6-1-1960

The Message of Koheleth and Khayyam

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THE MESSAGE OF KOHELETH AND KHAYYAM

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

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by

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June 1960

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Like a great and dark riddle is this little book to us, from its first cry of victory over the nothingness of the world to the silent words of sadness at the end, the sadness of man at his own inevitable doom.*

This noble little book, which for good reasons it were exceedingly worth while that it should be read by all men with great carefulness every day.**

Yet in his way, he [Omar] was a beacon light in the annals of God-seeking. I can find no better yoke-fellow for him than Luther, like whom he was indeed an Apostle of Protest.***

*Quotation uncited by Robert Gordis, Koheleth--The Man and His World, p. 3.

**Quotation from Martin Luther, unlocated by A. D. Power, Ecclesiastes or The Preacher, opp. title page.

***Robert Arnot, ed., The Sufistic Quatrains of Omar Khayyam, p. xxiii.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

The concurrent message of Ecclesiastes, or "The Preacher," or Koheleth and the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam is an elusive one. Available information concerning the background of the authors and their works is meager. Interpretations and evaluations of their conclusions have reached a wide divergence in most respects.

But the main difficulty in the way of understanding the joint phenomenon of Koheleth-Khayyam is not the lack of illuminating historical data or of a definitive consensus of commentators. Even though there were material available for ample biographies, these could not account for the originality, depth of thought, and individuality that characterize the works under consideration. Hence, in this instance the interpreter is kept from the besetting vice of the historian, the attempt to reduce works of genius to a chance convergence of personal idiosyncrasies and life-situational factors. Perhaps, too, it is better that no authorized standard interpretation of their message exists, since such would most likely prove false to their essentially unconventional character.

An authentic understanding of what Koheleth and Khayyam have to say must be gained from an empathic study within their own frame of reference. Both authors speak from prolonged reflection upon a varied life experience. Their conclusions are not merely intellectual but also convictional assertions. Both aspects must be grasped by one who may rightly claim to understand the concerns of these men.

The works under consideration have yet another important feature beyond the bare content of their message. The literary style used to express that message is a type of creative artistry as essential to it as poetic form is to a poem. For that reason, the message could not be realistically "demythologized" into naked logical propositions.

The outline of a literary work, therefore, does not capture its meaning. In the case of Ecclesiastes and the Rubaiyat, one does not find a strictly logical organization of thought. These were written in the Oriental fashion of achieving broad organic unity by the interweaving of a variety of considerations relevant to a central theme. The Oriental is satisfied when he sees his subject thoughtfully unraveled to the exposure of its interesting aspects. Happily, Ecclesiastes is made up of thought units sufficiently ordered to allow for its being abstracted into that useful Western cast, the synthetic outline. The Rubaiyat exists in less orderly arrangement. A certain amount of outlining is advantageous for communicating Oriental thought to the ordinary Western mind.

Since the message of Koheleth-Khayyam assumes for itself universal place-time validity, it is properly interpreted and evaluated from that standpoint. At the same time, an interpreter approaches his task with a specific outlook of personal interests and convictions. In the case of this thesis, three frames of reference form the background in the light of which the message will be assessed: humanism as this writer is best able to envision it, religion in general and Christian faith in particular. Koheleth

and Khayyam may be classified as humanists because of their preoccupation with distinctively human interests and ideals, although their conclusions differ in some respects from the tenor of Western humanism. Insofar as they have treated the area of religion and as their remarks have bearing upon a religious outlook, they may legitimately be appraised on the basis of religious standards.

The problem of determining and evaluating the message of Koheleth and Khayyam is solved by opening oneself sympathetically and creatively to a perennial attitude over against "the human experiment" which has found consummate expression in the writings of these two sages. The perceptive, sensitive spirit of man raises the foremost cry in the groaning and travail of all creation (Rom. 8:22). The wise man striving to penetrate the secret of the universe in a search for value and meaning is faced instead with man's senseless cruelty and unfathomable ignorance. He who is truly wise does not then fly defiantly in the face of harsh reality or refuse to acknowledge it, but rather is humbled by the awareness of his finite limitations and learns to be content with his modest place in creation. As he enters life's contest, he does not take himself or petty prizes too seriously. He discovers that his life is meant to express itself in nature's terrestrial setting. He sees the superiority of the golden mean as a guiding principle for action. Finding contentment in simplicity, he does not scramble after baubles, represent himself to others as something other than he really is, or envy those who are given a more distinguished set of raw materials than are his own portion with which to shape their lives.

Worship of God shares in one's general attitude of modesty, sincerity and reverence for creation. One's knowledge of God is very limited as is one's rights before Him. The end result is a willingness to endure honorably the suffering with creation which is man's lot and to enjoy actively the pursuit of happiness as a sacred duty and inalienable right which the Creator has seen fit to impose upon human existence. All in all, life is not to be lived on a plane of shallow optimism or passive resignation; our authors discover through vanity a path of gallantry and bonhomie. Koheleth and Khayyam reach the depth of philosophic insight.

Yet because of their sharp focus on human limitations, they underrate the importance of man's spirited engagement in the challenge of actualizing his noblest ideals. Thus, they may be rightly accused of failing to round out the complete picture of what best characterizes humanity. In like manner, religion has not been assigned the importance that man through the ages has insisted upon attributing to it. The Christian, for one, cannot tolerate a picture of life which attaches a minimal weight of emphasis upon man's devotion to the Creator-Reconciler-Sanctifier-Pantocrator as the nature-engrossment of Koheleth and Khayyam would seem to yield.

At the same time, both enlightened humanism and Christianity ought to appreciate deeply the honesty, courage and vital affirmation of a sacramental quality which abound in our two authors. Mankind as a whole ought to absorb the message of Koheleth and Khayyam as a masterful guide toward greater self-fulfillment which, after all, is man's duly appointed portion under the sun.

CHAPTER II

THE MEN

The search for an understanding of Koheleth and Omar Khayyam must concentrate mostly on a study of their writings, since other sources are meager. There appears to be just enough external background information available to make one feel that he has a reliable basis for making their acquaintance while yet their personalities must appear from within their writings if at all.

It is not known who the author of Ecclesiastes was. Considerations of linguistic style, historical allusions and thought climate have caused the book to be generally dated around 250 B.C. Its opening title has been interpreted as pointing to Solomon, but may be explained as a literary fiction intending to appropriate Solomon's reputation as the wisest of the wise as a stamp of approval and recommendation of the unorthodox views contained in the book. As for the name "Koheleth," which denotes the official speaker before an assembly, its referent remains a mystery. One might translate it as "the Preacher," "the Teacher," or "the Counselor." Koheleth and Khayyam alike are representative spokesmen for the mass of mankind, looking out upon the multitudes and addressing them with sage deliberation. Koheleth's outlook is sufficiently universal that he can content himself with this his purely functional self-designation.

Omar Khayyam can be more positively located in history than his counterpart. Born not later than A.D. 1040, he died in 1123.

His birthplace was Naishapur, the then magnificent capital city of the prosperous Persian province of Khorassan, where he also lived and died. Naishapur, meaning "the land of the sun," was the first and perhaps fairest city in the Persian land and rated third or fourth in all the world. It had six colleges, great offices, and an astronomical observatory. To Omar Persia must have seemed to stand at the height of advanced civilization with her power, centralized stability, splendor, cultivation of all arts and sciences, and veneration of scholarship. In striking contrast, Europe was being riven by barbarian hordes, fanatic priests and dark superstitions. The facts and legends gathered around Omar compel the conclusion that he came from a family of some position, fairly well to do. He received a first rate education and also traveled extensively over what was then the civilized world.

Omar's life was that of a scholar under the liberal patronage of Sultan Alp Arslan. He did such work as revising the astronomical tables of his time, developing a very accurate calendar, teaching and writing books. The following is a run-down on his writings:

> He wrote ten books in all, of which three dealt with the natural sciences, four with mathematics, two were on metaphysics, and one was a light volume of verses. Three of those works have survived. One is a monograph on certain difficulties in the definition of Euclid. Another is a treatise on Algebra, in which he was the first to treat of cubic equations. The third is the book of quatrains, on which the fame of the scientist now depends. The weighty acquisitions of knowledge have sunk; the burden of human love and suffering has ridden safely upon the sea of time.[1]

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[1] Otto Rothfeld, Umar Khayyám And His Age (Bombay: D. B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1922), p. 13.

Khayyam's contemporaries recognized him to be an extraordinary scholar in most areas of learning, but religious leaders fought him for his sceptical, fun-loving and free-thinking propensities. He was the nonconformist intellectual expressing the kind of flippant ease and learned scepticism that a society in its heyday of luxury begins to speculatively entertain. He followed in the intellectual path of such unorthodox ideals as Avicenna and Abu'l-'Alial Mu'arra. His hostile critic, Ibn al Kifti, aptly said of Omar's philosophy, "the inner meanings are as stinging serpents to Mussalman law."[2] In like vein Mohammad Shahrazuri a century after Omar's lifetime wrote, "His eminence in astronomy and philosophy would have become a proverb, if he had only been able to control himself."[3]

Omar's enemies abundantly confirm the picture of reliable Persian chroniclers that his was the highest competence as scientist, philosopher, mathematician, theologian and even physician. Nevertheless, the orthodox set was quick to accuse him of being a libertine and an infidel. Since theocratic Islam finds it difficult to tolerate the libertarian attitude, Omar's fame suffered a decline shortly after his death.

The studied simplicity of his poetry has caused professors of Persian Literature to treat him as a third rank writer. This appears to be an unfortunate preference for the intricate scholastic

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Harold Lamb, Omar Khayyam (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., c. 1934), p. 242.

of the more ambiguous classic poets above the inspiration to be gained from poetic sentiment. That is what a number of competent English translators have concluded. Rothfeld, for one, remarks:

> That directness of Umar, that bold, straight, honest rush to the fact, to the one thing that really matters, where can it be found in the academic writers?[4]

Again, he evaluates Omar the poet as "a powerful and charming writer, who expresses as few have done the yearnings and regrets of man the civilized."[5] Omar used the everyday oriental images, but not in such a way that they had the air of being dragged in according to protocol. Rather, he made the common comparisons appear fresh by manipulating them with vitality, skill and vigor. This style compares with Christ's effective use of the parable.

While there is more external information available concerning Khayyam, there is more autobiographical revelation within the book of Koheleth. In a character analysis seeking to illuminate the message of our two books, a general similarity is evident on most fundamental points of comparison. Due to this fortunate consonance we may supplement historiography with autobiography to gain a fuller picture of both personalities together.

Koheleth and Khayyam lived in strongly religious environments. While they always remained religious, their independence of thought led them to react against traditionalistic dogmatism and to arrive at a modest and tolerant estimate of religion's appropriate role.

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[4] Rothfeld, op. cit., p. 59.

[5] Ibid., p. 60.

They felt that authoritarianism cannot insure the truth of religious propositions, that it tends to undermine the spontaneous, humble, honest search for and worship of the Divine. In actuality, God is both far beyond all mortal apprehension and near enough at hand in all His creation so that a child-like simplicity of mind is all it takes to recognize and appreciate His presence there.

Objection to conventional religion is severe throughout Khayyam. That he held to religion as stated above within a Mohammadan matrix is attested to by a number of devotional quatrains, historical confirmation, deduction from the strong issue he takes with the approved religiosity of his culture which indicates that he took God seriously and by his very keen appreciation of creation as man's precious endowment. What Whinfield says on this question is equally applicable to Koheleth in a Judaic setting:

> Whatever he was, he was not an Atheist. To him, as to other Muhammadans of his time, to deny the existence of the Deity would seem to be tantamount to denying the existence of the world and of himself. And the conception of "laws of nature" was also one quite foreign to his habits of thought. As Deutsch says, "To a Shemite, Nature is simply what has been begotten, and is ruled absolutely by One Absolute Power."[6]

Koheleth shows less criticism than Khayyam toward his own religious environment. His posture is more reserved and reverent. As he discusses the subjects of importance to man, he devotes little more than the first seven verses of chapter five to commenting on a suitable religious attitude. His point there is that piety ought to be consistent and sincere to be worth anything. By "fear"

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[6] E. H. Whinfield, The Sufistic Quatrains of Omar Khayyam, edited by Robert Arnot (New York: M. Walter Dunne, 1903), p. 137.

he means appropriate "reverence."[7] Elsewhere he observes, as in 8:17-9:6, that little can be known about God except through His creation. For "God" he always uses the nondescript term, Elohim. Silence here is forceful testimony of his distance from the prophetic and priestly cultus. Yet he writes from within the tradition of Hebrew Wisdom as a sage teacher of practical and speculative observations. In brief, this is his attitude toward God:

> We kneel and fall before His shadow'd Sill.
> The very hinges with our yearnings thrill.
> Our soundest knowledge is, "We know Him not,"
> Our safest eloquence is, "Peace! be still."[8]

The difference between Koheleth's and Khayyam's view of the God whom they both know primarily as transcendent is that the former is especially impressed by His unapproachable holiness, the latter by His inscrutable silence over against His creation. Omar is painfully puzzled over a sphinx-like Supreme Intelligence whose omnipotence he firmly presupposes; Koheleth silently wonders about the sublime Eternal Presence. The diversity is a natural one arising out of Judaic and Moslem orientations.

