ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

The Romance of the Rubáiyát

Edited by
A. J. Arberry

Routledge Revivals: Selected Works of A. J. Arberry

Routledge Revivals

The Romance of the Rubáiyát

First published in 1959, this reprint of the first edition of Edward FitzGerald's translation of the Rubáiyát is accompanied by an introduction and notes by A. J. Arberry, one of Britain's most distinguished Orientalist scholars. The Rubáiyát is a selection of poems written in Persian and attributed to Omar Khayyám of the 11th and 12th centuries.

The work will be of interest to those studying Middle Eastern Literature.

The Romance of the Rubáiyát

Edward FitzGerald's First Edition
Reprinted with Introduction and Notes

Edited by
A. J. Arberry

First published in 1959
by George Allen & Unwin Ltd

This edition first published in 2016 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN
and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Publisher's Note
The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original copies may be apparent.

Disclaimer
The publisher has made every effort to trace copyright holders and welcomes correspondence from those they have been unable to contact.

ISBN 13: 978-1-138-21036-3 (hbk)
ISBN 13: 978-1-315-45541-9 (ebk)
ISBN 13: 978-1-138-20331-0 (set hbk)
ISBN 13: 978-1-315-44336-2 (set ebk)

1. EDWARD FITZGERALD
by Mrs Rivett-Carnac
National Portrait Gallery

A. J. ARBERRY

THE ROMANCE OF THE RUBÁIYÁT

Edward FitzGerald's First Edition

Reprinted with

Introduction and Notes

Ruskin House

GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD

MUSEUM STREET LONDON

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1959

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
in 12 pt. Fournier
BY SIMSON SHAND LTD
LONDON HERTFORD AND HARLOW

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Acknowledgments are first and foremost due to the rare genius of that strange and melancholy man who made the name and fame of Omar Khayyám to ring round the world, and by so doing moved many to a better esteem of Persian poetry—a service which commends him particularly to one who in his time has occupied a Chair of Persian. If in these pages I have dwelt little upon the transcendent beauty of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát*, and much upon his patient scholarly labour that went into the writing of the poem, it is because the former has been extolled by many better qualified to do so, whereas the latter has attracted scant attention. FitzGerald was making no arrogant boast when he wrote to his friend and teacher Cowell, 'I suppose very few People have ever taken such Pains in Translation as I have', and when he added 'though certainly not to be literal' he justly forestalled all petty and pedantic criticism. Those who may still imagine that poetry is written in a kind of divine frenzy, or that the *Rubáiyát* was cast off impetuously by one who cared little for meticulous scholarship, when they have persevered through the detailed story here recounted will have small excuse if they continue to hug their illusion. If I have anatomized the reverse side of the carpet, it is in order that the dazzling lustre of the finished masterpiece may be more informedly, and therefore more truly and rewardingly appreciated. Lest any misconception should remain, my object has been to enlarge and not to belittle FitzGerald's fame, secure indeed as that is against all cavilling. I have tried too to show him a greater man than the pardonable enthusiasm of some of his more undiscriminating admirers has suggested.

I am most grateful to the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge, and to the Librarian of Cambridge University Library, for allowing me to print hitherto unpublished letters and other documents of FitzGerald's. I am also deeply beholden to the encouragement of my friend Mr Philip Unwin, to his faith in causing this book to be published, and to the skill of his colleagues in making it look so attractive.

A. J. A.

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

PRELIMINARY ESSAY

'Better a live Sparrow than a stuffed Eagle.' Edward FitzGerald was writing from Beccles on 27 April 1859 to his friend Edward Byles Cowell in remote Calcutta—Cowell who had taught him Persian though a man so many years younger, and to whom he was now apologizing for what he had made of Omar Khayyám. The *Rubáiyát* had been out a month; it was on FitzGerald's fiftieth birthday that a clerk in the British Museum stamped the copy received under the provisions of the Copyright Act. But it was very much more than a sparrow that FitzGerald had called into being by the 'Messiah-like breath' of his poetic inspiration—it was that immortal song which fell upon deaf ears when first modulated, but of which Alfred Tennyson wrote in after times:

> Than which I know no version done
> In English more divinely well;
> A planet equal to the sun
> Which cast it, that large infidel
> Your Omar; and your Omar drew
> Full-handed plaudits from our best
> In modern letters . . .

