
Obliterated Earth from which he came
Was for the Potter dug, and chased in turn
Through long Vicissitude of Bowl and Urn:
But howsoever moulded, still the Pain
Of that first mortal Anguish would retain,
And cast, and re-cast, for a Thousand years
Would turn the sweetest Water into Tears.'

And after Death?—that, shirk it as we may,
Will come, and with it bring its After-Day—

For ev'n as Yusuf (when his Brotherhood
Came up from Egypt to buy Corn, and stood
Before their Brother in his lofty Place,
Nor knew him, for a Veil before his Face)
Struck on his Mystic Cup, which straightway then
Rung out their Story to those guilty Ten:—
Not to them only, but to every one;
Whatever he have said and thought and done,

Unburied with the Body shall fly up,
And gather into Heav'n's inverted Cup,
Which, stricken by God's Finger, shall tell all
The Story whereby we must stand or fall.
And though we walk this World as if behind
There were no Judgement, or the Judge half-blind,
Beware, for He with whom we have to do
Outsees the Lynx, outlives the Phoenix too—

So Sultan Mahmud, coming Face to Face
With mightier numbrs of the swarthy Race,
Vow'd that if God to him the battle gave,
God's Dervish People all the Spoil should have.
And God the Battle gave him; and the Fruit
Of a great Conquest coming to compute,
A Murmur through the Sultan's Army stirr'd
Lest, ill committed to one hasty Word,
The Shah should squander on an idle Brood
What should be theirs who earn'd it with their Blood,
Or go to fill the Coffers of the State.
So Mahmud's Soul began to hesitate:
Till looking round in Doubt from side to side
A raving Zealot in the Press he spied,
And call'd and had him brought before his Face,
And, telling, bid him arbitrate the case.
Who, having listen'd, said—'The Thing is plain:
If Thou and God should never have again
To deal together, rob him of his share:
But if perchance you should—why then Beware!'
So spake the Tajidar: but Fear and Doubt
Among the Birds in Whispers went about:
Great was their Need: and Succour to be sought
At any Risk: at any Ransom bought:
But such a Monarch—greater than Mahmud

The Great Himself! Why how should he be woo'd
To listen to them? they too have come
O So suddenly, and unprepared from home
With any Gold, or Jewel, or rich Thing
To carry with them to so great a King—
Poor Creatures! with the old and carnal Blind,
Spite of all said, so thick upon the Mind,
Devising how they might ingratiate
Access, as to some earthly Potentate.

'Let him that with this Monarch would engage
Bring the Gold Dust of a long Pilgrimage:
The Ruby of a bleeding Heart, whose Sighs
Breathe more than Amber-incense as it dies;
And while in naked Beggary he stands
Hope for the Robe of Honour from his Hands.'
And, as no gift this Sovereign receives
Save the mere Soul and Self of him who gives,
So let that Soul for other none Reward
Look than the Presence of its Sovereign Lord.
And as his Hearers seem'd to estimate
Their Scale of Glory from Mahmud the Great,
A simple Story of the Sultan told
How best a subject with his Shah made bold—

One night Shah Mahmud who had been of late
Somewhat distemper'd with Affairs of State
Stroll'd through the Streets disguised, as wont to do—
And, coming to the Baths, there on the Flue
Saw the poor Fellow who the Furnace fed
Sitting beside his Water-jug and Bread.
Mahmud stept in—sat down—unask'd took up
And tasted of the untasted Loaf and Cup,
Saying within himself, 'Grudge but a bit,

And, by the Lord, your Head shall pay for it!'
So having rested, warm'd and satisfied
Himself without a Word on either side,
At last the wayward Sultan rose to go.
And then at last his Host broke silence—'So?—
Art satisfied? Well, Brother, any Day
Or Night, remember, when you come this Way
And want a bit of Provender—why, you
Are welcome, and if not—why, welcome too'—
The Sultan was so tickled with the whim
Of this quaint Entertainment and of him
Who offer'd it, that many a Night again
Stoker and Shah forgather'd in that Vein—
Till, the poor Fellow having stood the Test
Of true Good-fellowship, Mahmud confess'd
One Night the Sultan that had been his Guest:
And in requital of the scanty Dole
The Poor Man offer'd with so large a soul,
Bid him ask any Largess that he would
A Throne—if he would have it, so he should.
The Poor Man kiss'd the Dust, and 'All,' said he,
'I ask is what and where I am to be;
If but the Shah from time to time will come
As now and see me in the lowly Home
His presence makes a palace, and my own
Poor Flue more royal than another's Throne.'