Koheleth speaks as one who, like Khayyam, was amply provided for in life. Both were well enough fixed to pursue whatever path of enjoyment might suit their fancy. They speak from a cosmopolitan outlook which must have resulted from the eager pursuit of varied interests expressing the vitality that stands out in their writings.

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[7] A. D. Power, Ecclesiastes or The Preacher (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1952), p. 138.

[8] William Byron Forbush, Ecclesiastes In the Metre of Omar (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1906), p. 78, translating 5:1-7.

Our authors might have contented themselves with high class living and let others worry about their own problems who had cause to worry. But their honesty and humane sensitivity did not allow them this. Looking realistically into life they saw that all is not well. They must have had an awakening much like Gautama Buddha's fascinating experience centuries earlier. Having sampled all life's fineries, they discerned a fundamental hopelessness behind existence to which they would not be blinded by fleeting pleasures and unsubstantial dreams. Nor could they be calloused to human misery as long as they were not directly exposed to it. Their sympathy with man who suffers much at the hand of man's inhumanity moved them to a passionate love of justice. A first reaction is indignant objection, defiant reproof of God and society. Mature reflection reveals a depth and complexity of wrong within the very scheme of things that must be endured with more humble resignation.

It is most characteristic of Koheleth and Khayyam that they faced up to their findings courageously. Having been strictly honest with themselves, they would not then be false to others. Posterity may now learn much from their brave testimonies of discovery gained in the form of keen insight into life.

They could do no other than return to their first love of life itself. But the spectacle of a troubled world now checked the carefree, joyous spirits which had carried them along before. The tang of adventuresome delight in the exploration of each new tomorrow was ever after inhibited by the consciousness of life's over-all vanity and inevitable tragedy. Nevertheless, in spite of the

inevitable loss of youth's whole-hearted instinctive gladness, our sages knew that it was best for man to return as far as possible to the spontaneous gaiety that springs from nature's song in the heart of youth and in the young at heart. There is no substitute for this goal in life. Gordis pictures Koheleth in old age musing over his former pupils who must certainly have called on him then out of respect:

> As his wise, understanding eyes scan their faces, he notes that they have paid a high price for success. The shining, carefree countenances of youth, the sparkling eyes brimful with mischief, are gone. In their stead are worn faces, some drawn, others grown puffy with the years, and tired, unhappy eyes sagging beneath the weight of responsibility. Time was when his pupils were young and he was old, but now the tables are turned. True, Koheleth is a few paces before them in the inexorable procession toward the grave. But in a deeper sense, he is young and they are prematurely old. He knows what they have forgotten, that men's schemes and projects, their petty jealousies and labors, their struggles and heartaches, all are vanity and that joy in life is the one divine commandment.[9]

It can now be understood why our authors took the religious position they did. Having explored life profoundly, they could sense no meaning in a creedal-ceremonial religious system that stood apart from life or even so much as threatened its natural unfolding. Where was Allah's compassion? And where was the justice the prophets had promised so fervently through the centuries? These certainly were none too evident in the priests and leaders of respectable religion in whose hands rested the sacred obligation of their furtherance. And since when has prosperity accrued as a rule to the industriously righteous?

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[9]Robert Gordis, Koheleth--The Man and His World (2nd. augmented edition; New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1955), p. 85.

Koheleth voiced the general religious disappointment of his time. The resplendent prophetic visions of Redemption cherished during the Babylonian Exile had become the colorless realities of the Return. "Instead of a mighty nation holding sway over distant lands, as the prophets had foretold, the Jewish people in its own homeland was a tiny island in a heathen sea."[10] The aftermath of majestic prophetic inspiration saw conservative Rabbinic Judaism, its literalism, formalism and accentuation of class distinctions.

Frequently also religion becomes objectionable because of the perverted self-righteousness and narrow intolerance which thrives under its name. These are both oppressive to humanity. They stunt one's growth in compassion, brotherly friendship and understanding. Omar for one must have been repeatedly harried by accusations from the Moslems threatening him with persecution. The following, though an overstatement, expresses the underlying attitude of our authors toward the pose of self-righteous superiority:

> Oppressed with the crushing sense of the helplessness of humanity, 'Umar Khayyám refused to admit the responsibility for his acts. To him the so-called sins of men were not crimes for which they should be judged and condemned, but weakness inherent in their very being and beyond their power to prevent or overcome. He felt for his fellow-creature as few have felt for him. He knew him as few have known him. He knew that man could not separate himself from all the rest of nature and that the rules and conditions of his being were as fixed and as unalterable as the procession of the stars and the succession of the seasons.[11]

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[10] Ibid., p. 23.

[11] Masud Ali Varesi, 'Umar Khayyám (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1922), p. 164, quoting a Mr. Wadia in Fate and Free Will.

As for the demands of exclusive authoritarianism, the following are their typical results:

> There are innumerable creeds and sects among the Muhammadans. They are said to be about seventy-three in number. What are their antagonistic problems? . . . These problems are above the intuition of the human mind. How can anybody know the qualities of God when His reality is inscrutable? In spite of this, each creed and sect believes that whatever it has dictated is definite and final. They go so far as to look down upon those who have a different opinion and call them ignorant, heretical, fool, atheist, damned, excommunicated and by many other names. . . . They describe one another as lost for ever, as doomed and as infidels. Sometimes these frictions have led to remorseless bloodshed, and history bears testimony to this fact that Baghdad has been the centre of these strifes and its streets and roads were reddened with Muslim blood. What is all this but blind fanaticism? If the Muselmans had acted on Khayyám's philosophical teachings, and had thought that these problems were above the human understanding, had treated their knowledge not as positive and final, had only believed in the existence of God and resorted to the real teachings of the Qur'an, they would never have worried themselves with the attempt to know things beyond their perception. There would have been no differences between them in religion during the last thirteen hundred years, no bloodshed, no strife and no civil wars, which have shattered the very foundations of the Faith. But such has been the case with other religions also and is equally lamentable.[12]

Hafiz, a yokefellow who took many cues from Khayyam and lived a hectic life ingeniously explaining away his "blasphemies" before theological judges who repeatedly sought his execution, adds:

> The one derides the other for being a heretic, and the other
> Imposes upon others with his spiritual and mystic accomplishments;
> Come here, we would place these claims to divinity before the Lord.[13]

Being only men, Koheleth and Khayyam asked for little more than their natural right to unhindered self-fulfillment; that they prized.

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[12] Ibid., p. 134.

[13] Ibid., p. 135.

CHAPTER III

THE TRADITION

If one grants that the authentic message of Koheleth and Khayyam consists of their supreme expression of a significantly representative and persistent attitude toward life, then his interest in that message should find fuller satisfaction the more he is able to find of a traditional continuity carrying it forward. His concern is then not primarily that of uncovering the exact words in the original Hebrew and Persian, but of going deeply into their thought pattern and placing this in an ever more adequate perspective. One who sympathetically appreciates the interest of these men enough to understand them is not the type of person who becomes literalistically preoccupied during a philosophic quest.

Since the message is a perennial one, the student of Koheleth and Khayyam is justified in going wherever there is promise of its further exposition, considering his findings to be a valid constituent of their tradition. While there is no evidence of direct literary contiguity between these two thinkers, there exists the more important communion of minds manifested in their works. This represents for our universal message even more valid traditional congruity than would a contemporaneous circle of writers. The emphasis of this study will, of course, fall upon our two giants toward whom the tradition is focused, other materials being viewed as having originated there or else as paralleling this foremost expression of the message being considered.

Both Ecclesiastes and the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam have a romantic history behind their transmission. The former barely made it into the Hebrew canon. Fortunately, the liberal school of Hillel prevailed against that of Shammai, having argued as grounds for acceptance the Solomonic authorship indicated by the title, the epilogue which sets orthodoxy against the book itself and therefore may have been added later or included by the author himself in an appeal for acceptance much as it is thought that the author of Job did with his prologue and epilogue, a naive reading of piety into the book as commentators still do today, its emphasis on joy which explains its being read in the synagogue on the Feast of Tabernacles, the Season of Rejoicing, and probably its creditable additions to the sum of Wisdom Literature.[1] Perhaps it is best to say that Judaism felt this book represented an important part of its national experience in a distinctive style. This criterion would explain how all sorts of outlooks have found their way into the canon. Realizing how solidly that nation was built on a religious foundation, we ought not trouble ourselves with wondering whether one book or the other does not belong in the canon because of its too "secular" character. Why not rather concur with the Jews that the "secular" and the "sacred" properly converge in man's creaturely existence and that not at the sacrifice of either pole? At any rate, the retention of this book is a tribute to the enlightened humanistic judgment of the canonical council.

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[1]Robert Gordis, Koheleth--The Man and His World (2nd. augmented edition; New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1955), p. 121.

The transmission of Khayyam's rubaiyat awaited a chance historical encounter. The brilliant language scholar, E. B. Cowell, in 1852 managed to talk Edward FitzGerald into taking up the study of Persian. In 1856 he introduced Omar Khayyam's poetry to FitzGerald who soon took a fond liking to "that old Mahometan." While FitzGerald was making a careful study of the rubaiyat, he repeatedly consulted Cowell about any problems in translation he ran across. After rendering many rubaiyat into Latin, he proceeded to do the same into English. On March 31, 1859, his fiftieth birthday, his first edition of an English translation of seventy-five select rubaiyat was copyrighted.

For several years the book did not sell. Some copies were lost, others given away and it seemed that the whole enterprise was heading for extinction. Because 1859 was a year of rich literary productivity, there was no market for the translated musings of an obscure medieval Persian, even at its penny-a-copy price in the second hand book box to which it was rapidly relegated. A few of the English classics published that year were Tennyson's Idylls of the King, Mill's On Liberty, Dicken's A Tale of Two Cities and Darwin's On the Origin of Species. The Victorian Age was at the height of its literary productivity. FitzGerald's despondency can be seen already in a letter to Cowell of April 27, 1859:

> No one cares for such things: and there are doubtless so many better things to care about. I hardly know why I print any of these things, which nobody buys; and I scarce now see the few I give them to. But when one has done one's best, and is sure that that best is better than so many will take pains to do, though far from the best that might be done, one likes to make an end of the matter by Print. I suppose very few People

> have ever taken such Pains in Translation as I have: though certainly not to be literal. But at all Cost, a Thing must live: with a transfusion of one's own worse Life if one can't retain the Original's better. Better a live Sparrow than a stuffed Eagle.[2]

The book eventually fell into the hands of such literary lights as Ruskin, Swinburne and Tennyson who praised it with the highest enthusiasm. Eight years later FitzGerald met the demand for a second edition which kept increasing through five editions. His Rubaiyat rose to phenomenal popularity because he had succeeded in making living literature out of an old classic and because its philosophical message ably defied the rigid Victorian conventions of his time. The smug "certainties" of Victorian literature were becoming highly suspect and disintegrating despite the artistry in which many of these sentimentalities lay imbedded. An Omar craze spread rapidly when it was discovered how skillfully the Rubaiyat pronounced an elegy on all manner of faiths. The book accomplished for the world of literature much the same critical function as Darwin's work did for the world of science. "Sweetness and light" was dealt a devastating blow by this sceptical little protest.

Different Khayyam translations and editions were produced by the hundreds. Omar Khayyam clubs were organized in England and America on a small, aristocratic scale with mostly the idea of good fellowship behind them. Although the Omar movement was carried on mostly on the high intellectual level, it suffered some inevitable debasement at the hands of faddists. True appreciation has lasted.

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[2] A. J. Arberry, The Romance of the Rubáiyát (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), p. 96.