The lines are prefixed to *Tiresias and Other Poems*, published in 1885; but 'old Fitz' had died in 1883, and the Laureate's eloquent tribute had been delayed too long to comfort him in his sad last days.

In these pages it is proposed to trace the history of the *Rubáiyát* from that date in the summer of 1856 when Cowell first brought Omar to FitzGerald's notice, down to the spring of 1859 when the finished poem crept unnoticed into the world. The tale has

been told before, but never as it happens in such detail or upon such authority; for use has now been made for the first time of certain letters hitherto unpublished, and of certain manuscripts hitherto insufficiently exploited. It has thus become possible to follow FitzGerald almost step by step as he progressed upon his greatest enterprise, and to be present so to speak at the conception and birth of the finest and most famous translation ever made.

His equipment for the task which Cowell had set him was slender enough, judged by modern standards of Persian scholarship. For the rudiments of Omar's speech he had to depend upon that classic foundation of Iranian philology, Sir William Jones's *Grammar of the Persian Language*—the second edition, as we know from his personal and annotated copy now housed, along with many other precious FitzGerald relics, in Cambridge University Library. 'As to Jones' Grammar, I have a sort of *Love* for it!' he told Cowell on 5 January 1854 when he had but recently embarked upon his Persian adventure. 'Instead of such Dry as dust Scholars as usually make Grammar, how much more than ever necessary it is to have men of Poetic Taste to do it, to make the thing as delightful as possible to learners.' His first experience of Persian authorship *in extenso* was gained from E. B. Eastwick's *Gulistān* of Sa'dī 'whom I like much: he is just one of the Writers who *can't* be seen in a Translation: his merits are not strong enough to bear decanting I think—Certainly Eastwick is *wretched* in the Verse: & both he & Ross (I know both Versions) seem to me on a wrong track wholly in their *Style* of rendering the Prose'. Even as a beginner FitzGerald entertained very decided views on how Persian ought to be translated into English.

His lexicon was by now for preference Francis Johnson's *A Dictionary, Persian, Arabic, and English*, published at London in 1852 to displace the earlier work of John Richardson. To the lyrics of Hāfiz and the mystical verses of Rūmī he had been first introduced by Cowell's own published papers, and it was Cowell who prompted him to acquire, and encouraged him to translate, Jāmī's *Salāmān u Absāl* in Forbes Falconer's edition (London

1850); his copy of this work, richly glossed by his and Cowell's hands, may be seen in Cambridge University Library. In the spring of 1854 FitzGerald bought at Bristol for six shillings the *Bakhtiyār Nameh*, 'a series of Persian tales' translated into English by Sir William Ouseley—'I dare say a stupid Book enough.' In June of the same year 'Tennyson & I have been trying at some Hafiz in Sir W. Jones' Poeseos'—so we may add to his little Persian collection the great linguist's monumental *Poeseos asiaticae commentariorum liber* (Oxford 1774). Early in 1855 he was 'about to get Hammer's Hafiz'—the pedestrian German translation by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, published in two volumes at Stuttgart in 1812-1813. He also saw 'a very handsome MS. Hafiz' and asked 'Is it worth buying?' On 21 August 1854 he had already thanked Cowell for 'the capital Hafiz you bought me. I shall very soon go for it again, & begin to poke at it'. He also possessed 'my Pendnameh'—the *Pand-nāma* of Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, edited and translated by the eminent Silvestre de Sacy (Paris 1819), and had Williams and Norgate order for him from Germany Jāmī's *Bahāristān*, the Vienna 1846 publication of O.M. von Schlechta-Wssehrd; he hesitated about 'a folio Joseph & Zuleikha—but it costs 38 s'—Vienna 1824, the work of V. Edlem von Rosenzweig-Schwannau.

