

The Seven Fountains; an Eastern Allegory: Written in 1767

Deck'd with fresh garlands like a rural bride,
And with the crimson streamer's waving pride,
A wanton bark was floating o'er the main;
And seem'd with scorn, to view the azure plain:
Smooth were the waves; and scarce a whispering gale
Fann'd with his gentle plumes the silken sail.
High, on the burnish'd deck, a gilded throne
With orient pearls and beaming diamonds shone;
On which reclin'd a youth of graceful mien,
His sandals purple, and his mantle green;
His locks, in ringlets, o'er his shoulders roll'd,
And on his cheek appear'd the downy gold.
Around him stood a train of smiling boys,
Sporting with idle cheer and mirthful toys;
¹⁷Ten comely striplings, girt with spangled wings,
Blew piercing flutes, or touch'd the quiv'ring strings;
Ten more, in cadence to the sprightly strain,
Wak'd with their golden oars the slumb'ring main:
The waters yielded to their guiltless blows,
And the green billows sparkled as they rose.

Long time the barge had danc'd along the deep,
And on its glassy bosom seem'd to sleep;
¹⁸But, now, a glittering isle arose in view,
Bounded with hillocks of a verdant hue:
Fresh groves and roseate bowers appear'd above;
(Fit haunts, be sure, of pleasure and of love;)
And, higher still, a thousand blazing spires
Seem'd with gilt tops to threat the heavenly fires.
Now, each fair stripling plied his laboring oar,
And strait the pinnace struck the sandy shore.
The youth arose, and, leaping on the strand,
Took his lone way along the silver sand;
While the light bark, and all the airy crew,
Sunk like a mist beneath the briny dew.

With eager steps, the young adventurer stray'd
Through many a grove, and many a winding glade:
At length, he heard the chime of tuneful strings,
That sweetly floated on the Zephyr's wings;
¹⁹And, soon, a band of damsels blithe and fair,

With flowing mantles and dishevel'd hair,
Rush'd, with quick pace, along the solemn wood,
Where rapt in wonder and delight he stood:
In loose transparent robes they were array'd,
Which half their beauties hid, and half display'd.

A lovely nymph approach'd him with a smile,
And said, 'O, welcome to this blissful isle;
'For thou art he, whom ancient bards foretold,
'Doom'd in our clime to bring an age of gold:
'Hail, sacred king! and from thy subject's hand,
'Accept the robes and sceptre of the land.'

'Sweet maid,' said he, 'fair learning's heavenly beam
O'er my young mind ne'er shed her favoring gleam;
'Nor has my arm e'er hurl'd the fatal lance,
'While desperate legions o'er the plain advance.
'How should a simple youth, unfit to bear
'The steely mail, that splendid mantle wear!'
'Ah!' said the damsel, 'from this happy shore,
'We banish wisdom, and her idle lore;
'No clarions here the strains of battle sing,—
'With notes of mirth our joyful valleys ring.
'Peace to the brave:—o'er us, the beauteous reign,
'And ever-charming pleasures form our train.'

This said, a diadem, inlay'd with pearls,
She plac'd respectful on his golden curls;
Another, o'er his graceful shoulder, threw
A silken mantle of the rose's hue,
Which, clasp'd with studs of gold, behind him flow'd,
And through the folds his glowing bosom show'd.
Then in a car, by snow-white coursers drawn,
They led him o'er the dew-besprinkled lawn,
Through groves of joy and arbors of delight,
With all that could allure his ravish'd sight;
Green hillocks, meads, and rosy grots he view'd,
And verdurous plains with winding streams bedew'd.
On every bank, and under every shade,
A thousand youths, a thousand damsels play'd;
Some wantonly were tripping in a ring
On the soft border of a gushing spring;
While some, reclining in the shady vales,
Told to their smiling loves their amorous tales:
But when the sportful train beheld from far
The nymphs returning with the stately car,
O'er the smooth plain with hasty steps they came,
And hail'd their youthful king with loud acclaim;

With flow'rs of every tint the paths they strow'd,
And cast their chaplets on the hallow'd road.

