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## ARTICLE IV.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL DISINTEGRATION  
OF ISLAM.<sup>1</sup>

BY THE REV. HENRY WOODWARD HULBERT.

TAKEN together, the first five centuries of the Christian church present a splendid spectacle of the power of the new faith to win its way against all obstacles. External to the Christian organization, Judaism, the Græco-Roman pagan systems, the Stoic, Cynic, and Epicurean philosophies, the revived mystery cults, Neo-Pythagoreanism, Neo-Platonism, and a final syncretism of all the pagan elements, went down in succession before the all-conquering faith in the Crucified One—Judaism alone remaining to-day to tell the story of disaster.

Within the church waged a still fiercer contest. In the guise of Christian heresies, the Jewish and Pagan elements

<sup>1</sup> BIBLIOGRAPHY.

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crept into the early church. Ebionitism, Gnosticism, Sabellianism, Manichæism, Arianism, Pelagianism, Monophysitism, Monothelitism, each in turn, and at times several in combination, stormed at the citadel of faith—all in vain as far as affecting any organic lodgment or even holding any outstanding tower or battlement.

We may justly account these continued victories without and within as proof of the fundamental basis in truth of that faith. Doubtless these hostile forces were useful in the disciplinary work which we cannot but think was necessary in the progress to be made. By them, every joint in the Christian armor was tested, every weapon in which the church was trusting was put to trial, and in the great creeds of the ecumenical councils the fundamentals of faith were formulated for all ages.

It is now our purpose to contrast at some length the first five centuries of Islam with these first five triumphant centuries of Christianity.

It was a sad day for Christendom when the Imperial church in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries undertook to extirpate paganism within the Empire by persecution. It is true that Neo-Platonism in its later development was taking on a quasi-trinitarian cast, and that some prominent Christians were yielding to the vague pantheistic ideas of Emanation taught by the philosophers; but, could the weakened and vanishing remains of the pagan cults, especially pagan philosophy (mainly in the form of Neo-Platonism), have remained within the bounds of Christendom, there can be little doubt but that they would have died out as effectually as did the great heresies. The safest place in which to keep wrong opinions is in the full blaze of the best intellectual and spiritual life of an age.

Hence, when the church of the Byzantine Empire forcibly drove the scattered remains of paganism across its borders, and into sections essentially non-Christian, and so

many of them soon to become Mohammedan, she gave a new lease of life to those very elements of speculative opposition, and was sowing broadcast those dragon's teeth whose harvesting would bring back to Christendom not only the tramp of armed men, but the whole array of the old Greek paganism, new panoplied with Damascus steel, and at a time when Christendom was, to all human view, poorly prepared to meet the onslaught.

But, however threatening a revival of pagan philosophy was to prove to Christianity at a later development, it was to demonstrate itself in the meanwhile almost the total destruction of Islam, which had far less resistant force. With this in view, let us glance for a moment at the nature and surrounding conditions of the early faith of Muhammad.

Who could have predicted the rise of so mighty a power as Islam from the hitherto silent Arabian peninsula? The "times of ignorance," as the prophet designated what went before him in Arabia, gave little promise of being the prelude of the unprecedented upheaval to the Pacific and Atlantic ushered in by the missionary armies of Islam. Sexual dualism, the most brutalizing of all idolatrous ideas, seems to have been the fundamental religious notion of the Arabs. Drunkenness, gambling, theft, personal vengeance, gross love-intrigues, the loosest possible family-ties, the degradation of woman to a merely animal existence, would not seem to be traits of a people preparing to enter upon so large a stage of activities. There was, however, a considerable stir of literary life, and renowned poets contested for the preëminence at the annual fairs, while the successful poems were displayed on the walls of the Kaaba. The best indication was that a wide-spread indifference made it evident that such a low state of religious and social life was doomed. Serious minds turned in every direction for help. There arose an ascetic fraternity who called them-

selves Ḥanifs ("penitents"). They sought to go back to the simple faith of Abraham, whom they styled the first Ḥanif. They proclaimed themselves as seekers after truth, and adopted for the most part a hermit life. They anticipated the central idea contained in the word "Islam" ("submission" or "resignation"), and their conception of God was summed up in the word "Judgment."

Into this twilight of faith came the earnest-minded Muḥammad. Sick at heart over the conditions of morals about him, he turned to a life of contemplation, haunting the cavernous hills about Mecca, and receiving the spiritual consolations of his faithful Khadija. Deeply impressed with vague information received about the Christian religion, more thoroughly inducted into the rabbinical travesties on the Old Testament narrative, the mind of Muḥammad gradually crystallized ideas which made up the body of the faith he championed at Mecca, and then at Medina, and at length, through his emissaries, throughout Arabia, dying with a world-vision of a theocratic religio-political kingdom.