Now in July 1856 Cowell presented him with a new treasure, his parting gift before leaving for India: his own transcript of Sir William Ouseley's manuscript of the *Rubā'īyāt* of 'Umar Khaiyām, only lately 'discovered' in the Bodleian Library. This is an admirably clear copy though not wholly free of faults, and presently FitzGerald was 'poking out' the meaning of some of the quatrains. But his sight was troubling him, and 'I have read really little except Persian since you went', he told Cowell on 22 January 1857, 'and yet, from want of eyes, not very much of that.' Besides Omar, he had 'gone carefully over two-thirds of Hafiz again with Dictionary and Von Hammer' in addition to Jāmī (the *Yūsuf u Zulaikhā*) and Niẓāmī (the *Haft Paikar*). 'But my great Performance all lies in the last five weeks since I have been alone here: when I wrote to Napoleon Newton to ask him to lend

me his MS. of Attar's Mantic uttair; and, with the help of Garcin de Tassy have nearly made out about two-thirds of it.' This reference was to *La Poésie philosophique et réligieuse chez les Persans*, published at Paris in 1856; it still wanted some months before de Tassy's edition of the *Manṭiq al-ṭair* should see the light. Another passing interest was the *Mathnawī* of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī 'of whom I have poked out a little from the MS. you bought for me'.

By 20 March 1857 FitzGerald had narrowed down his choice: 'Hafiz and old Omar Khayyám ring like true metal', and a week before he had compiled a list of words and phrases from the Ouseley manuscript of Omar. During the next few weeks he had so sufficiently mastered the meaning of a considerable part of the poems as to attempt to put thirty-two of the 158 into Latin verse. Then on 14 June 1857 he received from Cowell his second great treasure—a copy of a manuscript of Omar, since vanished, then in the library of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. But unlike Cowell's transcript of the Ouseley codex, this new document was written in an atrocious cursive hand: it abounded in mistakes; and FitzGerald's weak eyes must have suffered much in the course of its decipherment. Yet he persevered doggedly and enthusiastically upon his labour and tried to make out all the quatrains; many he succeeded in understanding more or less well, but some defeated him completely. 'All dark' he wrote against Nos. 119, 120 and 121, and 'Most Dark 272!'

How FitzGerald proceeded thereafter is related in the letters to Cowell now first published in the introduction which follows this essay. At last, in March 1859, the *Rubáiyát* was published. The intricate problem of the relationship between this 'tesselated eclogue' and the original Persian has engaged the attention of a number of ardent devotees, foremost among them Edward Heron-Allen to whose patient labours grateful acknowledgment is hereby made. In the notes appended to the *Rubáiyát* in this volume the research has been taken some steps further; but it would be presumptuous to pretend that every enigma has now been resolved, though the area of doubt and uncertainty has been considerably reduced. For as is well known, and as FitzGerald

himself was the first to declare, the *Rubáiyát* is no translation in the ordinary sense of the term. 'He is to be called "translator" only in default of a better word, one which should express the poetic transfusion of a poetic spirit from one language to another, and the re-presentation of the ideas and images of the original in a form not altogether diverse from their own, but perfectly adapted to the new conditions of time, place, custom, and habit of mind in which they reappear.'

These words were written in 1869 by the first reviewer of the *Rubáiyát*, Charles Eliot Norton. Yet in 1859 FitzGerald had himself announced: 'With regard to the present Translation. The original Rubáiyát . . . are independent Stanzas, consisting each of four lines of equal, though varied, Prosody, sometimes *all* rhyming, but oftener (as here attempted) the third line suspending the Cadence by which the last atones with the former Two . . . As usual with such kind of Oriental Verse, the Rubáiyát follow one another according to Alphabetic Rhyme—a strange Farrago of Grave and Gay. Those here selected are strung into something of an Eclogue, with perhaps a less than equal proportion of the "Drink and make-merry" which (genuine or not) recurs overfrequently in the Original.' And on 3 September 1858 FitzGerald had told Cowell: 'My Translation will interest you from its *Form*, and also in many respects in its *Detail*: very unliteral as it is. Many Quatrains are mashed together: and something lost, I doubt, of Omar's Simplicity, which is so much a Virtue in him.' Whatever other fault might be charged to his account, Omar's English interpreter cannot be accused of deceiving himself or wishing to deceive others; he never claimed to be a plain, or what is sometimes so inappositely called honest, translator.