At last, they reach'd the bosom of a wood,
Where, on a hill, a radiant palace stood;
A sumptuous dome, by hands immortal made,
Which, on its walls and on its gates, display'd
The gems that in the rocks of Tibet glow,
The pearls that in the shells of Ormus grow.
And now a numerous train advance to meet
The youth, descending from his regal seat;
Whom to a rich and spacious hall they led,
With silken carpets delicately spread:
There on a throne with gems unnumber'd grac'd,
Their lovely king six blooming damsels plac'd ²⁰,
And, meekly kneeling, to his modest hand
They gave the glitt'ring sceptre of command;
Then on six smaller thrones they sat reclin'd,
And watch'd the rising transports of his mind:
When thus the youth a blushing nymph address'd,
And, as he spoke, her hand with rapture press'd:

'Say, gentle damsel, may I ask unblam'd
'How this gay isle, and splendid seats, are nam'd?
'And you, fair queens of beauty and of grace,
'Are you of earthly or celestial race?
'To me the world's bright treasures were unknown,
'Where late I wander'd, pensive and alone;
'And, slowly winding on my native shore,
'Saw the vast ocean roll, but saw no more;
'Till from the waves with many a charming song,
'A barge arose, and gayly mov'd along;
'The jolly rowers reach'd the yielding sands,
'Allur'd my steps, and wav'd their shining hands:
'I went, saluted by the vocal train,
'And the swift pinnace cleav'd the waves again;
'When on this island struck the gilded prow,
'I landed full of joy: the rest you know.
'Short is the story of my tender years:
'Now speak, sweet nymph, and charm my listening ears.'

'These are the groves, for ever deck'd with flowers,'—
The maid replied, 'and these the fragrant bowers,—
'Where Love and Pleasure hold their airy court,
'The seat of bliss, of sprightliness, and sport;
'And we, dear youth! are nymphs of heavenly line;
'Our souls immortal, as our forms divine:
'For Maia, fill'd with Zephyr's warm embrace,

‘In caves and forests cover'd her disgrace;
‘At last she rested on this peaceful shore,
‘Where, in yon grot, a lovely boy she bore,
‘Whom, fresh and wild and frolic from his birth,
‘She nurs'd in myrtle bowers, and call'd him Mirth.
‘He on a summer's morning chanc'd to rove
‘Through the green labyrinth of some shady grove,
‘Where, by a dimpled rivulet's verdant side,
‘A rising bank, with woodbine edg'd, he spied:
‘There, veil'd with flowerets of a thousand hues,
‘A nymph lay bath'd in slumber's balmy dews;
‘(This maid by some, for some our race defame,
‘Was Folly call'd, but Pleasure was her name:)
‘Her mantle, like the sky in April, blue,
‘Hung on a blossom'd branch that near her grew;
‘For, long disporting in the silver stream,
‘She shunn'd the blazing day-star's sultry beam;
‘And, ere she could conceal her naked charms,
‘Sleep caught her trembling in his downy arms:
‘Born in the wings of Love, he flew and press'd
‘Her breathing bosom to his eager breast.
‘At his wild theft the rosy morning blush'd,
‘The rivulet smil'd, and all the woods were hush'd.
‘Of these fair parents, on this blissful coast,
‘(Parents like Mirth and Pleasure who can boast!)
‘I with five sisters, on one happy morn,
‘All fair alike, behold us now! were born.
‘When they to brighter regions took their way,
‘By Love invited to the realms of day,
‘To us they gave this large, this gay domain,
‘And said, departing, Here let Beauty reign.
‘Then reign, fair prince! in thee all beauties shine,
‘And, ah! we know thee of no mortal line.’

She said: the king with rapid ardor glow'd,
And the swift poison through his bosom flow'd:
But, while she spoke, he cast his eyes around
To view the dazzling roof, and spangled ground;
Then, turning with amaze from side to side,
Seven golden doors, that richly shone, he spied,
And said, ‘Fair nymph, (but let me not be bold,)
‘What mean those doors that blaze with burnish'd gold?’
‘To six gay bowers,’ the maid replied, ‘they lead,
‘Where Spring eternal crowns the glowing mead;
‘Six fountains there, that glitter as they play,
‘Rise to the sun with many a color'd ray.’
‘But the seventh door,’ said he, ‘what beauties grace?’
“O, 'tis a cave; a dark and joyless place,

“A scene of nameless deeds, and magic spells,
“Where day ne’er shines, and pleasure never dwells:
“Think not of that. But come, my royal friend,
“And see what joys thy favor’d steps attend.”
She spoke; and pointed to the nearest door:
Swift he descends; the damsel flies before;
She turns the lock; it opens at command;
The maid and stripling enter hand in hand.