So said the cheery Tale: and, as they heard,
Again the Heart beneath the Feather stirr'd:
Again forgot the Danger and the Woes
Of the long Travel in its glorious Close—
'Here truly all was Poverty, Despair
And miserable Banishment—but there

That more than Mahmud, for no more than Prayer
Who would restore them to their ancient Place,
And round their Shoulders fling his Robe of Grace.'
They clapp'd their Wings, on Fire to be assay'd
And prove of what true Metal they were made,
Although defaced, and wanting the true Ring
And Superscription of their rightful King.

'The Road! The Road!' in countless voices cried
The Host—'The Road! and who shall be our Guide?'
And they themselves 'The Tajidar!' replied:
Yet to make doubly certain that the Voice
Of Heav'n according with the People's Choice,
Lots should be drawn; and He on whom should light
Heav'n's Hand—they swore to follow him outright.
This settled, and once more the Hubbub quell'd,
Once more Suspense the Host in Silence held,
While, Tribe by Tribe, the Birds their fortune drew;
And Lo! upon the Tajidar it flew.
Then rising up again in wide and high
Circumference of wings that mesh'd the sky
'The Tajidar! The Tajidar!' they cry—
'The Tajidar! The Tajidar!' with Him
Was Heav'n, and They would follow Life and Limb!
Then, once more fluttering to their Places down,
Upon his Head they set the Royal Crown
As Khalif of their Khalif so long lost,
And Captain of his now repentant Host;
And setting him on high, and Silence call'd,
The Tajidar, in Pulpit-throne install'd,
His Voice into a Trumpet-tongue so clear
As all the winged Multitude should hear
Raised, to proclaim the Order and Array

Of March; which, many as it frighten'd—yea,
The Heart of Multitudes at outset broke,
Yet for due Preparation must be spoke.

—A Road indeed that never Wing before
Flew, nor Foot trod, nor Heart imagined—o'er
Waterless Deserts—Waters where no Shore—
Valleys comprising cloud-high Mountains: these
Again their Valleys deeper than the Seas:
Whose Dust all Adders, and whose vapour Fire:
Where all once hostile Elements conspire
To set the Soul against herself, and tear
Courage to Terror—Hope into Despair,
And Madness; Terrors, Trials, to make stray
Or Stop where Death to wander or delay:
Where when half dead with Famine, Toil, and Heat,
'Twas Death indeed to rest, or drink, or eat.
A Road still waxing in Self-sacrifice
As it went on: still ringing with the Cries
And Groans of Those who had not yet prevail'd,
And bleaching with the Bones of those who fail'd:
Where, almost all withstood, perhaps to earn
Nothing: and, earning, never to return—
And first the VALE OF SEARCH: an endless Maze,
Branching into innumerable Ways
All courting Entrance: but one right: and this
Beset with Pitfall, Gulf, and Precipice,
Where Dust is Embers, Air a fiery Sleet,
Through which with blinded Eyes and bleeding Feet
The Pilgrim stumbles, with Hyena's Howl
Around, and hissing Snake, and deadly Ghoul,
Whose Prey he falls if tempted but to droop,
Or if to wander famish'd from the Troop
For fruit that falls to ashes in the Hand,