Khayyam's attractiveness is not only attributable to the keenness of his thought but also to the superior literary style by which this is expressed. In iambic pentameter FitzGerald preserved Omar's four line verse structure called rubai in Persian, tetrastich in Greek and quatrain in Latin. Perry aptly described this impressive poetic form

> where the first lines rhyme, and the third introduces a change which the ear awaits in the fourth, where the original rhyme is repeated again with singular solemnity, as when the regular measure of tolling is interrupted, and the bell, turning over on itself, comes down with a more powerful note.[3]

One might call FitzGerald's translation a poetic transfusion capturing the spirit of one language in another, though it is at the same time substantially faithful to the original. Still, his friend Cowell was much dissatisfied with his work, since it did not conform to his own rigid literal standards. When Cowell translated, the finished product was a pedestrianly honest reproduction of the original. A sample comparison of Cowell's and FitzGerald's work is illuminating; both are at their best in stanza XVIII:[4]

> That castle, in whose hall king Bahram drained the cup,
> There the fox hath brought forth her young and the lion made his lair.
> Bahram who his life long seized the deer (gor)
> See how the tomb (gor) has seized him today![5]

> They say the Lion and the Lizard keep
> The Courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep:
> And Bahram, that great Hunter--the Wild Ass
> Stamps o'er his Head, but cannot break his Sleep.

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[3] Ibid., p. 25, quoting Thomas Sergeant Perry of Boston, 1877.

[4] This and all succeeding rubaiyat, unless otherwise assigned, will be taken from FitzGerald's fifth edition.

[5] Arberry, op. cit., p. 91.

FitzGerald's English poem strikes a favorable balance of contribution from the source and its redactor comparable to the intimate association of genius represented by Plato's account of Socrates' dialogues. Swinburne praised the combination:

> That the very best of his exquisite poetry, the strongest and serenest wisdom, the sanest and most serious irony, the most piercing and the profoundest radiance of his gentle and sublime philosophy, belong as much or more to Suffolk [FitzGerald's birthplace], than to Shiraz, has been, if I mistake not, an open secret for many years. Every quatrain, though it is something so much more than graceful or distinguished or elegant, is also, one may say, the sublimation of elegance, the apotheosis of distinction, the transfiguration of grace.[6]

FitzGerald's life was an uneventful one. Born wealthy, he never had to work for his livelihood. He took no special interest in his studies at Cambridge, though he made illustrious literary friends there. He read widely and eagerly wherever his interests led him. In school and afterwards he was disturbed by his doubts concerning the miracles in the Bible. In 1845 Cowell characterized him in these words:

> he is a man of real power, one such as we seldom meet with in the world. There is something so very solid and stately about him, a kind of slumbering giant, or silent Vesuvius. It is only at times that the eruption comes, but when it does come, it overwhelms you.[7]

He lived from 1809 to 1883. As he had directed, his gravestone bore the simple inscription, "It is He that hath made us and not we ourselves."

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[6] Ibid., p. 25.

[7] Carl Weber, Fitzgerald's Rubaiyat (Centennial Edition; Waterville, Maine: Colby College Press, 1959), p. 14.

Many elements combine to make up the literary artistry of FitzGerald's Rubaiyat. Blending the best of orient and occident he let them complement each other. He made music of the dark musings that lurk at the bottom of thinking men's minds. But we are also brought to see Omar as a pleasant, gay and humorous companion. He is not sparing of mischievous pranks calculated to unsettle the more straight-laced set. If his disparagement of life is too much for us, we can find satisfaction in his very human sympathy and affection. His is a profound, beautiful and expressive personality which unflinchingly faces up to the worst, challenging it with life.

This accounts for the Rubaiyat's lasting appeal. In the opinion of some commentators, it is the most important literary product of the Victorian Age, a judgment yet awaiting posterity's verdict.[8]

The style of Ecclesiastes has its own advantage in a more carefully arranged thought progression. There is in the book poetry, parallelism, rhythmic prose and striking use of proverbial quotations. It has a casual informality which conceals its inner structure by a creative naturalness that an artist must labor to attain.[9] The similarity of this book to Khayyam becomes more clear when it is rendered into quatrains as several translators have done. Both authors register their diverse moods in epigrammatic discursive style. Their temperament requires their movement in both domains of prose and poetry, for they were "too wise to be wholly poets, and yet too

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[8] Ibid., p. 33.

[9] Gordis, op. cit., p. 111.

surely poets to be implacably wise."[10]

The difference between our sages' individual emphases upon their common two-pronged message of vanity and joy was occasioned by diverse cultural climates. Though the Persians had their share of overt "puritanism," they were inclined to take a gayer private attitude toward life quite unlike the constitutionally serious Hebrew. Khayyam's culture encouraged and allowed for levity and luxuriant literary expression. Koheleth, on the other hand, was more naturally disposed to handle the vanity issue. His downtrodden race provided a real contrast with Omar's advanced civilization, towering over all others in its own eyes. The Persians also, by contrast with the Hebrews, were able to absorb themselves in a secular dimension of life disengaged from the sacred.

Koheleth and Khayyam have suffered serious misinterpretation at the hands of many who have refused to let them speak for themselves. The history of their interpretation furnishes a good example of vanity under the sun. The assertion, for instance, that Omar was really a Sufi mystic for whom wine symbolized the love of God, the tavern a mosque and so on has been refuted by FitzGerald, Whinfield and others. He would agree with the Sufi insistence upon substituting inner sincerity for outward ceremonial conformity, but beyond that they were often enemies. The whole line of philosophies have been cited as the theme of our two books. The many-sided universality of their outlook makes them easy prey to whatever one

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[10]William Byron Forbush, Ecclesiastes In the Metre of Omar (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1906), p. 6, quoting John Hay.

might wish to single out from them in the way of a historically representative world-view. But "Epicurean," "Pessimist," "Cynic," and even "Philosopher" are terms which do not strictly apply to these authors, having gained their peculiar content within the Western Greek heritage. When such original thinkers are being considered, terms and concepts are properly interpreted as arising out of their own context, and the authors are granted scope for developing a uniquely expansive attitude toward their subject.

The Koheleth-Khayyam tradition is a grand one. Its poetic sentiment strikes at the depths of inner humanity whence emerges the whole range of man's overt thought formulations and enterprises. It combines profound, honest and significant insight into the human enigma with the highest standards of artistic expression to produce a magnificent monument of the human spirit.

CHAPTER IV

THE OUTLINE

The original rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam were not arranged in any ordered sequence whatsoever. FitzGerald introduced a progression of moods into his translation which, while not clearly definable, impresses one as forming a rounded-out production. He gave this casual account of his Omar in a letter to his publisher:

> 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.[1]

Unfolded in the Rubaiyat are various moods of life compressed within the passing of a single day. One finds the spirit of robust awakening, daytime activity and deliberation, the passion of the evening and eventually all is night. It is a good thought scheme, however loosely FitzGerald conforms to it. Some of Koheleth's most effective sections (chapters 1,3,11,12) likewise picture life's little day as a procession of characteristic phases.

The following outline of Koheleth is offered as a good basic guide through the book. Where the meanings of individual verses are puzzling, this is the context suggested in which to clarify them, though it is not claimed to be a rigid, necessary scheme. Especially the conclusion of section II may evoke differences of opinion. From the testimony of the book's entire context it appears that Koheleth is here employing a clever turn of the traditional

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[1] A. J. Arberry, The Romance of the Rubáiyát (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), p. 22, dated March 31, 1872.

phraseology in order to admonish people that God will judge them if they squander their creaturely endowed disposition toward and opportunity for enjoyment. This argument is developed by Gordis.[2] The scholarly alternative has been to view the stern admonitions of 11:9b and 12:1a as either a later gloss or a compromising bid for acceptance by Koheleth himself, since a regulation religiosity is contrary to his characteristic outlook elsewhere.

THE WORDS OF KOHELETH, THE SON OF DAVID, KING IN JERUSALEM

PROLOGUE: The whole monotonous round of nature is vanity, 1:2-11.

I. LIFE'S PROSPECTS, 1-6.

A. Autobiography: A Solomonic quest for abiding values, 1:12-2:26.

1. Prospectus: All is vanity, 1:12-15.
2. Wisdom and knowledge, 1:16-18.
3. Sensual pleasure and amusement, 2:1-11.
4. Virtue and industry, 2:12-23.
5. Conclusion: The highest good for man in his vain existence is enjoyment within the divine order of creation, 2:24-26.

B. Catalog of Times and Seasons: God's confinement of man to the limitations of nature's cycle, 3:1-15.

1. Life's rhythmic polarity has been preestablished, 3:1-9.
2. Unable to figure life out, man should enjoy it, 3:10-15.

C. The Social Scene: Justice is nowhere to be found, 3:16-4:3.

1. Not at the hand of God, 3:16-22.
2. Not in the hands of men, 4:1-3.

D. Individual Industry: Personal success is too costly, 4:4-16.

1. A struggle to outstrip others is ignoble & arduous, 4:4-6.
2. Man needs the warmth and protection of comradeship, 4:7-12.
3. Popularity is a trivial and evanescent attainment, 4:13-16.

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[2] Robert Gordis, Koheleth--The Man and His World (2nd. augmented edition; New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1955), pp. 91-92,326.

E. Religious Piety: Practice your worship reverently and faithfully, avoiding foolish lip-service and excesses, 5:1-7.

F. The Economic Scene: Wealth occasions some tragic disappointments; it has not the answer to man's longings, 5:8-6:9.

1. It is ingrained in political oppression, 5:8-9.
2. It tantalizes one to the point of insatiable greed, 5:10.
3. Supply only increases demand; what gain in this? 5:11.[3]
4. Sleeplessness replaces carefree, zestful vitality, 5:12.
5. Dispossession may painfully undo all one's toil; 5:13-17.
6. Indisposition toward appreciating mundane goods, 5:18-6:9.

G. The Conclusion: Man stands ignorant and helpless before his unknown, predetermined, transient destiny, 6:10-12.

II. SENSIBLE LIVING, 7-12.

A. Live prudently if you would get the best out of life, 7:1-14.

1. One lives profoundly in facing the fact of vanity, 7:1-6.
2. The way of virtuous discretion is the superior way, 7:7-12.
3. Conclusion: Be so prudent as to expect little from life but to make the most of what joys life does afford, 7:13-14.

B. Don't expect to find some ideal of goodness in people, yourself included; especially women are disappointing, 7:15-29.

C. If you know what's good for you, you will obey your rulers unquestionably, for you can't escape despotism, 8:1-9.

D. Seek not life's satisfaction in justice; you can readily see how it does not triumph; rather, enjoy what you can, 8:10-15.

E. There being positively no discernible purpose to life, just pass your brief existence enjoying what you can, 8:16-9:16.

F. Live according to farsighted, realistic and virtuous wisdom, remaining ever conscious of its limitations, 9:17-11:6.

G. The Conclusion: Seek happiness while it may be found; this is the divine imperative in a world of vanity, 11:7-12:8.

EPILOGUE: Koheleth was a brilliant sage; but as for you, make sure that you fear and obey God who is all-important, 12:9-14.

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[3]Compare Parkinson's Law: "Work expands to fill the time available to its completion."

CHAPTER V

THE MESSAGE OF TOTAL VANITY

"Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity"--so begins and ends the report on a classic cosmic inquest which we know as the book of Ecclesiastes. The same sentiment likewise pervades the Rubaiyat from start to finish as can be seen already in its third quatrain:

> And, as the Cock crew, those who stood before
> The Tavern shouted--"Open then the Door!
> You know how little while we have to stay,
> And, once departed, may return no more."

The physical root concept underlying the Hebrew term for "vanity" is "vapor" or "breath." Burkitt, in the translation that will be principally used in this thesis, translates it "bubble" in order to preserve the concrete root while symbolizing lightness together with the idea of rapid dissolution as bubbles quickly burst. The word is used in Ecclesiastes to express transience, futility and consequent human disappointment at discovering these to be the universal conditions of existence. The observation elaborated by Koheleth and Khayyam is that man's natural inclination to search out substantial and abiding values is destined to be totally frustrated. These visionary aims assume such forms as the understanding of an underlying purpose in existence, the enjoyment of satisfying goods and experiences, and finding an environment that offers rich opportunities for the keen and ample gratification of human yearnings and desires. One might deduce from this message that any paradise appearing in life's desert can be no more than a visionary mirage.

Some commentators have tried to ease the tension that this fundamental concept creates by asserting the existence of modifying loopholes. It is claimed, to begin with, that Koheleth obviously accepts the popular form of the Hebrew faith in Yahweh because he stands under that tradition. A corresponding statement may be made and historically documented about Khayyam, but internal evidence must finally judge such a supposition made with regard to individualistic writings of this kind. The fact is that Koheleth and Khayyam undertook to deal with the totality of the human situation, and they were notably silent in respect to anything but the most elemental and universalistic religious faith. If they really felt that faith could leap over the wall of vain existence, one may rightly expect that they would give some clear indication of this. Yet the lament is never compromised: "All is vanity."