The secret of the strength as well as the weakness of Islam—the most formidable organized foe of Christianity—may be extracted from the letter Muḥammad sent from Medina, in the year 627 A.D., to Heraclius, the emperor, at Constantinople. It reads as follows:

"In the name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful. Muḥammad, who is the servant of God and is His apostle, to Heragl the Qaiser of Rum; peace be on whoever has gone on the straight road. After this I say, Verily I call you to Islam ('submission'). Embrace Islam and God will reward you twofold. If you turn away from the offer of Islam, then on you be the sins of your people. O people of the Book (Christians) come toward a creed which is fit both for us and for you. It is this—to worship none but God and not to call others God. Therefore, O ye peo-

ple of the Book, if ye refuse, beware! But we are Muslims and our religion is Islam.

[Seal] "Muhammad the Apostle of God."

With this spirit the armies of Islam threw themselves upon the territories nearest at hand. When we examine the weakened condition of the peoples attacked by these fanatical hordes, we need not be surprised at their victories in the field. What distresses us is the ease with which they won their spiritual victories, and swept vast numbers of pagans and nominal Christians into their ranks. It is to be remarked that most of the Christians thus won over were so-called heretical Christians—Nestorians in Persia, Monothelites in Syria, Monophysites in Egypt, and Arians in North Africa and to a certain extent in Spain. Here again orthodoxy at Constantinople utilized the persecuting spirit to its own hurt. Heresy, kept within the Empire and generously handled, might soon have eaten out its own heart, and disappeared; but, across the border and in distant corners, it fattened on the opposition, and learned to hate the imperial formula more than it did the enemies of the faith. And thus the stern discipline of the Koran spread itself with ease over the old centers of what had now become a corrupt Christianity.

It was the great infelicity of Islam, however, that it developed in a corner. Sir William Muir well says:

"In fine, viewed thus in a religious aspect, the surface of Arabia had been now and then gently rippled by the feeble efforts of Christianity; the sterner influences of Judaism had been occasionally visible in a deeper and more troubled current, but the tide of indigenous idolatry and Ishmaelite superstition, setting from every quarter with an unbroken and unebbing surge toward the Kaaba, gave ample evidence that the faith and worship of Mecca held the Arab mind in a thralldom rigorous and undisputed. Yet, even amongst a people thus enthralled there existed ele-

ments which a master mind, seeking the regeneration of Arabia, might work upon. . . . The material for a great change was here. But it required to be wrought; and Mahomet was the workman."

The whole scheme of Islam crystallized in the hermitage of the Arabian deserts. Christianity was born and nurtured in the full blaze of the best intellectual and spiritual light the world had. Mohammedanism came forth from its seclusion, its veins throbbing with a fervor of suppressed energy of feeling, blinking even in the twilight of a demoralized Christianity, and rushed fanatically to a world-conquest. The first century was spent in an unparalleled geographical expansion which left little or no time for calm comparison. The Ommeyad Kaliphs from Damascus from A.D. 661 directed the vast scheme of conquest with a statesmanship which compels our admiration. By 711 A.D. the Koran had sway from the Indus to the Atlantic, and its votaries surged up against the walls of Constantinople and over the Pyrenees. But here the work of conquest was checked. The forward impulse died out, and Islam settled down at Damascus, and then at Baghdad, to count over the treasures she had amassed. Now for the first time she came out into what remained of the intellectual and spiritual noonday of ancient civilization. This is the critical point in her history. A few centuries now will make evident her strength or her inherent weakness.

Let us turn at this point for a moment and notice what occurred in the meanwhile in the Byzantine Empire. In the year 529 A.D., Justinian had closed the pagan schools of philosophy, and Neo-Platonism, as we have seen, went forth from classic Athens to seek a new home and a more favorable environment. Zoroastrian Persia gave the first harborage to the exiles. The heretical Christian centers of Edessa and later Nisibis became fulcrums on which the revived spirit of pagan philosophy might get its purchase

on the creed of the fanatical innocents from the Arabian deserts. The Koran forbade all free investigation of religious opinions, but through the agency of Syrian Christians the way was opened. Aristotle and Plato and the works of the Neo-Platonists were translated into Syriac, and then into Arabic. The subtle pagan mysticism of Persia and of India, closely allied with various phases of Neo-Platonism, coöperated with the Greek exiles.