Why did FitzGerald trouble to translate Omar? He always maintained that his motive was, at least in part, to please Cowell who had been so helpful to him in his earlier Spanish and Persian exercises. Thus, on 9 December 1861 he wrote to W. H. Thompson, later Master of Trinity College, Cambridge: 'As to my own Peccadilloes in Verse, which never pretend to be original, this is the story of *Rubáiyát*. I had translated them partly for Cowell:

young Parker asked me some years ago for something for Fraser, and I gave him the less wicked of these to use if he chose. He kept them for two years without using: and as he didn't want them I printed some copies with Quaritch; and, keeping some for myself, gave him the rest. Cowell, to whom I sent a Copy, was naturally alarmed at it; he being a very religious Man: nor have I given any other Copy but to George Borrow, to whom I once lent the Persian, and to old Donne when he was down here the other Day, to whom I was showing a Passage in another Book which brought my old Omar up.' And to Cowell on 13 January 1859, 'I doubt you will repent of ever having showed me the Book'—a prophecy that was to be only too amply fulfilled. The eminent Professor of Sanskrit, badgered in his later years by incessant enquiries from FitzGerald's admirers who tracked him down to his Cambridge refuge, had good cause to regret having so injudiciously introduced his friend and pupil to Omar. Thomas Wright in his *Life of Edward FitzGerald* (London 1904) records vividly one such interview.

'When I visited Cambridge in November 1901, I was able to hear Professor Cowell's opinions from his own lips.

"Are we," I said, "to take Omar's words literally, or is there a hidden meaning?"

"The poem," he replied, "is mystical. I am convinced of it. When in India I had many conversations with the Moonshees on the subject, and they were all of this opinion. They ridiculed the idea that the poem is not allegorical."

"Omar's laudation of drunkenness," said I, "is difficult to explain away."

"By drunkenness," said Professor Cowell with a smile, "is meant 'Divine Love'."

"Then Omar was a Sufi, and not, as some will have it, heterodoxical?"

"Certainly, Omar was a Sufi."

"But FitzGerald did not agree with you?"

"Sometimes he inclined to this belief, though generally not. He could never quite make up his mind." '

But it was Edward Heron-Allen who caused Cowell more embarrassment than anyone else. 'Professor Cowell has honoured me with a good deal of information on this matter of FitzGerald's methods', he complacently boasted in 1898, and quoted from numerous letters written in the two previous years to substantiate his statement. 'I desire to record in this place my profound gratitude to Professor Cowell for all this most interesting information, which he alone is competent to give *ex cathedrâ.*' And so, when he came to publish *Some Sidelights upon Edward FitzGerald's Poem*—'being the Substance of a Lecture delivered at the Grosvenor Crescent Club and Women's Institute'—he thought to repay his debt in some small measure by dedicating the surprisingly erudite pamphlet—but those were days of tough listeners—to the Sanskrit Professor. It must have come as quite a shock to him to receive a rebuff, however politely phrased.

