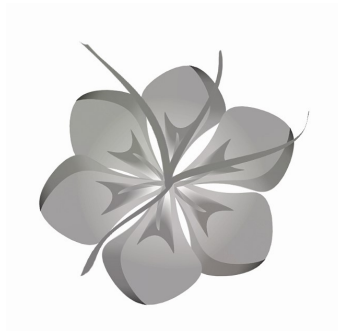




Sir Richard Burton

THE KASÎDAH
OF
HÂJÎ ABDÛ EL-YEZDÎ



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TO THE READER

THE Translator has ventured to entitle a “Lay of the Higher Law” the following composition, which aims at being in advance of its time; and he has not feared the danger of collision with such unpleasant forms as the “Higher Culture.” The principles which justify the name are as follows:--

The Author asserts that Happiness and Misery are equally divided and distributed in the world.

He makes Self-cultivation, with due regard to others, the sole and sufficient object of human life.

He suggests that the affections, the sympathies, and the “divine gift of Pity” are man’s highest enjoyments.

He advocates suspension of judgment, with a proper suspicion of “Facts, the idlest of superstitions.”

Finally, although destructive to appearance, he is essentially reconstructive.

For other details concerning the Poem and the Poet, the curious reader is referred to the end of the volume.

F. B.

VIENNA., Nov. 1880.



THE KASĪDAH

I

THE hour is nigh; the waning Queen
walks forth to rule the later night;
Crown'd with the sparkle of a Star,
and throned on orb of ashen light:

The Wolf-tail¹ sweeps the paling East
to leave a deeper gloom behind,
And Dawn uprears her shining head,
sighing with semblance of a wind:

The highlands catch yon Orient gleam,
while purpling still the lowlands lie;
And pearly mists, the morning-pride,
soar incense-like to greet the sky.

The horses neigh, the camels groan,
the torches gleam, the cressets flare;
The town of canvas falls, and man
with din and dint invadeth air:

The Golden Gates swing right and left;
up springs the Sun with flamy brow;
The dew-cloud melts in gush of light;
brown Earth is bathed in morning-glow.

Slowly they wind athwart the wild,
and while young Day his anthem swells,
Sad falls upon my yearning ear
The tinkling of the camel-bells:

¹The False Dawn



O'er fiery wastes and frozen wold,
o'er horrid hill and gloomy glen,
The home of grisly beast and Ghoul²,
the haunts of wilder, grislier men;--

With the brief gladness of the Palms,
that tower and sway o'er seething plain,
Fraught with the thoughts of rustling shade,
and welling spring, and rushing rain;

With the short solace of the ridge,
by gentle zephyrs played upon,
Whose breezy head and bosky side
front seas of coolly celadon;--

'Tis theirs to pass with joy and hope,
whose souls shall ever thrill and fill
Dreams of the Birthplace and the Tomb,
visions of Allah's Holy Hill.³

But we? Another shift of scene,
another pang to rack the heart;
Why meet we on the bridge of Time
to 'change one greeting and to part?

We meet to part; yet asks my sprite,
Part we to meet? Ah! is it so?
Man's fancy-made Omniscience knows,
who made Omniscience nought can know.

Why must we meet, why must we part,
why must we bear this yoke of MUST,
Without our leave or askt or given,
by tyrant Fate on victim thrust?

That Eve so gay, so bright, so glad,
this Morn so dim, and sad, and grey;
Strange that life's Registrar should write
this day a day, that day a day

²The Demon of the Desert

³Arafât, near Mecca



Mine eyes, my brain., my heart, are sad,
sad is the very core of me;
All wearies, changes, passes, ends;
alas! the Birthday's injury!

Friends of my youth, a last adieu!
haply some day we meet again;
Yet ne'er the self-same men shall meet;
the years shall make us other men:

The light of morn has grown to noon,
has paled with eve, and now farewell!
Go, vanish from my Life as dies
the tinkling of the camel's bell.



II

IN these drear wastes of sea-born land,
these wilds where none may dwell but He,
What visionary Past revive,
what process of the Years we see:

Gazing beyond the thin blue line
that rims the far horizon-ring,
Our sadden'd sight why haunt these ghosts,
whence do these spectral shadows spring?

What endless questions vex the thought,
of Whence and Whither, When and How?
What fond and foolish strife to read
the Scripture writ on human brow

As stand we perch on point of Time,
betwixt the two Eternities,
Whose awful secrets gathering round
with black profound oppress our eyes.

“This gloomy night, these grisly waves,
these winds and whirlpools loud and dread:
What reck they of our wretched plight
who Safety's shore so lightly tread?

Thus quoth the Bard of Love and Wine,⁴
whose dream of Heaven ne'er could rise
Beyond the brimming Kausar-cup
and Houris with the white-black eyes;

Ah me! my race of threescore years is short,
but long enough to pall
My sense with joyless joys as these,
with Love and Houris, Wine and all.

⁴ Hâfiz of Shirâz



Another boasts he would divorce
old barren Reason from his bed,
And wed the Vine-maid in her stead;
fools who believe a word he said!⁵

And “Dust thou art to dust returning,
ne’er was spoke of human soul”
The Soofi cries, ‘tis well for him
that hath such gift to ask its goal.

“And this is all, for this we’re born
to weep a little and to die!”
So sings the shallow bard whose life
still labours at the letter “I.”

Ear never heard, Eye never saw
the bliss of those who enter in
My heavenly kingdom, “Isâ said,
who wailed our sorrows and our sin:

Too much of words or yet too few!
What to thy Godhead easier than
One little glimpse of Paradise
to ope the eyes and ears of man?

I am the Truth! I am the Truth!
we hear the God-drunk gnostic cry
The microcosm abides in ME;
Eternal Allah’s nought but I!

Mansûr⁶ was wise, but wiser they
who smote him with the hurlèd stones;
And, though his blood a witness bore,
no wisdom-might could mend his bones.

“Eat, drink, and sport; the rest of life’s
not worth a fillip,” quoth the King;
Methinks the saying saith too much:
the swine would say the selfsame thing!

⁵ Omar-i-Kayyâm, the tent-maker poet of Persia

⁶ A famous Mystic stoned for blasphemy



Two-footed beasts that browse through life,
by death to serve as soil design'd,
Bow prone to Earth whereof they be,
and there the proper pleasures find:

But you of finer, nobler, stuff,
ye, whom to Higher leads the High,
What binds your hearts in common bond
with creatures of the stall and sty?

In certain hope of Life-to-come
I journey through this shifting scene
The Zâhid⁷ snarls and saunters down
his Vale of Tears with confi'dent mien.

Wiser than Amrân's Son⁸ art thou,
who ken'st so well the world-to-be,
The Future when the Past is not,
the Present merest dreamery;

What know'st thou, man, of Life?
and yet, forever twixt the womb, the grave,
Thou pratest of the Coming Life,
of Heav'n and Hell thou fain must rave.

The world is old and thou art young;
the world is large and thou art small;
Cease, atom of a moment's span,
To hold thyself an All-in-All!

⁷The "Philister" of "respectable" belief

⁸Moses in the Koran