Water that reacht recedes into the Sand.
The only word is 'Forward!' Guide in sight,
After him, swerving neither left nor right,
Thyself for thine own Victual by Day,
At night thine own Self's Caravanserai.
Till suddenly, perhaps when most subdued
And desperate, the Heart shall be renew'd
When deep in utter Darkness, by one Gleam
Of Glory from the far remote Harim,
That, with a scarcely conscious Shock of Change,
Shall light the Pilgrim toward the Mountain Range
Of KNOWLEDGE: where, if stronger and more pure
The Light and Air, yet harder to endure;
And if, perhaps, the Footing more secure,
Harder to keep up with a nimble Guide,
Less from lost Road than insufficient Stride—
Yet tempted still by false Shows from the Track,
And by false Voices call'd aside or back,
Which echo from the Bosom, as if won
The Journey's End when only just begun,
And not a Mountain Peak with Toil attain'd
But shows a top yet higher to be gain'd.
Wherefore still Forward, Forward! Love that fired
Thee first to search, by Search so re-inspired
As that the Spirit shall the carnal Load
Burn up, and double wing Thee on the Road;
That wert thou knocking at the very Door
Of Heav'n, thou still would'st cry for More, More, More!

Till loom in sight Kaf's Mountain Peak ashroud
In Mist—uncertain yet Mountain or Cloud,
But where the Pilgrim 'gins to hear the Tide
Of that one Sea in which the Sev'n subside;
And not the Sev'n Seas only: but the sev'n

And self-enfolded Spheres of Earth and Heav'n—
Yea, the Two Worlds, that now as Pictures sleep
Upon its Surface—but when once the Deep
From its long Slumber 'gins to heave and sway—
Under the Tempest shall be swept away
With all their Phases and Phenomena:
Not senseless Matter only, but combined
With Life in all Varieties of Kind;
Yea, ev'n the abstract Forms that Space and Time
Men call, and Weal and Woe, Virtue and Crime,
And all the several Creeds like those who fell
Before them, Musulman and Infidel
Shall from the Face of Being melt away,
Cancell'd and swept as Dreams before the Day.
So hast thou seen the Astrologer prepare
His mystic Table smooth of sand, and there
Inscribe his mystic figures, Square, and Trine,
Circle and Pentagram, and heavenly Sign
Of Star and Planet: from whose Set and Rise,
Meeting and Difference, he prophesies;
And, having done it, with his Finger clean
Obliterates as never they had been.

Such is when reacht the Table Land of One
And Wonder: blazing with so fierce a Sun
Of Unity that blinds while it reveals
The Universe that to a Point congeals,
So, stunn'd with utter Revelation, reels
The Pilgrim, when that Double-seeming House,
Against whose Beams he long had chafed his Brows,
Crumbles and cracks before that Sea, whose near
And nearer Voice now overwhelms his Ear.
Till blinded, deafen'd, madden'd, drunk with doubt
Of all within Himself as all without,

Nay, whether a Without there be, or not,
Or a Within that doubts: and if, then what?—
Ev'n so shall the bewilder'd Pilgrim seem
When nearest waking deepliest in Dream,
And darkest next to Dawn; and lost what had
When All is found: and just when sane quite Mad—
As one that having found the Key once more
Returns, and Lo! he cannot find the Door
He stumbles over—So the Pilgrim stands
A moment on the Threshold—with raised Hands
Calls to the eternal Saki for one Draught
Of Light from the One Essence: which when quaff'd,
He plunges headlong in: and all is well
With him who never more returns to tell.
Such being then the Race and such the Goal,
Judge if you must not Body both and Soul
With Meditation, Watch and Fast prepare.
For he that wastes his body to a Hair
Shall seize the Locks of Truth: and He that prays
Good Angels in their Ministry waylays:
And the Midnightly Watcher in the Folds
Of his own Darkness God Almighty holds.
He that would prosper here must from him strip
The World, and take the Dervish Gown and Scrip:
And as he goes must gather from all Sides
Irrelevant Ambitions, Lusts and Prides,
Glory and Gold, and sensual Desire,
Whereof to build the fundamental Pyre
Of Self-annihilation: and cast in
All old Relations and Regards of Kin
And Country: and, the Pile with this perplext
World platform'd, from the Fables of the Next
Raise it tow'rd Culmination, with the torn
Rags and Integuments of Creeds out-worn;

And top the giddy Summit with the Scroll
Of Reason that in dingy Smoke shall roll
Over the true Self-sacrifice of Soul:
(For such a Prayer was his—'O God, do Thou
With all my Wealth in the other World endow
My Friends: and with my Wealth in this my Foes,
Till bankrupt in thy Riches I repose!')
Then, all the Pile completed of the Pelf
Of either World—at last throw on Thyself,
And with the torch of Self-negation fire;
And ever as the Flames rise high and higher,
With Cries of agonising Glory still
All of that Self burn up that burn up will,
Leaving the Phoenix that no Fire can slay
To spring from its own Ashes kindled—nay,
Itself an inextinguishable Spark
Of Being, now beneath Earth-ashes dark,
Transcending these, at last Itself transcends
And with the One Eternal Essence blends.