Other commentators have pointed to the oft repeated phrase, "under the sun," explaining that this is intended to contrast with the great beyond of God's habitation and the after-life where vanity will be done away. But this notion is without foundation, lacking contextual support. The phrase is naturally explained as a dramatic way of underscoring the idea of terrestrial creation to which man is grounded and where he plays out his existence, as is substantiated by its parallel expressions, "under heaven" (1:13; 2:3; 3:1) and "upon the earth" (8:14,16; 11:2) which display this meaning at their appearences elsewhere (compare Deut. 7:24; 9:14; Gen. 8:17). Koheleth's remarks relating to an after-life are negative, as in 3:18-22; 6:6; 9:1-6,10; 12:7-8. His final word is that man's

spirit returns to the unknown, transcendent Creator. Koheleth is not prepared to concede to man access to a higher esoteric wisdom. His very elevation of present enjoyment proceeds on the assumption that man has no discernible future to count on. Khayyam affirms man's predicament along similar lines, as in his stanza LXXII:

> And that inverted Bowl they call the Sky,
> Whereunder crawling coop'd we live and die,
> Lift not your hands to <u>It</u> for help--for It
> As Impotently moves as you or I.

Nor will there be any release from the implications of vanity by subsequent glorification of worldly enjoyment which can at best only facilitate man's expedient adjustment to his all-pervading futile existence.

Koheleth begins his analysis of universal vanity by stating that this happens to be the obvious condition of natural existence. One might call it a preestablished disharmony built into the structure of creation. It is characterized, first of all, by a wearisome monotony as far as the eye can see:

> The weary Round continues as begun,
> The Eye sees naught effective to be done.
> Nor does the Ear hear aught to satisfy--
> There's nothing, nothing, New under the Sun.[1]

Natural processes follow a meaningless sameness. All expectations of novelty only betray one's ignorance about the common circuit of experiences that countless generations have already traveled and that others will continue to repeat. It seems at this point that Koheleth is not far from the Hindu concept of existence as being

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[1] F. C. Burkitt, <u>Ecclesiastes Rendered Into English Verse</u> (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), p. 10, translating 1:8-9.

fundamentally an endless cycle of birth and death, a "Wheel" of perpetual and painful becoming. There is certainly no place for the fond Western notion of progress in such a treadmill existence.

Within this framework God has afflicted man with a distressful destiny that he cannot correct. Here Khayyam improves on Koheleth's picture of man's inexorable limitations by his metaphorical LXXI:

> The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
> Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit
> Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
> Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.

Khayyam pictures existence as no more than the ink which destiny pens onward according to a heartless scheme appointed already on the first day of creation. His determinism is not necessarily metaphysical, but more the poetic effusion of an intelligent, sensitive mind which seeks to express its hopeless frustration at being unable to detect rhyme or reason within the process of life.

When man awakes from childish dreams of world-conquest to find himself the product of a universal process which is not interested in satisfying those compelling urges under whose domination it has subjected him, he has attained Koheleth's first insight into the vanity of existence. It is a summary concept of a general nature which now becomes more rounded out and concrete as questing man attempts to see how he can best live in such an alien world.

When the first rumblings of the opposition between fact and natural human desire occur to most people, they reach out for whatever harmonious explanations of life they can grasp. It is natural for people to want to acquiesce in the comfort of an established metaphysical habitation. The great philosophers have mostly been

imaginative thinkers who could not content themselves with living under a natural process which is essentially "red in fang and claw" in a "dog eat dog" society. In order to offset the "apparent" harshness of austere reality, they constructed for themselves magnificent temples of the Good, the True and the Beautiful which were marvelously contrived so as to provide delightful speculative relief for the sea-tossed soul. Nor have naturalistic outlooks been "objective" in turning to the stimulating exhilaration afforded by dramatizing for oneself a supposed grandeur, beauty and colossal indifference of the universe and resting their hopes upon evolutionary progress and the glorification of mankind.

Koheleth and Khayyam were not the kind to retreat into unsubstantial fancies of their own or of others' fabrication. They knew that wishful thinking could not succeed in changing reality so as to create in fact a garden of the gods out of life's wilderness. Instead, they undertook an honest, critical search for only and all the somewhat reliable knowledge attainable concerning the human situation. This is the most laudable, however unconventional, spirit of philosophy.

To begin with, then, our thinkers plunged into an intensive search for wisdom. They pursued this into every avenue of promise, thereby escaping the narrow confinement to accepted standards toward which society pressures its members in order to process them into a standard certified product. Koheleth did well to appropriate Solomon's reputation for himself, being a worthy successor of the wisest. Both our authors ring true as men among men in that they

began and ended their life's quest from the standpoint of loyalty to truth. It is this fact which exposes the superficiality of the various unjust accusations to the effect that their writings disclose a character ignoble, moody, barbarous or the like.

The concept of hokmah or "wisdom" appears to retain in Ecclesiastes some of the force it had in older usage when it meant a realistic, practical approach to life's problems and possibilities. A skillful administrator, musician, craftsman and singer were then all included under the term, "wise man." With the abstractification of the Hebrew language a more philosophical usage took over, though flexibility remained.[2] The Wisdom writers of Judaism sought plans which would bring harmonious sense to life. The book of Proverbs concerned itself with principles for successful living; Job emphasized the dominant importance of a true relationship with God around which life ought to be built; Ecclesiastes carries on a reflective metaphysical investigation into man's prospects. This speculation is dominated by a craving for some purposeful answer to life's mystery, a reliable integrating design which can give meaning to all one's activities. But Koheleth's Wisdom does not content itself with attaining theoretical sublimity. For him the competence of any plan for living must finally be verifiable by its faithful correspondence with life experience itself; reflection on this was his point of both departure and arrival.

Koheleth and Khayyam began by seeking out all the light that

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[2]Robert Gordis, Koheleth--The Man and His World (2nd. augmented edition; New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1955), pp. 16-19.

learning could shed on their quest for genuine wisdom. Both discovered that storing up knowledge is not what they had in mind as a satisfying answer to their inquiry. Koheleth summarizes:

> I told myself, More Wisdom I have gained
> Than all that in Jerusalem have reigned;
> Wisdom and Folly both proved empty Air,
> The more I knew, the more my Mind was pained.[3]

Khayyam reports the same, only more entertainingly so, in XXVII:

> Myself when young did eagerly frequent
> Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument
> About it and about: but evermore
> Came out by the same door where in I went.

The second step was an understandable reaction against the dry-as-dust approach, that of taking a fling in the opposite direction. The sensual world, after all, beckons with most appetizing allurements to delight man's deeply ingrained desires. So what was more natural for our authors to do than to plunge with unreserved enthusiasm into their project (not wholly scientific) of testing pleasure's satisfaction quotient by riding the crest of sensual indulgence? In 2:10 Koheleth confesses to having spared nothing that might contribute to his amusement: "Whatever my eyes desired, I did not withhold from them. I did not deprive myself of any pleasure." But his findings left him much to be desired:

> I said, Then I'll put Pleasure to the Test,
> And this was just a Bubble like the rest;
> Laughter seemed foolish, pointless was my Play,
> Even in my Cups I kept in mind my Quest.[4]

Koheleth and Khayyam speak from experience when they inform us that

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[3] Burkitt, op. cit., p. 11, translating 1:16-18.

[4] Ibid., translating 2:1-2.

professional pleasure-seeking can neither please nor appease one's deep yearning for a worthy purpose to existence. Man longs for living on a higher level than the mere gratification of animal urges. Gross hedonism was given a good try and found wanting.

After man's natural curiosity for knowledge has been frustrated by the discovery of its endless complexity and dubious advantages (12:12) and his sensual appetites have been humored to the point of tiresomeness or even disgust, he sometimes as a last resort may be persuaded in a moment of weakness to yield to virtue's pallid summons toward a life of disciplined uprightness. It may be that the moralists have something to be desired beneath their somber preachments which initially strike one as offering the bleakest of prospects, certainly one who has earlier acceded to the spicier overtures of life. In 2:12-23 Koheleth explains how he gave respectable living a good try. Virtue seeks the twin attainments of social contribution and personal righteousness. No sooner did Koheleth fall in step with the activist rallying cry, "Don't waste your time thinking; lose yourself in activity; do something useful!" than he realized that the very concept of "usefulness" is highly suspect. He wondered whether it was useful at all:

> All I had done and all I had to do
> I hated leaving to No one knows Who,
> One coming after me, perhaps as Wise,
> Perhaps a Fool--that was a Bubble, too![5]

The same problem is cited in 9:18-10:1:

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[5] Ibid., p. 14, translating 2:18-19.

> Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good. Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off an evil odor; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

When great efforts can be so easily undone, cui bono, what gain is in them? Koheleth would really have something to say to modern man who is at the point of committing suicide by push-button nuclear warfare. But does not history teach that all civilizations, however enterprising their achievements, eventually suffer the same fate of destruction? One could make a good case for social cycles to match those of nature. And do not rich endowments only sap the moral fiber of their luxuriating heirs, be this on the level of the individual or of a civilization? Why should one then heed the cry for social contribution? At best it summons one to a thankless task:

> This have I seen under the Sun, a thing
> That seemed to me well worth remembering:
> A little City with defenders few
> Besieged by Armies of a mighty King--
>
> Yet all their Apparatus was in vain,
> For in it was a poor Wise Man, whose Brain
> Saved that small City; but in after days
> No one remembered the poor Man again.[6]

The moralists take their final stand upon a categorical imperative: "Be virtuous because it's the right thing to do." Koheleth and Khayyam were unaware of any basis for such a claim. It presupposes the privileged possession of some absolute, certain knowledge of purpose in the universe or of God's inscrutable dispensation. But of these our authors profess to be totally ignorant. What, after all, is right and wrong, good and evil? Koheleth submits the

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[6] Ibid., p. 29, translating 9:13-15.

following considerations:

> For no man is sufficiently strong
> Against his Destiny to struggle long;
> Mere words are so much Bubble--who can tell
> What profits any man, and what does wrong?
>
> For who knows what was Good for any one
> While yet he Lives, ere yet his Course is run?
> His numbered Days glide like a Shadow by--
> What follows who can tell under the Sun?[7]

A dig at the puritanical moralist is 7:16: "Be not righteous overmuch, and do not make yourself overwise; why should you destroy yourself?" "What are you knocking yourself out for?" the less polished modern might ask. In 4:4 Koheleth objects to the disguising of one's motives, which are not as noble as man likes to flatter himself into supposing. How much is frail "righteousness" really worth? The best tentative conclusion the Preacher is able to reach at this stage, 2:24-26, is that mundane enjoyment is the truest standard of what is good and right.

Here ends the basic search for life's abiding values from the metaphysical direction. How best could its findings be summed up? Koheleth provides a powerful reply in 8:16-17 that could only be debilitated by reduction into verse, for it drives home hard an austere contention:

> When I applied my mind to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night one's eyes see sleep; then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out; even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out.

The grim truth is that man cannot penetrate the mystery of the

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[7] Ibid., p. 24, translating 6:10-12.

divine creative purpose, even so far as knowing that there is a plan. The wisest of men like Socrates, the fountainhead of Western thought, claim to have ascertained only the one insight, that of their hopeless ignorance. Our Persian sage arrived at the same conclusion:

> Khayyám's erudition and his unsurpassed mastery over the different sciences of his age is a conclusive fact; but his lifelong experience has forced him to admit the ignorance of man. His scientific researches and the depth of his philosophical and theological knowledge have proved of no avail. On them he has pondered and pondered over and over again, but, like his many preceding and succeeding philosophers, the real mystery has remained as unknown as ever. The truth of his sad statements is borne out by the fact that, in spite of the wonderful evolution the world has undergone, there has been little change in the real situation. Science has made considerable contributions to the invention of materials for human luxury, or for the destruction of civilization; but the knotty problems of soul and life have not yet been solved.[8]

But man's predicament is not confined to the intellectual sphere. This is a matter of his most passionate concern being thwarted by hostile reality (3:11). The wise man who is not disposed to leap to the inviting climes of wishful idealism reacts with the emotions of deep dismay. A shadow of despair is cast over his whole existence (2:16-20). One word in the Rubaiyat is strategically located so as to convey more emphasis than any other. It is a summary outcry expressing the extremity of existential disillusionment. Omar has reached the end of his rope. Now that everything has been investigated, failure has been established as final. No use to say any more with the dreamer, "But

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[8] Masud Ali Varesi, 'Umar Khayyám (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1922), p. xxiv.

there is yet hope." The possibilities have been exhausted, and the sage is left to bear his insufferable burden alone, estranged from all avenues of consolation. There is only one quatrain which, in all the editions of the Rubaiyat, breaks the verse form of the rest of the poem. For added emphasis, FitzGerald went out of his way to insert in it the redundant rhyme, "Lies":

> Oh, come with old Khayyám and leave the Wise
> To talk; one thing at least is certain, that Life flies:
> One thing is certain and the Rest is Lies;
> The Flower that once has blown for ever dies.[9]

On this note, the quest for wisdom ends.

