

Sir Richard Burton

Sir Richard Burton
by ~~Abdullah Hajji~~ ^{of Hajji} i Shirazi
by the Reverend P. D. Carey.

"Fa'nil is sound, and dies with air; light is co-excellent with God;
as Hate's a poison for delight, so love's a plague for the spleen.
and Et Qulhaq is Truth, and naught but Allah, ~~the~~ his, & abendine,
and Allah ^{windily} ~~in~~ ^{he} about with farband & emmed of gold & green."
Babagh-i-Muabbat.

Sir Richard Francis Burton once observed that he had
been endowed with all the talents except one - that of
utilizing the others! He erred; his failure in life - by
flimsy standards, - was due to his possession of positive
qualities, principally independence and the sense of
humour. One of our greatest men of letters now living
wanted, as a boy, to join the Navy. "No," said his father
very seriously "success depends on Sewility, ^{subtlety,} ~~something else,~~
~~and~~ Silence: and you ~~wouldn't~~ ^{wouldn't}, you aren't, and you couldn't."
If Burton had been a lesser man, he might have

been a greater soldier; if he had been a lesser
 artist, he might have been a greater name in art.
 The present generation does not understand how
 colossal is his figure; even among the Victorian giants
 he stands head and shoulders above all but a very
 few indeed; yet the present generation owes its very
 existence to him, in a very special sense; and the
 best thing it can do is to study him.

His achievement is almost incredible; he demands
 and deserves a full year's intimate work;
 every truly ambitious young man should
 devote at least that period to this transcend-
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Sir Richard spoke practically all the languages
 of Europe, Asia, and Africa with fluency,
 and was a profound scholar in most of the
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 He was by far the greatest, because

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The most original, of the explorers of his time,
 he was an ethnologist and anthropologist of vast
 experience.

He was one of the best swordsmen in Europe.

He published about one hundred books, all of
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 and direct experience. His translations of the
 Arabian Nights, of Lucretius, of Catullus, of
 the Pines, the Amarga-Range, the Beated
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 His books of travel are of unique value, because
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He made practical experiments with the secret doctrines of ~~the~~ ~~the~~ Asiatic mystics; and, obtaining their results, attained the impersonal illumination which they confer, thus acquiring the point of view which is the key to the fundamental treasures of psychology.

He was a philosophical poet of unequalled eminence.

With

These two latter facts this present essay is more immediately concerned; the first five are however important to our purpose as emphasizing their value ^{of the others}. They guarantee the mind which they illustrate; for it is too often the case that the transcendentalist, the thinker, and the ^{primer} ~~primer~~ speak ~~on~~

cathedra of that which they know not;
 their conclusions are vitiated by ignorance,
 or unbalanced by prejudice.

~~The~~ Literary criticism in England is
 still, ^{higher} for the most part in the formal
 gardens, ^{with their} ~~and~~ ~~stucco~~ ~~barbarism~~ ~~of~~ ~~and~~ ~~sham~~
 Greek temples, of the Eighteenth Century,
 when Hume wrote of the 'unhappy
 barbarism' of Shakespeare. It looks
 for 'polish', ~~like~~ as if the painters and
 Vanishers of automobiles were the highest
 artists. It forgets Browning's retort:
 "Sweet for the future, strong for the use"

when - "The poets ^{pour} from us ^{wine} wine", though it
 has ^{he} ~~incomprehensibly~~ ^{he} requested in Browning
 himself, we can only suppose on account
 of his respectability. The revolt against
 this ancestor-worship-like devotion to Pope,
 Addison, Tennyson, and other so-called
 stylists has been ^{anarchical}; it has led
 to the idolatry ^(or rather coprophilia) of mere brutal assassins
 of the language like ^(the latrine that boiled over) James Joyce. There
 has been no middle way whereon one might
 erect temples to the really strong writers,
 the men who were too virile to smooth
 down their Memorials - such as Jacob

erected at Beth-El, with rottenstee and
oil, or to hang them with festoons of pink
ribbon. Yet these are the only men who count.
Shelley's mastery of technique is but a
secondary glory. The formal perfection of
Keats would have destroyed a lesser
man; he was already aware of his danger,
and on his guard against fluency, when he
began Hyperion. Tennyson was altogether
lost to poetry in the labyrinths of
polite phrasing. Swinburne died of
perfection; he was only accepted when
his genius had been smothered under

the-performed pillows of classicism.

So the vigour of the ^{"Father of Mastachios"} ~~Leaded~~ ~~London~~
^{found to be} was, incompatible with canates, croquet,
 & culture and the Prince Consort. ~~Real~~ Ladies
 do not like shooting boots in their boudoirs;
 and their literary lions dis-trusted a man
 whose ^{brought home} had, so many lionskins from Africa;
 he might only too easily discover what
 animals they were that ^w wore such gear
 at garden parties.