The Moths had long been exiled from the Flame
They worship: so to solemn Council came,
And voted One of them by Lot be sent
To find their Idol. One was chosen: went.
And after a long Circuit in sheer Gloom,
Seeing, he thought, the TAPER in a Room
Flew back at once to say so. But the chief
Of Mothistan slighted so slight Belief,
And sent another Messenger, who flew
Up to the House, in at the window, through
The Flame itself; and back the Message brings,
With yet no sign of Conflict on his wings.
Then went a Third, and spurr'd with true Desire,
Plunging at once into the sacred Fire,

Folded his Wings within, till he became
One Colour and one Substance with the Flame.
He only knew the Flame who in it burn'd;
And only He could tell who ne'er to tell return'd.

After declaring what of this declared
Must be, that all who went should be prepared,
From his high Station ceased the Tajidar—
And lo! the Terrors that, when told afar,
Seem'd but as Shadows of a Noonday Sun,
Now that the talkt-of Thing was to be done,
Lengthening into those of closing Day
Strode into utter Darkness: and Dismay
Like Night on the husht Sea of Feathers lay,
Late so elate—'So terrible a Track!
Endless—or, ending, never to come back!—
Never to Country, Family, or Friend!'—
In sooth no easy Bow for Birds to bend!—
Even while he spoke, how many Wings and Crests
Had slunk away to distant Woods and Nests;
Others again in Preparation spent
What little Strength they had, and never went:
And others, after preparation due—
When up the Veil of that first Valley drew
From whose waste Wilderness of Darkness blew
A Sarsar, whether edged of Flames or Snows,
That through from Root to Tip their Feathers froze—
Up went a Multitude that overhead
A moment darken'd, then on all sides fled,
Dwindling the World-assembled Caravan
To less than half the Number that began.
Of those who fled not, some in Dread and Doubt
Sat without stirring: others who set out
With frothy Force, or stupidly resign'd,

Before a League, flew off or fell behind.
And howsoever the more Brave and Strong
In Courage, Wing, or Wisdom push'd along,
Yet League by League the Road was thicklier spread
By the fast falling Foliage of the Dead:
Some spent with Travel over Wave and Ground;
Scorcht, frozen, dead for Drought, or drinking drown'd.
Famisht, or poison'd with the Food when found:
By Weariness, or Hunger, or Affright
Seduced to stop or stray, become the Bite
Of Tiger howling round or hissing Snake,
Or Crocodile that eyed them from the Lake:
Or raving Mad, or in despair Self-slain:
Or slaying one another for a Grain—

Till of the mighty Host that fledged the Dome
Of Heav'n and Floor of Earth on leaving Home,
A Handful reach'd and scrambled up the Knees
Of Kaf whose Feet dip in the Seven Seas;
And of the few that up his Forest-sides

Conclusion
Only Thirty Birds Remain

From the original Conference of every bird in the world, only thirty have persisted on the journey. The remaining few finally arrive at the Symurgh's dwelling place.

. . .

Of Light and Darkness where The Presence hides,
But Thirty—thirty desperate draggled Things,
Half-dead, with scarce a Feather on their Wings,
Stunn'd, blinded, deafen'd with the Crash and Craze
Of Rock and Sea collapsing in a Blaze
That struck the Sun to Cinder—fell upon
The Threshold of the Everlasting One,
With but enough of Life in each to cry,
On THAT which all absorb'd—

And suddenly
Forth flash'd a winged Harbinger of Flame
And Tongue of Fire, and 'Who?' and 'Whence they
came?'
And 'Why?' demanded. And the Tajidar
For all the Thirty answer'd him—'We are
Those Fractions of the Sum of Being, far
Dis-spent and foul disfigured, that once more
Strike for Admission at the Treasury Door.'
To whom the Angel answer'd—'Know ye not
That He you seek recks little who or what
Of Quantity and Kind—himself the Fount
Of Being Universal needs no Count
Of all the Drops o'erflowing from his Urn,
In what Degree they issue or return?'