But with man seeking out the many devices that he does, wisdom is perhaps not his only recourse. Might it not be that if he sets his sights more modestly on lesser attainments he can achieve a considerable degree of satisfaction from his being occupied with them? Koheleth more than Khayyam explores these subsidiary possibilities, and in doing so ends up at a crisis more distressing than the first.

Men have sought solid footing for their worldly hopes in one of two securities, collective strength or self-reliant independence. But Koheleth does not care for the "safety" of numbers at the cost of oppression. He was not the kind to embrace the various isms that promise so much and then deliver neither freedom nor security. Looking at the social scene, he uttered this bitter lament, 4:1-3:

> Again I saw all the oppressions that are practiced under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them. And I thought

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[9]Quatrain XXVI as it appears in FitzGerald's first edition.

> the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive; but better than both is he who has not yet been, and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

Observing man's inhumanity to man, Koheleth could not coldly rationalize it away with the pious thought that the Almighty would somehow balance the accounts, redress the oppressed and see to it justice triumphs in the end. He certainly would not glibly posit the existence of a presently prevailing state of moral compensation. The best he can do in figuring out the wherefore of injustice seems to be the following reflections:

> God lets the Wicked flourish; no doubt He
> Will judge them justly, but it seems to me
> That He has made Men for Experiment
> To try what kind of Animals they be.
>
> For one Event comes both to Man and Beast,
> There's no Distinction when the Breath has ceased;
> As one dies, so the other,--Bubbles both,
> And Man nowise superior in the least.[10]

The Preacher recognizes, then discards, the popular doctrine of providentially ordained retribution here or in another world. He does not care to walk away from injustice glowing with a dubious consolation while his fellow man continues to suffer unabated the burden of tyranny. And who knows when it will be his own turn? It is clear that he must turn elsewhere if he would find something which makes life worth the living.

Maybe the answer lies in rugged individualism. Perhaps all it takes is the grit to hammer out the shape of one's existence.

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[10] Burkitt, op. cit., p. 17, translating 3:17-20.

Could not life be a battleground where heroes achieve greatness and in the titanic process forge triumphant destinies, making the world a better place for their posterity? A stirring enough ambition, but one which must also be submitted to the test of pragmatic corroboration. Koheleth saw what young idealists often overlook, that a workaday world which subscribes publicly to these sentiments, in theory, actually carries into its business practices the dominating principle of "shrewd" (meaning "ruthless") competition, that "all's fair in love and war." Fairness and good will are too easily choked out by the weeds in this survival of the fittest. After all, business is business and life is a gamble, winner take all.

Then again, maybe business is as it should be. Looked at from another angle it is challenging. Of course some people will get hurt, but that's the chance you always take in the brisk course of nature. Accept the fact that it's every man for himself and then dive in with might and main to make your mark. If you have what it takes, you can look forward to being a whopping success. Take the bad with the good. If at first you don't succeed, pull yourself together and keep trying. Start at the bottom if you have to and learn to take the hard knocks in your stride; stay in there pitching, and in no time you'll be heading for the top where the big men and the big money are. So the advice multiplies by which the business world lures unsuspecting youth into getting so entangled in its "rat race" that he'll never be able to get out from under.

Koheleth was no slouch himself when it came to dishing out practical advice, but his was the well-intentioned, helpful variety.

He would not let himself be taken in by those siren-voices which make their victims prisoners of a system and force them to be accomplices to the injustices it fosters. Nor would he accept as justifiable the flimsy excuse for deceptive business techniques that "the economy is built on them." Seeing the slavery of automation that organization man subjects himself to, he could not suppose the degradation of human possibilities and dignity this entails to be a fair exchange, whether this is done in the name of economics, politics, religion, or any other social party. To functionalize an individual is to dehumanize him; our sages wanted no part of such evil business under the sun.

Where keen competition sets every man's hand against his neighbor, Koheleth decries the consequences this brings in the form of aching loneliness to man who much craves intimate companionship (4:7-12). But this is the price of sizing up one's fellow man as a "status symbol" to keep up with or pass by if possible. Even if the top is finally reached, the effort to maintain one's position there is grueling, and at that it can't be done for long because there are always more climbers with fresh energies and novel strategems. It is because Koheleth calls a spade a spade that we can almost hear him realistically shouting the Orwellian slogan: "Success is failure!"

> I noted with what pain Success is won--
> And what's Success, when all is said and done?
> Getting the better of another Man--
> Just one more Bubble blown under the Sun.[11]

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[11] Ibid., p. 19, translating 4:4.

Omar reached a similar evaluation of political intrigue:

> Khayyám perceived full well that what these men secured was after all a fleeting phantom, thoroughly unreliable. It was subject to speedy decay and dissolution. You see a Vizier today in the exercise of full powers. A short time after you find him degraded and fallen. You see a man, who, a few months before, decided the fate of millions of men, and today he is begging for his livelihood. The Baramekides rule with unlimited powers and glory today over a vast population. All of a sudden, they are slaughtered in cold-blood, they fall with an unimaginable indignity, and their very name becomes a disgrace. The great and learned literary genius, Abu'l-Fadl, is the chief courtier today and tomorrow is beheaded.[12]

All it should take to convince one of fortune's fickleness is a glance into history at the interminable rise and fall of empires, enterprises and their leaders alike. Our sages saw that, after all is said and done, man cannot master his fate either by individual or collective recourse. Koheleth put the matter this way in 9:11-12:

> Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all. For man does not know his time. Like fish which are taken in an evil net, and like birds which are caught in a snare, so the sons of men are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.

Both fearless individualism and entangling alliances can be more foolhardy, foolish and injurious than sound as policies for living.

As a last resort, there's always money for a person to seek his security and happiness in. It may not be everything, but it's a whole lot. Yet just because this final hope so easily becomes an obsession with people, Koheleth sees all manner of dangers clustering around it, so that he would probably agree with 1 Timothy 6:10

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[12] Varesi, op. cit., p. 192.

that "the love of money is the root of all evils." In our outline, six of these drawbacks cited by Koheleth are listed. Because wealth's lure is such a tenaciously deceptive image, its liabilities ought to be firmly impressed upon the unwary. Here are some of them:

He that loves Money never gets his Fill,
And hoarded Treasure often turns out ill;
The Owner gains only the Sight of wealth:
Dependents eat, the Rich man pays the Bill.

The Slumbers of the Labourer are deep,
Although his Fare may be put poor and cheap;
The Rich man cannot buy a dreamless Couch,
His very surfeit drives away his Sleep.

How pitiful it is when hoarded Gain
Only has served to give the Owner pain,
Wealth that is lost before it is enjoyed
And all the Pile must be built up again

What has he profited for all his Art?
He's stripped (we say) as bare as at the Start--
But that's the Pity of all human Life,
That naked as we came we must depart.[13]

After material abundance has been stripped of its tinsel, there remains one good that man might yet rejoice in, his own bare but living self. Ought he not be buoyant with delight in the vitality throbbing within him, over his marvelous construction, his unquenchable spirit, romantic madness and abounding energies? Psalm 8 after asking the question, "What is man?" replies in verse 5, "Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor." Shakespeare has Hamlet expressing the same thought:

> What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god!

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[13] Burkitt, op. cit., p. 21, translating 5:10-15.

the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals![14]

True, man is the highest of creatures and abundantly endowed. But may his possibilities be realized in his finite world? What is vitality to a man in chains of restrictions, an unquenchable spirit tied down to a mortal body, youthful romance in a world of madness, abounding energies set against unconquerable nature? Of such antagonistic elements torture is compounded. Man can't win. Because of their acute consciousness of life's uncertainty and mutability, the Greek dramatists sometimes gave the advice not to adjudge a person happy until the books are closed on him in death, concluding even that the best fortune is not to be born at all and so to be spared one's struggle to the last in this tragic world. Koheleth says much the same in 4:3 and 6:3. Khayyam agrees in XCVII, XCIX:

> Would but some winged Angel ere too late
> Arrest the yet unfolded Roll of Fate,
> And make the stern Recorder otherwise
> Enregister, or quite obliterate!
>
> Ah Love! could you and I with Him conspire
> To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
> Would not we shatter it to bits--and then
> Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!

Clarence Darrow, a man standing boldly in our tradition, once debated with a leading anthropologist, Frederick Starr, the question of whether life is worth living or not. Naturally, he took the negative position. He rested his case in these closing words:

> To me life is of little value. I don't mean to me individually, but as I see life. This great senseless, wasteful, cruel spawning of life upon the earth! I see not only its pain, but

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[14] William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, ii,2.

> its pleasures, and its joys annoy me more than its sorrows, for I don't want to lose them. I love my friends; I love people; I love life; but its everlasting uncertainty; its infinite miseries; its manifest futility; its unavoidable troubles and its tragic end appalls me. That is the truth about it. And, I am glad to take refuge in the one consolation, which I think is philosophy, but which may be dope, that life does not amount to much, and I should worry![15]

And so man's last hope in his natural lust for life itself must meet repeated failure of fulfillment and then surrender to stark tragedy.

Men shrink from these facts. They try especially to mask the shocking implications of death. They take refuge in dreams of the immortality of the soul, reincarnation up the ladder of perfectibility, romantic prospects at some fairer shore, sentimental eulogies, and even in the continuous vitalistic renewal of the race from which death removes only the rubbish. The remnant of validity in this last notion has been dealt a telling blow in this century by the possibility of racial suicide within the forseeable future.

But these easy ways out are not open to the more intelligent people. Honest reflection compels a conclusion similar to the one stated so superbly in feudal England around A.D. 700; to Edwin, King of Northumbria, an aged counselor spake this parable of life, saying:

> The present life of man, O king, seems to me, in comparison of that time which is unknown to us, like to the swift flight of a sparrow through the room wherein you sit at supper in winter, with your commanders and ministers, and a good fire in the midst, whilst the storms of rain and snow prevail abroad; the sparrow, I say, flying in at one door, and immediately out at another, whilst he is within is safe from the wintry storm; but after a short space of fair weather, he immediately vanishes out of your sight, from one winter to another. So this life of man appears for a short space, but

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[15] Clarence Darrow, Is Life Worth Living? (Girard: E. Haldeman-Julius Company [Little Blue Book no. 910], n.d.), p. 62.

> of what went before, or what is to follow, we are utterly ignorant.[16]

Today's eminent philosopher-scientist, Bertrand Russell, has with the same masterful strokes summed up man's helpless, hopeless predicament, though retaining throughout something of a heroic idealism:

> Brief and powerless is Man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for Man, condemned to-day to lose his dearest, to-morrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day; disdaining the coward terrors of the slave of Fate, to worship at the shrine that his own hands have built; undismayed by the empire of chance, to preserve a mind free from the wanton tyranny that rules his outward life; proudly defiant of the irresistible forces that tolerate, for a moment, his knowledge and his condemnation, to sustain alone, a weary but unyielding Atlas, the world that his own ideals have fashioned despite the trampling march of unconscious power.[17]

The English statesman, Sir Arthur J. Balfour, expounded in his Foundations of Belief even more mercilessly the considered verdict of modern scientific speculation:

> Man, so far as natural science by itself is able to teach us, is no longer the final cause of the universe, the Heaven-descended heir of all the ages. His very existence is an accident, his story a brief and transitory episode in the life of one of the meanest of the planets. Of the combination of causes which first converted a dead organic compound into the living progenitors of humanity, science indeed as yet knows nothing. It is enough that from such beginnings famine, disease, and mutual slaughter, fit nurses of the future lords of creation, have gradually evolved, after infinite travail, a race with conscience enough to feel that it is vile, and

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[16] The Venerable Bede, The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation, translated by J. A. Giles (London: James Bohn, 1840), p. 110.

[17] Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship," in Mysticism and Logic (Garden City: Doubleday & Co. [Doubleday Anchor Book], c. 1917), p. 54.