A century later than the banishment of the Neo-Platonists, there arose in the Empire at its extreme eastern limit the heretical sect who styled themselves "Paulicians." They were the spiritual successors of the Marcionite type of Gnosticism, dualists, who repudiated the Old Testament as the work of the evil Demiurge. They rejected the human birth of Jesus, and received the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist as symbolic acts not to be repeated. They also set themselves against the whole hierarchical system, as well as against various abuses that had crept into the church. The imperial arm was, however, soon raised against this body of schismatics. Symeon, the Byzantine officer sent to persecute them to the death, was converted by the simplicity and heroism of the martyrs. Becoming their leader, he himself suffered martyrdom. Persecution seems to have given vigor to the sect, and, when at last its votaries were banished in the ninth century, they established themselves in Saracen territory just beyond the limits of the Empire, and kept up thereafter a constant guerilla warfare upon their former persecutors.

When, therefore, the Abbasside Kaliphate established itself on the Persian border, and the city of Baghdad became the new Athens of science and philosophy and art, a combination of forces hostile to orthodox Christianity took place of singular power—the legalistic and materialistic spirit of classic Greek philosophy, the wild mysticism of Persia and Hindu orientalism, the servile accommodation



of heretical Christianity, and the stern willfulness of fatalistic Islam. In the brilliant and luxuriant court of Haroun er Rasheed and Al Ma'mun, and for a time Al Mu'atasim, all of these variant forces were given free sway. The result was overwhelmingly in favor of the elements which had longest been bearing the brunt of a world-struggle of ideas. Islam had no chance, and could hold its footing in intellectual circles only by surrendering its identity and by allegorizing the fundamental precepts of the Koran. Already the Mohammedan world had been rent in twain by the schism of Shi'ite *vs.* Sunnite over the question of spiritual and temporal succession. The Shi'ites were mainly Persians, and thus had Aryan blood in their veins. The basal notion in the Aryan word "man" is "thinker," and the race has always remained true to its intellectual birthright. Christian heresies, Greek philosophy, and oriental Aryan mysticism made short work with the Shi'ite division, and, although the Persians have furnished Islam with only ten million votaries at its most flourishing period, hardly more than one-twentieth in all; yet it has had from the earliest times more antagonizing and heretical sects than all the rest of the world of Islam put together. Mohammedan rationalism has always found its home in Persia. Keen minds like Isaak el Kindi, Al Farabi, Avicenna, and el Gazel marked out the road which the world of Mohammedan learning could not help following out east and west. The Shi'ite sects in particular, even the more conservative of them, were receptacles of all the former religious ideas of Persia.

As we have seen, in the early days of Islam its primitive fanaticism excluded any theological discussion, any going behind the veil of revelation. The Koran must be accepted *in toto*, without reservation, and the troubled heart must await the day of judgment for the solution of all its metaphysical and other difficulties. And here it is

to be remarked that this position is the only practicable one for Islam. The inconsistencies—historical, ethical, and religious—of the Koran are so apparent that any attempted analysis or systematization must lead to irretrievable doubt or to the abandonment of the whole scheme. The first five centuries of Islam make this quite evident. All seemed lost, from the intellectual standpoint, when the Ottoman appeared and the stern hand of repression put down the thinking element in Islam, and she has managed thus to work along to this latter decade of the nineteenth century. But once put aside this repressive policy, and bring the whole theory of the Koran or any of its variants into the blaze of (not now Greek philosophy, but) modern science and of the historical method, and it must vanish quickly, except where sheer fanaticism shall allow it a lingering death. This condition of things is the fundamental explanation of the method of the Ottoman with the Armenian to-day. Islam cannot bear light and discussion. But the century of geographical expansion was not over when, at Bosrah, on the Persian gulf, arose a theological innovator, named Haşan, who introduced into the Mohammedan world the critical study of dogma. His disciple, Waşil ibn 'Ata, systematized the doctrine of the school thus formed into the creed adopted by the Mo'tazilite sect. In this body of dogma it was denied that attributes could be ascribed to God. He was considered too far away, too unapproachable (as in Neo-Platonism), for the familiarity thus implied. This sect rejected the doctrine of fatalistic predestination, so clearly taught in the Koran, and added to paradise and gehenna an intermediate station not unlike purgatory. The Jabarites, although agreeing with the Mo'tazilites that attributes could not be predicated of God, took an extreme view in favor of fatalism. In contradistinction to both of these sects, the Safatites held to the grossest anthropomorphism. The Ismailians, a power-

ful Shi'ite sect, believed in a God above the Allah of the Koran. He was unapproachable by human reason. His will created the "Universal Reason." This produced the "universal soul," and thence came matter and space and time—making together the five causes of the universe. Man emanated from these, and ever had a tendency back to a union with the universal reason. Of himself he was powerless to accomplish this aim. Hence the universal reason and the universal soul became incarnate in the prophets of all ages, and especially in Ali and the Imams.