'MY DEAR FRIEND,

I hope this letter will not annoy you—you will see that I write to you without reserve, as a friend. I thank you sincerely for doing me the honour of dedicating your lecture to me, and it gave me much pleasure to see it. But in your last letter you mentioned that you intended to reprint the lecture in the Grand Edition which you are preparing, as the final crown of your labours on 'Omar Khayyám. Now I hope you will not be pained when I particularly ask of you as a favour that the dedication to me be not kept also. I feel that I am doing a rude and ungracious thing, but after all we must be loyal to our convictions. I yield to no one in my admiration of 'Omar's poetry as literature, but I cannot join in the "*'Omar Cult*", and it would be wrong in me to pretend to profess it. So, I am deeply interested in Lucretius, and I believe I first introduced FitzGerald to his sublime poem in 1846, when we read a good deal of it together at Ipswich; but here again I only admire Lucretius as "literature". I feel this especially about 'Omar Khayyám, as I unwittingly incurred a grave responsibility when I introduced his poems to my old friend in 1856. I admire 'Omar as I admire Lucretius, but I cannot take him as a *guide.* In

these grave matters I prefer to go to Nazareth, not to Naishapúr. Forgive my plain speaking, and believe me,

Yours most sincerely,

E. B. COWELL.'

How did FitzGerald set about his translation? Again, Cowell has often been cited as the fountain-head of information, particularly in his letter to Heron-Allen written on 8 July 1897: 'I am quite sure that Mr FitzGerald did not make a literal prose version first; he was too fond of getting the strong, vivid impression of the original as a whole. He pondered this over and over afterwards, and altered it in his lonely walks, sometimes approximating nearer to the original, and often diverging further. He was always aiming at some strong and worthy equivalent; verbal accuracy he disregarded.' On 31 December 1896 he had told Heron-Allen: '*You* will be able to decide whether his first translation was made from the Oxford MS. *only*, by seeing whether that will account for all the tetrastichs. He altered and added, but he never, I fancy, invented an entire tetrastich of his own. I feel persuaded that his first translation was compiled from the Oxford and Calcutta MSS. combined. You will find tetrastichs from the latter represented in his translation which have no parallel in the brief Oxford MS. . . . I have no MS. copy of his translation. That was all done after I had left England. He used to send me questions by letter.'

These questions are fully published and annotated hereafter. They, and the additional evidence of the Latin paraphrases, present us with ampler information than earlier investigators have had at their disposal. In the manuscript of the Latin paraphrases we see FitzGerald frequently drafting parts of lines at a time, sometimes without regard to metre, and then going back over his draft and amending his first choice or order of words. With these at all events there was no question of working out a complete stanza in his head before committing his ideas to paper. It would seem reasonable to suppose that he followed the same procedure with his English paraphrases. Indeed the new material

sometimes illuminates his method in an arresting manner. Thus, when he first read Tetrastich 158 in the Ouseley transcript he jotted down a prose rendering of the last two lines as he understood them: 'The Time is come when the Bottles on the Shoulder say "The Knots of the Porters are coming".' The influence of this note on Stanza LXVI is very clear. Again, even more startlingly, we find the word 'Caravanserai' pencilled against Tetrastich 98 in the Calcutta transcript; it was not a very obvious choice to represent the original *ribāṭ*, but FitzGerald liked it well enough to introduce it—with what exquisite sensibility—in his Stanza XVI. The Latin paraphrases were all based upon Ouseley; the English poem rests equally upon Ouseley and Calcutta, and there is abundant proof that FitzGerald collated the two manuscripts before composing his *Rubáiyát*. The new material also demonstrates conclusively—and that is perhaps the most important new fact to emerge at this late juncture—how hard FitzGerald strove to penetrate to the exact meaning of his Persian original.

To try to understand is one thing; to seek to reproduce is another. FitzGerald's actual errors of understanding can now be detected readily enough; they are not few, but they are not unduly numerous, considering the material at his disposal and the limited extent of his experience of the Persian language and literature. With Ouseley he could on the whole cope well enough; but it must be repeated that the Calcutta transcript laid an unfair burden on his inexperienced shoulders, and the most erudite of professional scholars would have been defeated not seldom by its scrawls and mistakes. When FitzGerald in Stanza XLII wrote:

> And lately, by the Tavern Door agape,
> Came stealing through the Dusk an Angel Shape

Heron-Allen felt constrained to comment: 'The quatrains attributed to 'Umar Khayyám are singularly free from that coarseness of illustration and metaphor which, according to Occidental ideas, disfigure the great bulk of Oriental poetry, but the literal meaning of the original rubá'i affords us a striking example of the refining influence of FitzGerald's method.' The word translated