> intelligence enough to know that it is insignificant. We survey the past, and see that its history is of blood and tears, of helpless blundering, of wild revolt, of stupid acquiescence, of empty aspirations. We sound the future, and learn that after a period, long compared with the individual life, but short indeed compared with the divisions of time open to our investigation, the energies of our system will decay, the glory of the sun will be dimmed, and the earth, tideless and inert, will no longer tolerate the race which for a moment disturbed its solitude. Man will go down into the pit, and all his thoughts will perish. The uneasy consciousness, which in this obscure corner has for a long space broken the contented silence of the universe, will be at rest. Matter will know itself no longer. "Imperishable monuments" and "immortal deeds," death itself, and love stronger than death, will be as though they had never been. Nor will anything that <u>is</u> be better or be worse for all that the labour, genius, devotion, and suffering of men have striven through countless generations to effect.[18]

Darrow reinforces this with his own sceptical addition:

> The poet and the dreamer and the copy book have told us much of the meaning of life. We often repeat these lessons to make ourselves believe them true. When we feel a doubt casting its shadow across our path, we read them once again to drive the doubt away; and yet, in spite of all, we know absolutely nothing of the scheme, or whether there is any kind of plan. We are only whistlers passing through a graveyard, with our ears tied close and our eyes shut fast. It would surely be as well to step boldly up and read the inscription on the marble tomb and then walk round and look at the vacant, grinning space upon the other side, calmly waiting to record our name.[19]

It is interesting to note that the only recognized memorial of Omar Khayyam now remaining is his tomb; we have not even that much identification of Koheleth. Stanza XXII ponders death's knell:

> For some we loved, the loveliest and the best
> That from his Vintage rolling Time hath prest,
> Have drunk their Cup a Round or two before,
> And one by one crept silently to rest.

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[18] Clarence Darrow, <u>op. cit.</u>, pp. 60-61.

[19] Clarence Darrow, "A Persian Pearl," <u>Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam</u> (Girard: Little Blue Books [no. 1], [1928]), p. 48.

One by one men drop off into the night with which the Rubaiyat so sadly ends at quatrain C:

> Yon rising moon that looks for us again--
> How oft hereafter will she wax and wane;
> How oft hereafter rising look for us
> Through this same Garden--and for one in vain.

But death is not only a phenomenon that has bearing on the final moment of life. It is such a common occurrence at every stage of life that one might well wonder why people bother to make plans at all and to restlessly strive, toil or spin. Yet while we see our comrades fall by the wayside and vanish into the night we seldom relate this spectacle to our own person, though our turn must as surely and irrevocably come. Darrow debates strategically:

> But, the great fact in it [life] is this, that the intense joy of life makes death a nightmare; it is the skeleton at every feast, and it is the only sure thing which says: No, there is no such thing as joy. Take that away; get a state of mind in the world where men are willing to die, and it can only mean one thing, that they are, at least, indifferent to life, and therefore, it is not worth while.[20]

Some modern existentialists have defined man as a "being unto death." Of course, the keen awareness of this condition is nothing new. For a classic statement thereof, one can always go to Thomas Gray's poem, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard." Darrow explains why he faces up so seriously to the problem that seems at first blush best disregarded as long as possible:

> It has never required the great or the learned to note the constant falling of the leaves and the ceaseless running of the sands. It is mainly from this that systems of religion

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[20] Clarence Darrow, Is Life Worth Living? (Girard: E. Haldeman-Julius Company [Little Blue Book no. 910], n.d.), p. 59.

have been evolved. Man has ever sought to make himself believe that these things are not what they seem; that, in reality, death is only birth, and the body but a prison for the soul. This may be true, but the constant cries and pleadings of the ages have brought back no answering sound to prove that death is anything but death.

Our old philosopher could not accept these pleasing creeds on faith. He preferred to plant his feet upon the shifting doubtful sands, rather than deceive himself by alluring and delusive hopes. Upon the old question of immortality, he could answer only what he knew, and this is what he said:

Strange, is it not? that of the myriads who
Before us pass'd the door of Darkness through
Not one returns to tell us of the Road
Which to discover we must travel too.

This stanza is perhaps gloomy and hopeless, but it is thoughtful and brave, and beautiful. We may seek to be children if we will, but whatever our desires, we cannot strangle the questions that ever rise before our minds and will not be put away. To our own souls we should be just and true. Peace and comfort, when gained at the sacrifice of courage and integrity are purchased at too high a price. The truth alone can make us free, and

"One flash of it within the tavern caught
Better than in the Temple lost outright."

Yes, one flash of the true light is better than all the creeds and dogmas. It is better, even though these hold out the fairest prospects and the brightest dreams, and the flash of true light is only the blackest midnight.

Not only would Omar take away the hope of Heaven, but he leaves us with little to boast while we live upon the earth. Our short, obscure existence is not felt or noticed in the great sweep of time and the resistless movement of the years. Along the pathway of the world we leave scarce a footprint, and our loudest voice and bravest words are as completely lost as if spoken in the presence of Niagara's roar.

And fear not lest Existence closing your
Account and mine, should know the like no more;
The Eternal Saki from that Bowl has pour'd
Millions of Bubbles like us, and will pour.[21]

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[21]Clarence Darrow, "A Persian Pearl," Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam (Girard: Little Blue Books [no. 1], [1928]), pp. 51-52.

Yes, death is the consummation toward which all vanity finds its way sooner or later, and mostly sooner. So Ecclesiastes began its account of existence (1:11):

> Like snowflakes falling in the unmarking sea,
> Like flowers that bloom to fade where no men be,
> Like sands that gulph an unremember'd shrine,
> So fall, so fade, so fail our Works--and We.[22]

So Ecclesiastes closes the book on life's swift decline and dissolution when restless vitality is exhausted and its constitutive elements are ploughed back into the universal process:

> A melancholy Picture, Line by Line,
> Howe'er we deck it out in Phrases fine;
> It shows Man going to his long, long Home,
> The Funeral Procession, yours and mine.
>
> That is the End of all the Toil and Trouble;
> To Earth goes back once more the Dust and Rubble,
> The Breath returns again to God who gave--
> Bubble of Bubbles! All things are a Bubble.[23]

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[22] William Byron Forbush, Ecclesiastes In the Metre of Omar (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1906), p. 29.

[23] Burkitt, op. cit., p. 32.

CHAPTER VI

THE MESSAGE OF NATURAL ENJOYMENT

After one has had a good dose of Koheleth-Khayyam's message of total vanity, it is understandable that he might summarily judge these men to have been embittered misanthropes. But now the other main facet of their outlook on life will be displayed. Taking that into account, one might better call them "gentle sceptics." This is not to minimize the passion in their critical negativity, but rather to recognize the admixture of appreciation for life, man and the rest of nature which transformed their over-all attitude into something far more pleasant than the bitterness and despondency in which they might otherwise have floundered.

Our sages were able to arrive at an attractive source for happiness precisely because they had conducted their search for it in the spirit of courageous integrity. Stanza LXXVII exhibits this:

> And this I know; whether the one True Light
> Kindle to Love, or Wrath-consume me quite,
> One Flash of It within the Tavern caught
> Better than in the Temple lost outright.

With Socrates they denounced thinking to know when one does not know, finding sophistries to be a waste of valuable living time.

In their quest they must have been often rebuffed by the league of the militant righteous who could not abide what of happiness life might yet offer to such as wanted to be left in peace to live in accordance with nature. The puritanical spirit exists where people arrogate for themselves the right of judgment over their fellows. But our sages saw such brashness as stemming from

foolish pride. They preferred to live and let live and let each express that for which he was made. They would be the kind which believes in helping others by friendly inspiration and by intervention only to the extent that this is requested by a particular party. Who are they to claim knowledge of the unique complex of circumstances that make up other people's lives so that they can tell others what to do, when they don't even understand who they themselves are? Hafiz remarks in his quatrain 64:

> They closed the tavern door and turned the key,
> These righteous men:--I pray to God that He
> Will not permit them now to open wide
> The whited temple of hypocrisy.[1]

The perversion of such spoilsports is that they have soured on life after being unwilling to face it as it really is and then devised their own Procrustean explanation of how they would like it to be which they must tenaciously maintain because it is their only remaining prop for a grim sort of happiness. It may not be too cheery, but it's at least something to live by. The weakness of such systems is indicated by the frantic efforts taken to assert their absoluteness against even harmless differences of viewpoint which are countenanced as grave threats. The regimen is a bit rugged all around for the unfortunates caught under its sway.

At error's other extreme are the happy-go-luckies. They try to think positively into existence their favorite "visions of sugar plums." One key factor they refuse to face up to is that all is

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[1]Clarence K. Streit, Hafiz in Quatrains (New York: Ben Abramson, c.1946), p. 40.

vanity. Hence, they prove to be a shallow ilk. Their's is a thinner bubble than the rest because they have made themselves incapable of loftier realizations, richer enjoyments and appreciative communion with nature (7:3-6). When vanity thrusts home forcibly, as it will without exception at one time and another, they never know what hit them, not having anticipated the eventuality and prepared themselves to receive life's worst and best as it comes along. As Plato expressed it, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Unexamined selves cannot appreciate the moment because they don't realize that it represents precious opportunity. Koheleth counsels a person to seize those few moments granted him as in 9:9-10 and 11:9-12:1. Omar counsels the same in XLVIII:

> A Moment's Halt--a momentary taste
> Of Being from the Well amid the Waste--
> And Lo!--the phantom Caravan has reach'd
> The Nothing it set out from--Oh, make haste!

Koheleth and Khayyam hold neither of the short-sighted outlooks just mentioned. In their larger view they recognize that vanity may be total in extension while yet not absolute in quality. Man can to a great extent establish peaceful coexistence with the universe by not transgressing his natural role as a child of the earth. Life has its compensations. So long as nature tolerates him, man has a relative degree of freedom to drink the brimming cup of life to the full. With such a prospect open to them, our authors wouldn't think of choosing in its place arid programs of living which restrict man's freedom of expression in his natural habitat, such as by getting him entangled in formalities to the point where life is consumed in giving expected responses to standardized overtures, or else by

dictating to him a monotonous routine which dulls one's response to his individualistic promptings or to nature's call around him. Khayyam would reason that nature is stingy enough with the distribution of her prizes that nothing and nobody ought to interfere with their natural enjoyment by others. Koheleth calls them our rightful portion under the sun. Both would direct denatured Civilization Man "back to nature for her ways are best."

Our authors might have taken Buddha's way out from the vanity they felt as keenly as he did, but they were not the kind to repress desires. To do so would only be unnecessarily heaping up additional vanity. In 9:4 the Preacher refers to vitality as a condition far superior to extinction in the words, "a living dog is better than a dead lion." But it has been found that this superiority cannot be distilled into any higher enduring valuational principles. It can lie only in the present realization of mundane enjoyment.

What, then, is the nature of this vaunted avenue of happiness? It does not consist of thrills for thrills' sake, a kind of forced or anxious scrambling after "kicks." That had been tried and rejected.

> Pleasure is sweet, and sweet its memories.
> To drain Joy's chalice to the nauseous lees,
> To quaff delights that end in lasting griefs,
> These are not pleasures but debaucheries.[2]

Instead, one might call it basically a friendly communion with

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[2]Stephen C. Houghton, "Omar the Sybarite," Twenty Years of the Omar Khayyam Club of America, edited by Charles Dana Burrage, published under the auspices of the Omar Khayyam Club of America (Boston: The Rosemary Press, 1921), p. 41.

nature arising out of the awareness of one's intimate kinship with all creation. Omar described this relationship with especial beauty:

> I beg you grant me this much when I die:
> Walk softly in the Garden where I lie,
> For Fear the very Dust beneath your Feet,
> Tomorrow's Rose, just Yesterday was I.[3]

Sensing a close bond of unity with nature, he could live realistically and yet with a charming love of life. The following verse, though perhaps it should not be recommended for romantic courting technique, manages to be cheerful while contemplating the worst:

> This wheel of heaven in order to destroy me and you
> has designs against my pure soul and yours:
> sit on the grass, fair idol, for not long remains
> ere grass will be growing out of my dust and yours.[4]

Khayyam turned to wine as nature's quintessential representative product. He felt his new way of life to be quite an improvement over speculation, as LV, LIX and LX maintain:

> You know, my friends, with what a brave Carouse
> I made a Second Marriage in my house;
> Divorced old barren Reason from my Bed,
> And took the Daughter of the Vine to Spouse.
>
> The Grape that can with Logic absolute
> The Two-and-Seventy jarring Sects confute;
> The sovereign Alchemist that in a trice
> Life's leaden metal into Gold transmute;
>
> The mighty Mahmud, Allah-breathing Lord,
> That all the misbelieving and black Horde
> Of Fears and Sorrows that infest the Soul
> Scatters before him with his whirlwind Sword.