The wondering youth beheld an opening glade,
Where in the midst a crystal fountain play’d ²¹;
The silver sands, that on its bottom grew,
Were strown with pearls and gems of varied hue;
The diamonds sparkled like the star of day,
And the soft topaz shed a golden ray;
Clear amethysts combin’d their purple gleam
With the mild emerald’s sight-refreshing beam;
The sapphire smil’d like yon blue plain above,
And rubies spread the blushing tint of love.
‘These are the waters of eternal light,’
The damsel said, ‘the stream of heavenly sight;
‘See, in this cup,’ (she spoke, and stoop’d to fill
A vase of jasper with the sacred rill,)
‘See, how the living waters bound and shine,
‘Which this well-polish’d gem can scarce confine!’
From her soft hand, the lucid urn he took,
And quaff’d the nectar with a tender look:
Strait from his eyes a cloud of darkness flew,
And all the scene was open’d to his view;
Not all the groves, where ancient bards have told,
Of vegetable gems, and blooming gold;
Not all the bowers which, oft, in flowery lays
And solemn tales Arabian poets praise—
Though streams of honey flow’d through every mead,
Though balm and amber dropp’d from every reed;
Held half the sweets that Nature’s ample hand
Had pour’d luxuriant o’er this wondrous land
All flowerets here their mingled rays diffuse,
The rainbow’s tints to these were vulgar hues;
All birds that in the stream their pinion dip,
Or from the brink the liquid crystal sip,
Or show their beauties to the sunny skies,
Here wav’d their plumes that shone with varying dyes;
But chiefly he, that o’er the verdant plain
Spreads the gay eyes which grace his spangled train;
And he, who, proudly sailing, loves to show
His mantling wings and neck of downy snow;
Nor absent he, who learns the human sound,

With wavy gold and moving emeralds crown'd:
Whose head and breast with polish'd sapphires glow,
And on whose wing the gems of Indus grow.
The monarch view'd their beauties o'er and o'er,
He was all eye, and look'd from every pore.
But now the damsel calls him from his trance;
And o'er the lawn, delighted, they advance:
They pass the hall adorn'd with royal state,
And enter now with joy, the second gate ²².

A soothing sound he heard, (but tasted first
The gushing stream that from the valley burst,)
And in the shade beheld a youthful quire
That touch'd with flying hands the trembling lyre:
Melodious notes, drawn out with magic art,
Caught with sweet ecstasy his ravish'd heart;
An hundred nymphs their charming descants play'd,
And melting voices died along the glade;
The tuneful stream that murmur'd as it rose,
The birds that on the trees bewail'd their woes,
The boughs, made vocal by the whispering gale,
Join'd their soft strain, and warbled through the vale.
The concert ends: and now the stripling hears
A tender voice that strikes his wondering ears;
A beauteous bird, in our rude climes unknown,
That on a leafy arbor sits alone,
Strains his sweet throat, and waves his purple wings,
And thus in human accents softly sings:

'Rise, lovely pair, a sweeter bower invites
'Your eager steps, a bower of new delights;
'Ah! crop the flowers of pleasure while they blow,
'Ere winter hides them in a veil of snow.
'Youth, like a thin anemone, displays
'His silken leaf, and in a morn decays.
'See, gentle youth! a lily-bosom'd bride;
'See, nymph! a blooming stripling by thy side.
'Then haste, and bathe your souls in soft delights,
'A sweeter bow'r your wandering steps invites.'

He ceas'd; the slender branch, from which he flew,
Bent its fair head, and sprinkled pearly dew.
The damsel smil'd; the blushing youth was pleas'd,
And by her willing hand his charmer seiz'd:
The lovely nymph, who sigh'd for sweeter joy,
To the third gate ²³ conducts the amorous boy;
She turns the key; her cheeks like roses bloom,
And on the lock her fingers drop perfume.

