

# ST FRANCIS AND GAUTAMA

## I

' Childlike, thou sayest, is the friend of God ?  
Such love he asks from man as lovers use,  
Making of love the path to happiness ?  
Fond is such love ; for Death and Sorrow dog  
The bliss of lovers and Delusion blinds.  
To tear Delusion's veil and find Release,  
To purge the heart of passionate Desire  
That binds him darkling to the Wheel of Life—  
Such is the Path of Wisdom, such the staff  
For full-grown man to lean on, and escape  
From all the woe and pity of the world.  
Not Love but Wisdom is the remedy :  
Not children we, but men upon the rack !'

## II

Thus Gautama, whom in a dream I saw  
Hold high communion with Assisi's Saint  
Francis, that passionate lover of his Lord  
And of his little brethren. Laughingly  
The Ocean laved their feet, and round about  
The patient simple beasts stood listening.  
' Nay but,' quoth Francis, ' God our Lord on High  
Of us his brethren is not gotten else  
Save only by such Love, so only held,  
By wisdom never nor enlightenment ;  
Therefore in love is highest wisdom found ;  
For losing God, what profiteth the World ?  
The power of Love thou knowest, and hast sung,  
Who for it spurned the love of power and pomp,  
Taking for bride our sister Poverty,  
And living in gentleness with man and beast.  
Thy life, my Brother, mirrors the life of God,  
Whose Heart is all compassion, and His name  
Is Love ; to whom man's Wisdom seemeth fond.

For love responds to love as lute to touch  
 And loveless wisdom is a stringless lute.  
 Such Wisdom passeth, Love alone abides  
 Amidst the change and chance of fleeting things.'

### III

'Fleeting indeed ! And like a painted gaud,  
 Or some mirage that lures the thirsty soul  
 'Mid desert ways under the fierce sun's eye,  
 Is this dark world. All passes, naught abides ;  
 Nor Love nor Wisdom. Therefore let the wise  
 Escape, and find elsewhere abiding peace,  
 Nirvana's peace that naught can take away,  
 Surcease of suffering and lust and all.  
 Thou speakest of God ; if He be anywhere  
 'Tis truly where Love rules the hearts of men :  
 Yet Love not blind, as children and lovers use,  
 But clear-eyed, purged of passion, pitiful  
 And yet serene, nor suffering itself  
 By any strain of human woe or sin  
 To lose its own calm lofty pinnacle.  
 Such pity seeth man as bound and racked  
 Upon the Wheel of Fate, and calls him " Fool " !  
 If God there be so must He view the World,  
 And pitying contrive a swift release :  
 For less are all the waters of the sea  
 Than all the weary waste of human tears.  
 Could Love create and bind us to the Wheel ?  
 Strange God—the source of endless misery !  
 Should He not suffer for the world He made,  
 As man doth suffer for his lighter sin ?  
 All suffer, all hate suffering, all alike  
 May win escape by wise self-mastery !  
 Thus have I taught, and so my followers teach  
 (That ancient Knighthood of the Yellow Robe  
 Which doth endure when Kings and Emperors pass) :  
 This is the central truth of suffering,  
 Pervading all as salt pervades the sea.  
 The Gods, if any Gods there be, are dumb !  
 Strive on, and master self and win release !'

## IV

' In self-forgetfulness is higher Wisdom hid,  
In self-surrender, not self-mastery !  
To high adventure in the cause of Love  
God calls ; to seek release were cowardice.  
He sets us in this weary world of pain  
To make it glad with joy and love and song.  
Thou askest of the nature of our God :  
In strength made perfect in humility  
See inmost Godhead perfectly revealed ;  
Here is the abiding source of peace and joy.  
Learn this, my Brother, suffering is a boon ;  
The pains of Love are worth all pleasures else.  
Whom most God honours, most He gives to love  
And with most love gives power to suffer most !  
In sufferance is His Majesty made plain,  
His power most mighty when His heart doth break ;  
For so alone doth man, o'ercome by Love  
Find strength to conquer Pride and Lust and Wrath,  
Arming himself in Love's strong armoury.  
So only is he reconciled to God  
And purged his heart of bitter enmity !  
To conquer self, man needs must die to self,  
And Love alone may find the secret path  
That leads through pain to blest communion.  
God suffereth, Brother, as thou sayest He must :  
On Calvary see His breaking heart laid bare ! '

## V

So spake these holy ones, rapt from the world  
Of sense and time, in whom the spirit strove,  
Conquering the frail worn flesh : their eyes,  
Seeing eternal verities, shone full of joy.  
Yet diverse seemed the joy I saw revealed  
In these two heroes of the way of pain  
My soul had revered long and now beheld.  
The eyes of Francis glowed with radiant light  
As seeing Him who is invisible,  
And filled with love for man and beast and all  
This beauteous world which is His blazonry.

Siddartha's eye was calm and glad, yet lit  
 With sombre joy and sorrowful content,  
 As who should say, 'The world is but a snare ;  
 What matter ? It is nought to me and mine !'  
 So sate these two physicians of the soul,  
 Pondering the Gospel each had found and proved.

## VI

And then I think God whispered in the ear  
 Of His beloved : turning him to song  
 Swifter to heal than weightiest argument.  
 For never was a reed more simple and straight  
 For Him to fill with heavenly harmony.  
 He sang of all God's creatures : Sun and Moon  
 And of the joyful choir of the Stars  
 Which tell aloud the praises of their Lord,  
 And hymn Him ever to the listening spheres.  
 He sang of water who is pleasant, and of rain  
 Who comforts and replenishes the earth,  
 Making her sing in praise antiphonal :  
 Of birds and beasts, his little brethren too,  
 Who in their joyance praise the Source of joy,  
 And by their living hymn the Lord of Life,  
 Till all His world is filled with minstrelsy.  
 Then as the silver melody thrilled on,  
 Rising like water in a clear pure jet  
 To Heaven, I saw Siddartha smile, and joy  
 Light up the deep-set cavern of his eyes :  
 'I, too,' he sang, 'have loved the teeming earth,  
 And sought to spare my little brothers pain  
 Even to the least, yea, even to the brood of snakes ;  
 For they too cherish the warm life within.  
 "Even as a mother's love enfolds her son,  
 Her only son, with tender watchful care,  
 So, through the world let thy compassion move  
 Deep and pervading as the encompassing sea."  
 So far I knew—but now I know indeed  
 That Love hath depths beyond our mortal ken  
 And highest Wisdom is in Love revealed.

O Maitri !<sup>1</sup> whom far off I saw and loved,  
In very Christ I find thee, and adore !  
O Love of God that taught me how to love  
Unknown, unrecognized, yet now made plain !  
O Holy One ! O suffering Godhead, Thou  
Whose Love encompasses Thy children all,  
O Source of Love, O Mother-Heart divine ;  
On Thee I lay the age-long weight of pain,  
The woe of all this laden labouring world,  
And at Thy feet my emptied self I bow :  
For self is helpless till Thou mak'st it thine.'

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Then as I waked I thought high Heaven pealed  
With glad acclaim, and all creation sang,  
Giving to God the glory and the praise  
Of this last miracle His Grace had wrought ;  
And angel hosts on high sang Francis' song,  
Whilst these two radiant souls passed through the veil.

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<sup>1</sup> The coming Buddha whom Gautama foretold, calling him *Maitri*, which means Love, and prophesying his power to bring men to righteousness.