Darrow comments on this section:

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[3] Horace Thorner, The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam (London: The Brookside Press, 1955), p. 24.

[4] A. J. Arberry, The Romance of the Rubáiyát (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), p. 127.

> After throwing the theoretical philosophy to the winds, he turned to the vine to learn what life really meant. No doubt, the vessel here is figuratively used. It might mean a wine cup, it might mean feeding a beggar, it might mean a warm room and comfortable dress. It meant something besides the intangible, barren theories, which have ever furnished theologians and professors with the pleasing occupation of splitting hairs and quibbling about the meaning of terms.[5]

Omar's wine is the real thing, and yet his record shows that he was not a dissolute type of person. We might call its function for him his primary sacramental point of contact with all nature. It was both a symbol and an efficacious agent uniting him with the rest of creation. It served admirably, in addition, as a means with which to vex his stiff-starched "temperance" adversaries who were wont to zealously thrust upon others their religious regulations for alcoholic abstention:

> That Wine and Faith are Enemies, I know.
> And I know how to parry Blow for Blow.
> So let me catch the Flagon by the Throat,
> And I will drink the red Blood of my Foe.
>
> Indeed, I think it Right on Holy Days
> I should put by the Drinking-Cup I raise
> On Days less honored and less sacred, too,
> And fill a larger Bowl in Allah's Praise.[6]

But actually, this comradeship with the world around him was practiced on an exalted level. For man to live according to his nature results in existence at its highest level, with all the variety, nobility and creativity this implies. At least four aspects of such living are given expanded treatment by Khayyam.

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[5]Clarence Darrow, "A Persian Pearl," Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam (Girard: Little Blue Books [no. 1], [1928]), p. 58.

[6]Thorner, op. cit., pp. 32-33.

The first is a natural outcome of humanely discerning the vanity factor of life, compassion for one's fellow man. The levity in Omar's allegory of the pots (the "Kuza-Nama" section) almost conceals the sympathy for human weakness out of which he must have conceived it. His point is that people have been shaped by birth out of earth's clay to be as they are. Endowed with a particular heredity, they have also been molded into a preformed environmental pattern. Where the product is poor or better, it befits one to look to the responsibility that lies in the process rather than vaingloriously praising himself for good fortune and faulting others for their weaknesses or else denying the reverse actuality. Clarence Darrow is the man qualified to comment on this position, since his life was notably devoted to its promotion:

> When will humanity be great enough and good enough to distinguish between the fault of the potter [cosmic process?] and the fault of the pot! When can it look over the myriads of human beings, each with his flaws and limitations, and pity instead of blame!
>
> The history of the past is a record of man's cruel inhumanity to man; of one imperfect vessel accusing and shattering another for the faults of both. . . . The world . . . has penned and maimed, tortured and killed, because the potter's work was imperfect and the clay was weak.
>
> But we live in the shadows; we can see only the causes and effects that are the closest to our eyes. If the clouds would rise, and the sun shine bright, and our vision reach out into time and space, we might find that these cracked vessels serve as high a purpose in a great, broad scheme, as the finest clay, wrought in the most beautiful and perfect form.[6]

The suggestion of the last paragraph is a tribute to this great

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[6]Darrow, op. cit., pp. 44-45.

lawyer's humane sympathy. Never would he posit such an optimistic consideration in order to gain any metaphysical satisfaction for himself, but he does it characteristically for his fellow man in order to grant him the benefit of all doubt.

A second aspect of living in harmony with nature is the keen appreciation of her beauties in the present moment. Superb imagery is employed as a strong enhancement of this idea:

> Then, shall I reckon how my Days are sped
> More than the Rose for whom one Dawn is red?
> No. There are two Days that we reckon not:
> The Day not born, the Day already dead.
>
> And Yesterday has died as Echoes die.
> It faded like a Rainbow from the Sky,
> And like the Shadow of a Butterfly
> Upon a Rose-leaf that the Wind swept by.
>
> And it has flown as Water from a Stream,
> And even as the Water-Lily's Gleam
> When she has lost the Kiss of Moonlight;
> And as a Dreamer waking from a Dream.
>
> As for Tomorrow, is the Story so,
> And told by one who was there and must know?
> Then, I will listen to Tomorrow's Tale
> On the Day Today becomes Tomorrow.[7]

Our sages would thrill to the words of the renowned Sanscrit poet, Kalidasa, inviting men to appreciate nature's present delights:

> Listen to the invocation of the Dawn:
> Look to this day. In its brief course
> Lie all the realities, all the verities, of life:
> The bliss of growth,
> The glory of action,
> The splendor of beauty.
> For yesterday is but a dream,
> And tomorrow is only a vision.
> But this day, well lived,

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[7] Thorner, op. cit., pp. 12-13.

Makes every yesterday a dream of pleasure,
And every tomorrow a vision of hope.
Look well, then, to this day.
This is the invocation of the Dawn.[8]

The Persian language is exceptionally well suited to convey the rich force of picturesque description, since it has more of expressive words than elaborate syntax. FitzGerald led the way to an increase of substantive force in English translation by capitalizing the more important nouns whose number he also kept high.

A third feature of the natural way of living is the return to simple satisfactions, as this quatrain extols them:

Let him rejoice who has a loaf of bread,
A little nest wherein to lay his head,
Is slave to none, and no man slaves for him,--
In truth his lot is wondrous well bested.[9]

Darrow praises this simplicity of outlook and adds to it a fourth direction that man follows when true to his inner promptings, namely, seeking the felicity of friendship:

> But Omar knew that all of this [the possessiveness and the appliances of civilization] was a delusion and a snare;--that it failed of the purpose that it meant to serve. He turned from these vanities to a simpler, saner life, and found the sweetest and most lasting pleasures close to the heart of that great nature, to which man must return from all his devious wanderings, like the lost child that comes back to its mother's breast. What simpler and higher happiness has all the artificial civilization of the world been able to create than this:
>
> A Book of Verses underneath the bough,
> A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread and Thou

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[8]Houghton, op. cit., p. 41.

[9]E. H. Whinfield, "The Quatrains of Omar Khayyam," The Sufistic Quatrains of Omar Khayyam, edited by Robert Arnot (New York: M. Walter Dunne, Publisher, 1903), p. 183.

Beside me singing in the Wilderness--
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow.

It is these bright spots in life's desert that make us long to stay. These hours of friendship and close companionship of congenial souls that seem the only pleasures that are real, and from which no regrets can come. It is away from the bustle and glare of the world, above its petty strifes, and its cruel taunts, in the quiet and trust of true comradeship, that we forget the evil and fall in love with life. And our old philosopher, with all his pessimism, with all his doubts and disappointments, knew that here was the greatest peace and happiness that weary, mortal man could know. In the presence of the friends he loved, and the comradeship of congenial lives, he could not but regret the march of time and the flight of years, which heralded the coming of the end. Poor Omar was like all the rest that ever lived--he looked forward into the dark, unknown sea, and shuddered as he felt the rising water on his feet.[10]

The Omar Khayyam clubs were devoted primarily to that spirit of convivial fellowship.

To these thoughts on the good life Koheleth adds some remarks on prudent living. They are of secondary weight, however, because they are no more than useful directions which can teach one how more adequately to exploit his opportunities for happiness. By looking ahead to a certain extent, one can make the necessary provision for a greater measure of satisfying living than would otherwise accrue to one living on a haphazard, catch-as-catch-can basis. Moderation and virtue are sound general directives. It is being realistic if one does not cherish extravagent hopes of achieving a happy security for oneself in this uncertain world. The circles in which the Preacher moved discussed proverbial wisdom so much that he could not help but contribute his share. His maxims blaze

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[10]Darrow, op. cit., pp. 60-61.

the trail for his students who wish to follow the dictates of common sense in order to attain the best possible ends.

The Preacher heartily concurs with the message of natural joy:

The Happy Man, as I have learnt to measure,
Lives by his Work and finds in it his Pleasure
All thro' the Number of his days on Earth:
This is the Gift of God, His highest Treasure.

One who can eat from what he has and find
His daily Round congenial to his Mind
Ponders but little on his Life and bears
No Memory of bitter Days behind.[11]

His appeal to man is that he cherish his portion of creation's goods:

So go thy way in garments white to dine,
And with rare ointments make thy visage shine.
Forget the Door of which He holds the Key,
But not the one which holds thy cherish'd wine.

And seek to prove Life's solace year by year
With One whom thy fond heart may find most dear.
Her will may be the wind's will, yet to thee
The home-bound breeze that brings the Haven near.

So shalt thou find at length a maid that's kind,
A gladsome task well suited to thy mind;
And stop thine ears to the mad Fool's crackling laugh,
And never listen to the homeless Wind.[12]

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[11] F. C. Burkitt, Ecclesiastes Rendered Into English Verse (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), p. 22, translating 5:18-20.

[12] William Byron Forbush, Ecclesiastes In the Metre of Omar (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1906), pp. 84,86,88, translating 9:7-10.

CHAPTER VII

THE EVALUATION

Any evaluation of the message that has now been stated will reflect the peculiar bias of the individual carrying it out. It will not be this writer's intention to take back or cancel out anything that has been presented earlier. He will, however, point out some areas of the total human situation which he feels have not been given their full due in the writings treated. Should his outlook happen to prove more complete than the picture of life given in these books, that fact would still not detract from their excellence. We may not legitimately ask of an author conformity to the range of views that we feel belongs in a subject he chooses to treat in his own characteristic way.

Koheleth and Khayyam merit high commendation for their critical honesty. David Hume was not the first great intelligent sceptic. Today's specialized philosophical schools would do well to consider the more comprehensive analysis of life than theirs that our sages have carried out. The raw materials to work with remain the same. And it would seem that concern for the human situation as a whole is a more worthy subject for philosophical investigation than are linguistic and strictly scientific structures alone. Omar would smile at the complex subtleties to which the universities of the world are subjecting language and logic today and comment (LVI):

> For "Is" and "Is-not" though with Rule and Line
> And "Up-and down" by Logic I define
> Of all that one should care to fathom, I
> Was never deep in anything but--Wine.

Yet the course of his career establishes the likelihood that he would join right in with the best of today's scientific thinkers, though more out of interest than from expectation of startling discovery.

Again, it is commendably realistic of our thinkers to recognize man's limitations and possibilities within a naturalistic setting. Thereby they avoid all manner of confusions that rigid adherance to partial explanations of the good life create. They clear the way of speculative rubbish which selectively narrows the range of possibilities for self-fulfillment. Where man has wide scope for creative expression, he ought to be able to arrive at all else that is best for him, even the degree of discipline to which he chooses to be bound. When he is forced to bend to an artificial code, he is reduced thereby to an even lower state than wild animality. The protest against stuffy puritanism is valid.

Yet there are two large areas of human experience to which our sages did not seem to assign a due weight of importance. The first is the matter of enterprising and inspiring ideals. Koheleth and Khayyam would certainly not stand in the way of whatever ambitious projects men might want to undertake. But their negativistic attitude would tend to chill one's enthusiasm for almost any hopeful endeavor. Their sober pronouncements seem to whisper in the background, "It won't work" or "It isn't worth it." Nor do they offer much stimulus to or many guiding principles for man's aspiration toward noble social attitudes. Excusing man for all his wrongs will encourage unbridled license if positive ideals are not

promoted to replace the sought-after relaxation of compulsive social controls. The entire area of human aspirations might well be assigned independent and equal status along with the naturalistic and the negativistic approaches. It seems fantastic to suppose that man either could or should or would junk civilization come what may, for all its necessary evils. A better program to follow would be to naturalize the tenor of social institutions to the extent that they can be accommodated to an enlightened primitivism. And the most promising means for achieving this is the promotion of a comprehensive world-view which balances appealingly and competently the truest of human dispositions.

In defense of our authors, it should be kept in mind that they nowhere oppose the virtuous and constructive variety of idealism just suggested. Their passion for justice, mercy, freedom and aggressive honesty exemplifies the fundamental ideals for which they stood. They recognized that for man there is no more important feature of nature than all mankind. The life of Khayyam shows great dedication to his vocation as a scholar. Koheleth was an able Wisdom teacher.(12:9-10); he speaks about the value of virtue and prudence in one's life. We have the example of the commentator often cited in this thesis, Clarence Darrow. His humanitarianism was of legendary proportions. These men realized keenly that for ideals to be worth anything they must arise spontaneously and sympathetically and that their attempted obtrusion by moralistic principles or act of parliament will only encourage their degeneration and subject the true human spirit to formalistic repression. The

character of one's life speaks more eloquently than the mere public declaration of principles however lofty. Perhaps our thinkers were close to the ideal of idealism.