'an Angel Shape' means in the Persian 'an old man', yet in this instance FitzGerald was not displaying an uncharacteristic Victorian delicacy, as Heron-Allen supposed; he was simply misreading *pīrī* as *pirī* ('a fairy'). Indeed FitzGerald was not the man to lose any opportunity of shocking—a good case in point is Stanza LXIV:

> Said one—'Folks of a surly Tapster tell,
> And daub his Visage with the Smoke of Hell;
> They talk of some strict Testing of us—Pish!
> He's a Good Fellow, and 'twill all be well.'

There we have the true drunkard's language; God is called by some, it is alleged, 'a surly Tapster', but in reality he is 'a Good Fellow'. It was no regard for the proprieties which induced the English poet so grossly to misrepresent the moderate expression of his Persian model. Again, let us look at Stanza XXX with its blasphemous final line—though the sharpness of the blasphemy has probably escaped the notice of most of FitzGerald's readers:

> What, without asking, hither hurried *whence*?
> And, without asking, *whither* hurried hence!
> Another and another Cup to drown
> The Memory of this Impertinence!

It was certainly original, and daring, to charge the Great Artificer with being impertinent, or, as in later editions, insolent; further on in these pages it will be shown that the expression has no foundation whatsoever in the original, but was borrowed from an incomprehensible eccentricity in FitzGerald's Latin paraphrase.

The scheme which FitzGerald devised in planning his 'eclogue' is on record, in a letter which he wrote to his publisher Bernard Quaritch on 31 March 1872: 'I daresay Ed^{n}. 1 is better in some respects than 2, but I think not altogether. Surely, several good things were added—perhaps too much of them which also gave Omar's thoughts room to turn in, as also the Day which the Poem occupies. He begins with Dawn pretty sober & contemplative: then as he thinks & drinks, grows savage, blasphemous,

&c., and then again sobers down into melancholy at nightfall. All which wanted rather more expansion than the first Ed^{n}. gave. I dare say Ed^{n}. 1 best pleased those who read it first: as first Impressions are apt to be strongest. . . . As to the relative fidelity of the two Versions, there isn't a Pin to choose—not in the opening Stanzas you send.' This then was how FitzGerald proposed to manipulate his sources; and the original documents illustrate how he proceeded. He took out of his Persian manuscripts of Omar those quatrains which would fit into his prefabricated pattern, and arranged them in groups together. 'Hooks on to 98' he pencilled against Tetrastich 102 in the Calcutta transcript; and these two poems reappeared next to one another as Stanzas XVI and XVII. A careful examination of the Persian originals discloses in a number of instances that he took a couple of quatrains in succession because the same key-word occurred in both. The decisive creative moment had already come when he wrote to Cowell on 6 August 1857: 'I see how a very pretty *Eclogue* might be tesselated out of his scattered Quatrains.' Thereafter everything was plain sailing; the course was set, and by January 1858 the harbour had been reached. But another year and more was to pass before the world would have the opportunity of looking at his choice cargo from the romantic East.

The world proved to be in no hurry to appraise the novel merchandise. On 31 March 1859 FitzGerald wrote to Quaritch: 'I have been so harried about in Mind and Body too by the Fatal Illness of a Friend, I have not had opportunity to see, or write to you—Not that I have much to say:—only I wished to ask you to *Advertize* Omar Khayyám in the Athenaeum & any other Paper you think good: sending Copies of course to the Spectator &c.' Next day he requested his publisher 'Please to send an Advertisement of Omar to the *Saturday Review*', and on 5 April 1859: 'I enclose an Order to pay you Adv^{ts}. in the Saturday Review, Athenaeum, & any other Weekly Paper you like (Spectator?) as also for any other incidental Expenses regarding Omar. I wish him to do you as little *harm* as possible, if he does no good. I shall be obliged to you to send me 40 copies directed here by Eastern