Thus it came to pass that even to-day
~~when~~ the derivative and decorative art of
 Fitzgerald's Omar Khayyam survives
 Ruskinian Christianity, and Morris
 wall-paper, and Reman's Jesus to the
 detriment of ^{the} ~~a~~ supremely original
 and comprehensive graft of Oriental

9.

Philosophy upon the tree of Occidental
Science which flowers so magnificently
in the Kasidah of Burton.

The Revolutionary Renaissance died when
Shelley was murdered; the reaction ^{swept} was
everything before it. Barbarism broke out
like a boil, and infected European
thought for decades. The early promise
of Tennyson petered out in to puerile
plattitudes, while that of Browning
ended in ^{such} performance. ~~as~~ as would ^{earn} ~~earn~~
the approbation of the post-dinner, the
partly, and the self-important. One
cultivated the 'drawing-room of the country

vicarage, ^{and} ^{women in} the college of amoral
 adolescence, and the servants' hall of
 gluttonous glumbeysom; the other aimed
 at the pulpits of compromising clerics
 and the high table of intellectual Pharooses.
 When the revolt came at last, it was
 unrooted from Paris; the pre-Raphaelites
 were not autochthonous; they derived
 their inspiration from ^{the} Greece of ^{Amphicles,} ~~Aeschylus,~~
 the Italy of Michael Angelo, and the France
 of Bandelaine. The true revolutionaries
 were men of the most solid English stock,
 physically and intellectually. Their
 achievement is not bulky, but it is

unique and authentic. They are the most
 truly original thinkers of the century; for
 they are not dependent upon aristocratic
 ancestry. Their names are James Thomson,
 Richard Francis Austin, and Samuel Butler.
 It would be ~~hard~~ ^{vain} to explore history for
 a phenomenon parallel to that of the
 appearance of these three men. Each is
 utterly independent of the other two, each
 possesses the same fundamental mental
 anatomy; they are agreed entirely upon
 the main principles of philosophy; yet
 Thomson ~~found~~ ^{found} his light in science
 and Charles Bradlaugh, Butler in

original meditation upon classical reading,
and Burton in post-hand investigation of
living types of thought.

It is indeed strange that all three, despite
their ^{diversity of their} social, intellectual and moral opinions,
should have arrived independently at the
same goal of atheistic mysticism, ^{antinomian} ^{atheism} ^{sceptical}
Ethics, and scientific scepticism. How
strange that these three, and these three
only - unless we ~~class~~ ^{include} Husley in this
class; to do so would fortify the argument -
should have attained such colossal
supremacy in literature. Criticism, ^{or} ~~is~~
^{rather absence of criticism, in}
England being what it is, one dare not

expect that even the present demonstration
 of the case will affect public opinion to
 any appreciable extent; one must content
 oneself by awaiting the commencement of the
 King of the Critics; for whether or no
 the pen be mightier than the sword, there
 can be no doubt that the scythe is mightier
 than the pen. The true claim of Sumner
 to fame is that he said more sublimely
 than any other man, in Hertha, the
 Chances of Atalanta, the Hymn to Proserpine,
 and Anactoria, what these three men were
 saying, each in his own violent voice,
 vivid and vile, it may yet prove

more permanently than he, for the very reason that their style is less serene and splendid. For what is language, in ~~the true sense of~~ itself? No matter how brightly blaze the beams of Apollo, no matter how fervent are his fires how rhythmical his rays, it is yet ^{not he but} Hermes who bears the Word of Zeus from Olympus.

A poem, whether in verse or prose, is essentially a simple and direct presentation of Truth. The formulae of Euclid ^{or} Newton are poems in the proper sense of the words; and there is actually, ^{harvest of Probability in the} aesthetic value ^{of} the style of a differential equation. For it is part of our notion

of Truth that its expression should not outrage our sense of Beauty - as Keats himself said, more profoundly, one may suspect, than his conscious mind was aware.

There is no general disposition, even in England - as she is to-day, to deny that *The City of Dreadful Night* and *The Way of All Flesh* are masterpieces in form as well as in essence; and it must be confessed that the *Kasidah* is rhythmically more rugged than is quite readable, more learned and profound than seems proper to an artistic composition, more formally faulty than is commonly considered

compatible with the highest attainment in literature. Yet, having pronounced Peccavit, one feels that the penance need be no more than nominal. It adds to the glory of a Saint that he should have faults of his own; otherwise, he would be inhuman and incredible; but such an argument is not to be brought forward by ^{high} ~~high~~ in the Court of Literature. It is, no doubt, necessary to the supreme self-analysis of Burton that he should manifest those very awkwardnesses and impatience which reached him as a man. It would be easy to revise the Kurîlah; ~~for~~ the occasional defects of the rhythm could

be repaired in a few hours without in any way interfering with the sense of the stanzas; and it would be fatuous to assert that Burton's blunders, however psycho-analytically precious, improve the general effect of the poem. It is better to pass over them with brief regret, and to attend to the business in hand, which is to make it abundantly clear that these verses, the crown of their creator's victory over life and death, form an imperial ciclet (as also the aureole of a saint) about the brows of Burton.