A second point of issue that is justifiably taken with our men is that they minimize the place of religion in one's life, at least as far as overt practice is concerned. History and personal experience testify to the fact that this occupies a large role in the normal aggregate of human activities. After the negatively critical faculty of man has reaped its harvest of vanity, religion takes over constructively. It cannot afford to disregard any feature of man's experience, but instead, in the light of that experience, finds man a place in the ultimate scheme of the universe through contact with some higher reality. To a large extent, the satisfactoriness of a religion depends upon the honesty and profundity with which it confronts the total human predicament; to that perspective it is expected to speak with a uniquely forceful and incisive answer.

Christianity calls the condition of universal vanity "sin" or "depravity." It looks back on its sacred record and discovers a titanic cosmic contest between utter vanity and ultimate value incarnate, the conflict taking place within a monumental historical continuity of God's dealings with His people. It sees the climax of that clash to have occurred at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the Desire of All Ages who uniquely represented God and man in pursuing his sole ambition of reconciling both parties with each other. At the cross it retrospectively discerns triumphant victory in the

Savior's dying words, "It is finished." It affirms the Resurrection faith, that divine life ultimately vanquished forever demonic evil and death for all who will be reconciled to God by His Son, in accents such as those of Paul Gerhardt's hymn, translated by John Kelly:

> Awake, my heart, with gladness,
> See what today is done;
> Now, after gloom and sadness,
> Comes forth the glorious Sun
>
> For Christ again is free;
> In glorious victory
> He who is strong to save
> Has triumphed o'er the grave.[1]

Hence the Christian will not recognize Omar's or Koheleth's message as decisive with reference to the sacred dimension of life. When the early enthusiasm over Khayyam reached the pitch of religious fervor, Cowell spoke, one might say, for Christendom in a letter of reproof to Edward Heron-Allen who helped stir up the excitement:

> 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.[2]

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[1] The Lutheran Hymnal, authorized by the synods constituting The Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), hymn 192.

[2] A. J. Arberry, The Romance of the Rubáiyát (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), p. 19.

It is only fair to note also Cowell's one-sidedness here. More than literature, the Rubaiyat is also significant philosophy, and that not just as being an extension of Lucretius whom Cowell favored. Hence, its appeal to the Victorian Age. Furthermore, the Omar movement annoyed Cowell because of his disappointment over the fact that FitzGerald compromised rigid accuracy in the interest of creating literary charm. He felt that the popularity gained thereby was won at the cost of ignoble concession. The only point of this quotation is the rejection of Omar as a suitable religious guide. It speaks to those who mistakenly suppose that he intended to pass off his thoughts as oracles of a religious quality. It was in attacking formal theology, not private religious experience, that he had few scruples.

On the matter of an expanded religious program our authors were uncomfortably silent. This was not their forte or the burden of their message. Their critical digs at religious pretensions were not a noisy sneering at piety itself, but only at what they considered to be an interfering distortion of the same. They did not agree, for one thing, with the stubborn tendency in much conventional religion to curtail man's earthly enjoyment so that his happiness might be the greater in the world to come. Khayyam did not take to such inferior theological tactics of his day as the aggravation of the problem of evil by elaborating a worse than Calvinistic doctrine of Double Predestination and a promised paradise which amounted to no more than an environment extravagantly outfitted to incite a wholesale wallowing in carnal gratifications.

In another breath these same theologians forbade the innocent and natural pleasures of this life. Rothfeld ably represents Omar:

> The only thing in the whole world that is certain is that the creeds are not true. It is not true, it cannot be true that man has from the first been predestined to suffer for the pleasure of some "Sultan in the Sky."[3]

There is much in our sages' attitude from which religions, including Christianity, need to learn. In the first place, the concept of a creation which God Himself engineered and appreciated deserves continued front page publicity. The terrestrial is the sphere of man's creaturehood. Therefore it is only foolish for him to suppose that he is other than he is and to discountenance his material conditions as though they stood on an inferior plane of existence beyond which he is able to rise. On the contrary, let man learn the Wisdom insight that nature's endowments are to be heartily embraced while one can do so and that this be done in a spirit of gratitude to the Creator-Giver of all good gifts.

Secondly, religion ought to acknowledge that its positive affirmations are on a different cognitive level from those of philosophy and not pretend that it possesses ontological certainty which must be assented to as such, as though its devotees had broken the vanity barrier of man's unfathomable ignorance so as to be in a position to demand immediate acceptance of their dogmatic views. Faith's sole ground of verification lies in its successful establishment of a dynamic relationship between the creature and his

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[3]Otto Rothfeld, Umar Khayyám And His Age (Bombay: D. B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1922), p. 76.

Creator. Religious propositions, if the term is even valid, derive meaning from this relationship and apart from it do not possess independent metaphysical value. Hence, religion's approach is most appropriately that of relevant proclamation, never obscurantistic disputation. Failure to appreciate the special nature of faith as consisting in an ultimate personal relationship with the Divine has produced such aberrations as preaching a Mohammedan type of pleasure paradise conferred upon man as a reward for goodness in the place of hope for a graciously consummated "I-Thou" relationship, a God who can be isolated and described objectively in Aristotelian categories, a faith which consists in assent to this God, a legalistic moral code which absolutizes provincially approved generalizations of right and wrong and judges mankind thereby, the setting up of human religious authorities as trusted substitutes for direct encounter with God, confidence in the mechanical efficacy of ceremonial observance apart from and beyond the faith relationship, concern for the letter beyond rather than in service to the spirit, and so on.

It is because of such abuses, stemming from metaphysically unwarrantable dogmatic presumption which on a very wide scale is wont to infiltrate, subvert and derange authentic religion, that Forbush perceptively attributes the appeal of our two books to their resistance of such perversions. It appears that that old dragon, pride, finds its way ever so easily into popular religiosity. Forbush says:

> But why does Ecclesiastes appeal to any one? It is precisely because, like the Rubaiyat, it speaks to men in their questionings. Neither book has any message to the piously omniscient.

> The deeper one goes into life, the harder he finds it to be patient with ready-made faith. John Morley has spoken of the detestableness of "the complacent religiosity of the prosperous." Thoreau once remarked, "Our sadness is not sad, but our cheap joys." It is of infinite comfort to youth to know that even in the Bible there is a book written by a man who was freely permitted to think.
>
> In the midst of the inexorable, what we want is not explanations, but tenderness. It is magnificent to think that Koheleth had faced all the facts of life without blinking, and found no solution, and yet was not dismayed by them. For it is not true, as Holdheim urges, that "the book begins with nothingness and ends with the fear of God." The Hebrew thinker, like Omar's philosopher,
>
> "Evermore
> Came out by the same door wherein he went."
>
> But he had learned, with Tennyson's Ancient Sage, to
>
> "Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt,
> And cling to Faith beyond the forms of Faith."
>
> The reason why the Rubaiyat has become a fad and almost a religion, and the reason why Ecclesiastes has persisted in the canon, in which it is the only contribution of a skeptic, is because these books "face the Unseen with a cheer." They help us on rainy nights and amid November recollections to make a cheery mastery of fate.[4]

Similarly, Anderson concludes his evaluation of Ecclesiastes:

> Since religious people are prone to settle down comfortably in their faith, supposing that they possess the answer to life's questions under their hats, it is fortunate that the rabbis finally decided to include Ecclesiastes in the canon. For, as one of the editors of Ecclesiastes wrote, "the sayings of the wise are like goads" (12:11). Like the prophets, they awaken men from complacent orthodoxy and stimulate the struggle for faith that can stand all the tests of doubt and despair.[5]

It would be a fascinating and profitable undertaking to match up

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[4] William Byron Forbush, Ecclesiastes In the Metre of Omar (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1906), pp. 11-12.

[5] Bernhard W. Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1957), p. 484.

against Koheleth's scepticism Job's triumphantly emergent faith.

The third cue religion ought to take from our tradition is that it needs to work in conjunction with rather than in opposition to other legitimate poles of existence. Man comes to serve God in faith out of a recognition of his need for Him. Hence theology must correlate faith's message with man's contemporaneous consciousness of need. Koheleth and Khayyam made their point crystal clear that man neither wants to nor can stand alone against the greater powers of the universe. With corresponding force the Spirit of God reveals Christ to man as Lord of the universe and yet man's Friend, Brother, Reconciler with God, the all-around Savior of that errant creature who, though indeed the crown of creation, has ever managed to lose himself in every imaginable way inside a world that is too much with him. It remains for the Christian as a missionary to discover at what point each individual is straying from the true path and then to take appropriate steps to reroute him toward the Divine Way. First there must be understanding, to be followed up by wise and positive Christ-focused guidance. The situation is one of many different needs existing and one substantial context which could, by patient study and application, answer each problem with the particular insight it demands.

By contrast, there is the fundamentalistic posture which prefers to dictate a monolithic set of archaic doctrinal formulations, demanding unconditionally surrendered subscription to them. It is ill-equipped to meet the religious needs of an advanced culture.

Whenever religion does not adapt itself to the thought climate

of contemporaneous civilization, "Man of Culture" will seek refuge in competing isms of inferior stature. Where its message is doctrinaire and formalistic, existentialism will capture the loyalties of its potential constituency. Where it suppresses the expression of honest bewilderment over life in general and restiveness especially over society's stifling pressures toward conformity, some sort of "beat generation" will establish its own protective shelters. Where it pontificates with dogmatic abandon, scientism waits to move in. Where it operates with the naive complacency of its possessing ready answers for every perplexity, sensitive men of intelligence and honesty will more and more turn away from it in Camus-like disappointment. Christianity ought not compromise its essential proclamation, but it does not serve effectively either by restricting itself to a parochial language as though the needs of all times and individuals were the same. Let the remedy be suited to the illness, and the ministration to the want.

As one views now the many-sided picture that the Koheleth-Khayyam tradition has opened to consideration, he may wonder how the dissimilar attitudes can be rationally harmonized. The ambition is a metaphysical one which must be solved on that plane if at all. An enlightened world-view, perhaps an integral humanism, which is able to maintain a happy balance of the factors discussed in this paper would magnificently expand, beginning on the formal level, man's possibilities both in a conservative and a creative direction. The spirit of Hebrew Wisdom would welcome such an achievement if it could be done well. Where a comprehensive

metaphysic is unavailable, let the individual content himself with being faithful always to the best he can envision. Let him give primary loyalty to truth, and extend his helpful sympathy to his fellow man as such. Let him seek satisfaction and animalistic delight in his self-acknowledged mundane habitat, not claiming to be more or less than he is. He dare not fail to seek out also the answer to his innate religious needs in a relationship to God that is humble pure and faithful, apart from which reality affords an unqualified prospect of vanity. Perhaps the clue to some of Omar's courage to assert his cosmopolitan independence against sectarian pressures lies in this fascinating invocation of his:

> Open the door! O entrance who procurest,
> And guide the way, O Thou of guides the surest!
> Directors born of men shall not direct me,
> Their counsel comes to naught, but Thou endurest![6]

Of like import is a stanza with which he might well have closed his treasury of poems, had he arranged them in any ordered sequence:

> Oh, God, I am weary of my own business!
> Of my anguish and my empty-handedness!
> Even as Thou bringest existence out of non-existence, so take
> Me from my own non-existence to the glory of Thine existence.[7]

On a similar note, Koheleth closed his book (12:7) with the blind, trustful prayer, "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit" (Lk. 23:46).

The indispensable and the proper place of ritual, ordinance, and traditions in man's worship life are aspects of religion that

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[6] E. H. Whinfield, "The Quatrains of Omar Khayyam," The Sufistic Quatrains of Omar Khayyam, edited by Robert Arnot (New York: M. Walter Dunne, Publisher, 1903), p. 253.

[7] William Byron Forbush, Ecclesiastes In the Metre of Omar (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1906), pp. 11-12.

are important enough but not within the scope of this thesis. Relative to the tradition at hand, interest is in the internal reality of the religious experience. The Christian can only hope that this will be more and more a sincere confrontation with God in Christ, for There is the one Rock foundation of truth, hope and lasting joy mightily standing in the midst of time's shifting sands and loftily towering over them all.[8]

It is with a truer and richer understanding of and delight in God, man and the universe that one comes away from his contemplation of the message of Koheleth and Khayyam.[9]

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[8] Cf. Matt. 7:24-27; 1 Cor. 3:11; Heb. 11:8-10.

[9] The text of this thesis was substantially prepared by March 31, 1960 in commemoration of this 151st. anniversary of the festival of Sir Edward FitzGerald which is also the 101st. anniversary of his Rubaiyat.

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