About 875 A.D. a certain Abdallah ibn Mainun al Kad-dah attempted to use the doctrine of this sect to destroy Islam. He called together a congress of religions (one of the earliest on record) which was to bring into comparison all faiths, with the aim of constructing a final religion which would contain the good qualities of them all. Mohammed ibn Ismail was proclaimed the true Messiah or Mahdi, and missionaries were sent to the four quarters of the globe. The Ismailian sect was a sort of free-masonry, and its members were to rise from arcanum to arcanum by slow gradations, in each rise sworn to the most dread secrecy. The Fatimite dynasty of Egypt grew out of this movement. The Druses of Mt. Lebanon and that strange sect of the Assassins were lineal descendants of the Ismailian heresy.

The ascetic heresy of Sufism arose in the East, and was thoroughly pantheistic. "Every man is God," said one of their leaders.

It is not possible here and now to go into the subject-matter of the almost innumerable heresies in the Mohammedan world. Over one hundred and fifty of them have been carefully tabulated and described, and that by no means exhausts the list. It is probable that the sects in Islam far outnumber those of Christianity. As the unity of the Mohammedan world fell apart with the rise of the

Abassid dynasty and the flight of the Ommeyads to Cordova, and as later almost innumerable political divisions shattered the uniformity in statecraft; so the spiritual feudalism brought unending internecine strife, and the theocratic ideal of the Koran fell forever. The spirit of the various sects is fairly represented by an utterance ascribed to Muhammad when he said: "Verily, it will happen to my people even as it did to the children of Israel. The children of Israel were divided into seventy-two sects, and my people will be divided into seventy-three. Every one of the sects will go to gehenna except one."

It is probably correct to ascribe this almost immediate and universal falling apart of the Mohammedan world in theological matters to the rationalizing influences of Greek philosophy and the closely allied oriental schemes of thought. Doubtless other forces were at work in both the political and doctrinal world to assist in the process of disintegration, but that the philosophical element was the predominant factor may be proved beyond a doubt by a brief study of the rise and development of Arabian philosophy as seen in the East in Al Kindi, Al Farabi, Avicenna, and Al Gazel; and in the West by Avempace, Avicenna, and Averroes. We shall quickly find justification for the assertion that "the whole philosophy of the Arabians was only a form of Aristotelianism tempered more or less with Neo-Platonic conceptions."

The encyclopedic mind of Al Kindi left scarcely a topic of thought untouched. Born at Bosrah, on the Persian gulf, about 900 A.D., he had produced before his death, seventy years later, over two hundred and sixty-three treatises, of which thirty-two were on philosophy. He set himself to reconcile faith and philosophy, perceiving that the Islamic faith seemed at variance with the Aristotelian system, which, by his time, was widely accepted among the Arabs. A Platonizing spirit influenced his

Aristotelianism. He found the bond of union of all things to be a universal soul of the world with its partial or fragmentary souls. In theology the reason must as a last resort settle all matters.

Al Farabi, a contemporary, began his study and teaching at Baghdad, and continued them at Aleppo and Damascus. While presenting in his metaphysical speculations much that was found useful to the Christian theologians of a later date, Al Farabi was essentially a Neo-Platonist, and the doctrine of emanation is the key to his system. Somewhat inconsistently he affirmed that the First Being, of which he predicates Intelligence (as over against the *Nous* of Plotinus, which could not have attributes), created first of all the Intellect. From this by emanation came forth the Cosmical Soul. By combinations of these are formed matter and all terrestrial bodies. "Evil is a necessary condition of good in a finite world," he affirmed. Yet "all things are under divine guidance and are good, since all was created by God." Knowledge of the First Being is the end of philosophy, and with the Neo-Platonists he defines the practical duty of man as consisting in rising as far as human force permits it into likeness with God.<sup>1</sup>

Avicenna (978-1036 A.D., Bokhara-Ispahan) rejected many of the Neo-Platonizing ideas of Al Farabi, and with Aristotle held to the eternity of matter. As Erdmann points out, Avicenna answers the questions raised by the Neo-Platonist Porphyry by saying, that all genera had a real existence in the Divine understanding; they have a real existence in the individuals and also a real existence in our concepts; thus settling in the Orient the contest which waged long after in the West between realism, nominalism, and conceptualism.