Then cried the Spokesman, 'Be it even so:
Let us but see the Fount from which we flow,
'And, seeing, lose Ourselves therein!' and, Lo!
Before the Word was utter'd, or the Tongue
Of Fire replied, or Portal open flung.
They were within—they were before the Throne,
Before the Majesty that sat thereon,
But wrapt in so insufferable a Blaze
Of Glory as beat down their baffled Gaze.
Which, downward dropping, fell upon a Scroll
That, Lightning-like, flash'd back on each the whole
Past half-forgotten Story of his Soul:
Like that which Yusuf in his Glory gave
His Brethren as some Writing he would have
Interpreted; and at a Glance, behold
Their own Indenture for their Brother sold!
And so with these poor Thirty: who, abasht
In Memory all laid bare and Conscience lasht,

By full Confession and Self-loathing flung
The Rags of carnal Self that round them clung;
And, their old selves self-knowledged and self-loathed,
And in the Soul's Integrity re-clothed,
Once more they ventured from the Dust to raise
Their Eyes—up to the Throne—into the Blaze,
And in the Centre of the Glory there
Beheld the Figure of—Themselves—as 'twere
Transfigured—looking to Themselves, beheld
The Figure on the Throne en-miracled,
Until their Eyes themselves and That between
Did hesitate which Sëer was, which Seen;
They That, That They: Another, yet the Same:
Dividual, yet One: from whom there came
A Voice of awful Answer, scarce discern'd
From which to Aspiration whose return'd
They scarcely knew; as when some Man apart
Answers aloud the Question in his Heart—
'The Sun of my Perfection is a Glass
Wherein from Seeing into Being pass
All who, reflecting as reflected see
Themselves in Me, and Me in Them: not Me,
But all of Me that a contracted Eye
Is comprehensive of Infinity:
Nor yet Themselves: no Selves, but of The All
Fractions, from which they split and whither fall.
As Water lifted from the Deep, again
Falls back in individual Drops of Rain
Then melts into the Universal Main.
All you have been, and seen, and done, and thought,
Not You but I, have seen and been and wrought:
I was the Sin that from Myself rebell'd:
I the Remorse that tow'rd Myself compell'd:
I was the Tajidar who led the Track:

I was the little Briar that pull'd you back:
Sin and Contrition—Retribution owed,
And cancell'd—Pilgrim, Pilgrimage, and Road,
Was but Myself toward Myself: and Your
Arrival but Myself at my own Door:
Who in your Fraction of Myself behold
Myself within the Mirror Myself hold
To see Myself in, and each part of Me
That sees himself, though drown'd, shall ever see.
Come you lost Atoms to your Centre draw,
And be the Eternal Mirror that you saw:
Rays that have wander'd into Darkness wide
Return, and back into your Sun subside.'—

This was the Parliament of Birds: and this
The Story of the Host who went amiss,
And of the Few that better Upshot found;
Which being now recounted, Lo, the Ground
Of Speech fails underfoot: But this to tell—
Their Road is thine—Follow—and Fare thee well.

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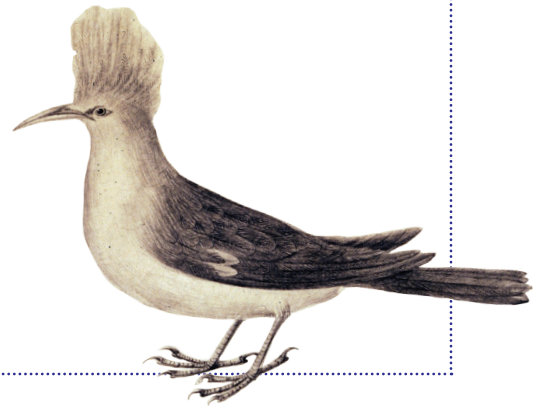
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