Firstly, what is the plea of the poem at the Bar of the Justice of Jupiter?

"as he pronounces lustily on each deed
 of so much fame in heaven accept thy meed!"

The Masidah ^{makes} ~~has~~ this colossal claim, that it
 is the first (and indeed, the only) attempt
 to coordinate the conceptions of all classes
 of men, all codes of thought. It forges a
 coherent chain from the first to the last
 'syllable of recorded time', from the nearest
 to the furthest stretch of space. It takes
 into account every fact that was known
 at the time of its composition - which
 occupied a quarter of a century - and every
 speculation that has ever been based
 upon them. It considers them with
 sceptical candour as with impersonal

impartiality. It accepts in private judgments
 with the same cool common-sense consideration
 as it does objective observations. It holds
 the balance with absolute indifference; the
 feather of Truth is not stirred either by
 the wind of the desert or the breath of the
 traveller. Finally, it sums up the whole
 argument with a critical submission to
 the limitations of human light, while
 at the same time it delivers a verdict
 which attains the asymptote of philosophical
 possibility by dismissing the disputants.
 Things as they are? Things as they
 seem? That which seems, actually is
 by virtue of the fact that it seems.*

* Friedrich Schlegel, *Cogitationen, Essays etc.*, See "The Soldier and The Merchant" "The Egyptian" Vol. I No. 1.

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* Footnote. "Cogitamus, ergo est." See "The Soldier and the Hunchback" The Equinox Vol I No 1.

Reason is Right, because the laws of Reason are of the substance of the matter. The problem of Existence is solved by the simple recognition that it is a problem. ~~just~~ It is the Nature of Things that it should be insoluble; all that is necessary is to accept that circumstance as ineluctable. For instance, it is certainly the case that a triangle is a three-sided figure; but to analyse the triangle does not explain it away; it remains as one of the fundamental ideas in ~~on~~ the mind, utterly ~~is~~ unintelligible and irreducible in one sense, absolutely simple and self-evident in another. So in all investigation of life and action, thought and impression, the

further we go the more we know; yet the additional knowledge merely establishes new relations between various ideas in our minds, ~~and~~ such relations are new facts, even new types of fact; they do not answer our original question as to what anything actually is in itself.

Now this philosophy is pantomimic. One cannot proceed beyond it - as soon as it is fully understood. It may be expressed indifferently in as many sets of terms as there are minds; it is equally sceptical as it is mystical, as idealistic as it is pragmatic. Any attempt to culminate it on the side of any possible theory is merely

to select one of its aspects for special attention.

There is a certain Vision* in which the seer advances up towards the summit of a mighty mountain. There on it a vast Temple ringed round by pylons; and as the adept passes through the pylon which crowns his path the Angel Warden ~~tells~~ communicates the awful secret of the peak: "There is no God!" This pass-word, ^{then} goes round, ^{the circle} from one to another; but each, ^{Angel} pronounces and utters it in his own way, so that the Candidate is aware that every possible interpretation thereof in any particular mind is but

* See The Equinox Vol I No 5 Supplement: Fifth Act

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There is a certain "Noria" in which the sea advances up towards the summit

of a slightly mountain. Thereon is a vast Temple ringed round by pylons; and as the ascent begins through the pylons which surround his path the Angel

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* See The Equinox Vol I No 5 Supplement: Fifth Act

sublime, and that the Truth is hidden
behind the pyramids, upon the peak of the
mountain itself.

This philosophy of the Kāsidah is
then at the apex of the Pyramid,
where all lines, long and short alike,
merge in a point, common to all, which
hath no parts nor magnitude. And
it is this stupendous summary of
speculative thought which makes the
poem unique in history. It does not
end with a sublime exclamation, but
with the simple superficial sense-perception
with which it began: The whirler of the

desert wind; the rimbaling of the camel-bell.
 The ~~reality~~ of the pilgrim has recognized
 that these things are illusion, and sought
 Reality beyond them. He has found such
 deeper truths equally illusion; and only when
 "the wheel has come full circle" does he
 discover that even the most absurdly
 shallow illusion is itself uttermost Reality.
 Everything, even the ^{securest} ~~deepest~~ certainty of
 the profoundest philosopher, is a provolous
 falsehood; yet also every thing, even the
 vainest phantasm of sense ^{or} imagination,
 is the ultimate and absolute Truth!

However the professional philosopher
 may pierce-hole this ^{Summum} ~~Summum~~ of Bacon.