Al Gazel, a skeptic in philosophy, closes the succession

<sup>1</sup> Ueberweg, Vol. i. p. 363.

of philosophers in the East. He became a Sufi—a mystic, and gave over the attempt to think out his faith. An unphilosophical orthodoxy now received the backing of the Mongol Ottoman, and after the cataclysm of the Crusades speculative questioning was suppressed in the Orient.

In the West, in the brilliant court of the Kaliphate of Cordova, conditions had been most favorable to the development of philosophical speculations. Great schools had arisen; Jews and Christians were given freedom of thought and activity and Islam opened itself out to free-thinking in close proximity to Europe now drugged into spiritual and intellectual slumbers. Avempace and Abubacer were thorough rationalists. Man without revelation is in a position to know God, they said. The former was repeatedly styled an enemy of religion. But it was in Averroes that philosophical speculation reached its paradise. Aristotle became his supreme master. While not hostile to religion, he looked upon all religions “as containing philosophical truth under the veil of figurative representation; by allegorical interpretation one might advance to purer knowledge, while the masses held to the literal sense. The highest grade of intelligence was philosophical knowledge.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus it was that the whole world of Islam was honeycombed by religious doubt. Having ventured out into the “open” of the world’s thought, it soon found itself, in strong contrast to the Christian victories of the first five centuries of the Christian era, a victim to pagan metaphysical speculation, which, having run its swift course, left no resource but to acknowledge the inability of the Koranic faith to be harmonized with philosophy. This outcome threw all the bolder, freer minds in the world of Islam into utter skepticism. A denial of the fundamentals of revealed religion, a thoroughly materialistic conception of

<sup>1</sup> Ueberweg, Vol. i. p. 417.

life and destiny, a pathetic and yet half-mocking appeal to thoughtful men to eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we and whatever is precious to us must go out of existence, as the flame that is blown out, are all that is left. The masses might be humored by the fantasies of so-called religion; but the thinking man must be above all this, and must calm all agitations of mind or conscience in the stoical acceptance of fate.

The typical mind of this outcome of the contact of Islam with pagan philosophy and mysticism was the Persian astronomer-poet Omar Khayyam. In closing our theme, let us glance at his life and writings with the view of understanding the situation of things at that critical period when the rude warriors of Europe, at the command of a Christian Kaliph, and in the form of a Christian Jihad ("Holy War"), struck a blow at the Kaffir ("infidel") who held the most revered relic in the world, the tomb of the Christ.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Let me emphasize here what I believe to have been the prime cause of the Crusades. Christendom was by the year 1050 hemmed round by a huge crescent of Islam from the Pyrenees to the Volga. Europe was sunk to its lowest state of ignorance and superstition. The pornography at Rome and like iniquity almost everywhere else in the high places of the church had created a restlessness on the part of the people. As Sabatier has so vigorously pointed out, the many-titled heresy of the Cathari was eating out the heart of Southern Christendom. The best part of Europe, Southern France, was almost to a man in revolt against the church. Italy was going fast along the same way. Distrust and doubt were everywhere. Some of the brightest minds came into contact with speculative doubt in Spain. Sicily was looked upon as a nest of heretics who had come into contact with skeptical Muslims. The spirit of doubt everywhere rampant in Islam was pouring over into Europe. The great heart of Christian Europe, distrusting its leaders, chafing under widespread spiritual defections, looked blindly about to seek the cause of all this, rose as one man at the call to battle against a foe whose *spiritual* invasions promised more terrors for Christendom than all the martial victories of the previous centuries. Says Erdmann (p. 358): "All that Christianity had ever opposed reappears now united in Islam in a rejuvenated form. Heathenism, Judaism, and Christian heresy were the teachers of Mohammed. What they gave their pupil was fused by him,

Omar Khayyam was born at Naishapur in Khorasan, Persia, about the middle of the eleventh century (c. 1050 A.D.). As far back as the reign of Haroun er Rasheed, the Kaliphate had utilized, as a bodyguard, Mongol slaves captured in the distant wars in Central Asia. The story of how these Seljuk proselytes to the faith gradually gathered power at Baghdad and, finally, aided by soldiers of fortune from the Turkish hordes, took possession of *political* affairs as "mayors of the palace" to the *spiritual* Kaliph, is well known. In 1058 Togrul Beg, as Emir al Omra, assumed control of military affairs in the dying Kaliphate. His son, Alp Arslan, and Malik Shah, who followed, gathered matters into their own hands more and more, and their devastating armies moved east and west through the Mohammedan world. A general indifference to religion made the court of these barbarians at Ispahan the hotbed of Mohammedan free-thinking, in greatest contrast to the Ottoman court at Brusa, a few centuries later. The Visier, Nizam ul Mulk, has left us a quaint story of his school-boy days, when, at Naishapur, he studied under Abd es Samad, together with our poet Omar and Hasan Ben Sabbah, afterwards the originator of that strange division of the Ismailians called the "Assassins." The three boys made a mutual vow, that, if any one reached a position of power, he would share with the others. They parted, and years after Nizam ul Mulk became the vizier of Alp Arslan at Ispahan. Whereupon his two friends appealed to the school-boy promise. Hasan Ben Sabbah was given a lucrative position, with prospects of advance. He became involved, however, in a court intrigue, fled, and established himself at the head of the sect

in the spirit of a world-conqueror, into one doctrine which is entirely of this world, so that all the various traits which the Apostolic age had ascribed to Anti-Christ are united in Islam, the true Anti-Christianity. An encounter with the Anti-Christ was the general desire."



of the Assassins in the impregnable castle of Alamut, south of the Caspian Sea. One of the victims of that terror-bringing order was the old school-friend Nizam ul Mulk.

Omar, to the contrary, refused a position of political trust, and said: "The greatest boon you can confer on me is to let me live in a corner under the shadow of your fortune, to spread wide the advantages of science, and pray for your long life and prosperity." Whereupon he was given a pension, and carried out to the full his wishes. He became great in mathematics, in astronomy, but particularly as a free-thinking poet. Under the lead of Mr. Edward Fitzgerald, the "breviary of a radical free-thinker," the Voltaire of Islam, has been made of late the subject of enthusiastic study.

It is not necessary to quote the quatrains of Omar Khayyam at length for our present purpose, but only to call attention to them as the logical outcome in the philosophical disintegration of Islam. In vain, to my thinking, do romanticists attempt to allegorize away the sad pessimism and revolting materialism which make up the warp and woof of these strange, fascinating lines:—

"Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend  
Before we too into the dust descend:  
Dust unto dust and under dust to lie  
Sans wine, sans song, sans singer, sans end.

"Alike for those who for to-day prepare,  
And those that after some to-morrow stare,  
A muezzin from the tower of darkness cries,  
'Fools, your reward is neither here nor there.'

"A moment's halt—a momentary taste  
Of being from the well amid the waste,  
And lo! the phantom caravan has reached  
The Nothing it set out from—oh make haste!

"O threats of hell and hopes of paradise,  
One thing at least is certain—this life flies.  
One thing is certain and the rest is lies,  
The flower that once has blown forever dies.

“ Yet—ah, that spring should vanish with the rose;  
 That youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close;  
 The nightingale that in the branches sang,  
 Ah, whence and whither flown again—who knows !

“ Waste not your hour nor in the vain pursuit  
 Of this and that endeavor and dispute;  
 Better be jocund with the fruitful grape  
 Than sadden after none or better fruit.

“ Into this universe, and why not knowing;  
 Nor whence like water willy-nilly flowing;  
 And out of it, as wind along the waste  
 I know not whither, willy-nilly blowing.

“ Earth could not answer, nor the seas that mourn  
 In flowing purple of their Lord forlorn,  
 Nor rolling heaven with all his signs revealed  
 And hidden by the sleeve of night and morn.”

Contrast this despairing wail of a disintegrated Islam with the faith-cry of the Christian poet of mediævalism who, too, walked “this dark wood where the straight path was confused”! Listen to the description of the meeting of Dante with Beatrice, the emblem of divine truth:—

“ ‘ Turn, Beatrice, O turn thy holy eyes,  
 Such was their song—‘ unto thy faithful one,  
 Who has to see thee ta'en so many steps.  
 In grace do us the grace that thou unveil  
 Thy face to him, so that he may discern  
 The second beauty which thou dost conceal !  
 O splendor of the living light eternal !  
 Who underneath the shadow of Parnassus  
 Hath grown so pale, or drunk so at its cistern,  
 He would not seem to have his mind encumbered  
 Striving to paint thee as thou didst appear,  
 Where the harmonious heaven o'ershadowed thee,  
 When in the open air thou didst unveil thyself ! ”