His ravish'd sense a scene of pleasure meets,
A maze of joy, a paradise of sweets;
But first his lips had touch'd th'alluring stream,
That through the grove display'd a silver gleam.
Through jasmine bowers, and violet-scented vales,
On silken pinions flew the wanton gales,—
Arabian odors on the plants they left,
And whisper'd to the woods their spicy theft:
Beneath the shrubs, that spread a trembling shade,
The musky roes, and fragrant civets play'd.
As when, at eve, an Eastern merchant roves
From Hadramut to Aden's spikenard groves,
Where some rich caravan, not long before,
Has pass'd, with cassia fraught, and balmy store,—
Charm'd with the scent that hills and vales diffuse,
His grateful journey gayly he pursues;
Thus pleas'd, the monarch fed his eager soul,
And from each breeze a cloud of fragrance stole:
Soon the fourth door ²⁴ he pass'd with eager haste,
And the fourth stream was nectar to his taste.
Before his eyes, on agate columns rear'd,
On high a purple canopy appear'd;
And under it, in stately form, was plac'd
A table with a thousand vases grac'd;
Laden with all the dainties that are found
In air, in seas, or on the fruitful ground.
Here the fair youth reclin'd with decent pride,
His wanton nymph was seated by his side:
All that could please the taste the happy pair
Cull'd from the loaded board with curious care;
O'er their enchanted heads, a mantling vine
His curling tendrils wove with amorous twine;
From the green stalks the glowing clusters hung,
Like rubies on a thread of emeralds strung;
With these were other fruits of every hue,
The pale, the red, the golden, and the blue.
An hundred smiling pages stood around,
Their shining brows with wreaths of myrtle bound:
They, in transparent cups of agate, bore
Of sweetly-sparkling wines a precious store;
The stripling sipp'd and revel'd, till the sun
Down heaven's blue vault his daily course had run;
Then rose, and, follow'd by the gentle maid,
Op'd the fifth door ²⁵: a stream before them play'd.

The king, impatient for the cooling draught,
In a full cup the mystic nectar quaff'd;
Then with a smile, (he knew no higher bliss,)

From her sweet lip he stole a balmy kiss:
On the smooth bank of violets they reclin'd;
And, whilst a chaplet for his brow she twin'd,
With his soft cheek her softer cheek he press'd;
His pliant arms were folded round her breast.
She smil'd; soft lightning darted from her eyes,
And from his fragrant seat she bade him rise;
Then, while a brighter blush her face o'erspread,
To the sixth gate ²⁶ her willing guest she led.

The golden lock she softly turn'd around;
The moving hinges gave a pleasing sound:
The boy delighted ran with eager haste,
And to his lips the living fountain plac'd;
The magic water pierc'd his kindled brain,
And a strange venom shot from vein to vein.
Whatever charms he saw in other bowers,
Were here combin'd, fruits, music, odors, flowers;
A couch besides, with softest silk o'erlaid;
And, sweeter still, a lovely yielding maid,—
Who now more charming seem'd, and not so coy,
And in her arms infolds the blushing boy:
They sport and wanton, till, with sleep oppress'd,
Like two fresh rose-buds on one stalk, they rest.

When morning spread around her purple flame,
To the sweet couch the five fair sisters came;
They hail'd the bridegroom with a cheerful voice,
And bade him make, with speed, a second choice.
Hard task to choose, when all alike were fair!
Now this, now that, engag'd his anxious care:
Then to the first who spoke, his hand he lent;
The rest retir'd, and whisper'd as they went.
The prince enamour'd view'd his second bride;
They left the bower, and wander'd side by side;
With her he charm'd his ears, with her his sight;
With her he pass'd the day, with her the night.
Thus, all by turns the sprightly stranger led,
And all by turns partook his nuptial bed;
Hours, days, and months, in pleasure flow'd away;
All laugh'd, all sweetly sung, and all were gay.

So had he wanton'd threescore days and seven,
More blest, he thought, than any son of heaven:
Till on a morn, with sighs and streaming tears,
The train of nymphs before his bed appears;
And thus the youngest of the sisters speaks,
Whilst a sad shower runs trickling down her cheeks:

‘A custom which we cannot, dare not fail,
‘(Such are the laws that in our isle prevail,)
‘Compels us, prince! to leave thee here alone,
‘Till thrice the sun his rising front has shown:
‘Our parents, whom, alas! we must obey,
‘Expect us at a splendid feast to-day;
‘What joy to us can all their splendor give?
‘With thee, with only thee, we wish to live.
‘Yet may we hope, these gardens will afford
‘Some pleasing solace to our absent lord!
Six golden keys, that ope yon blissful gates,
‘Where joy, eternal joy, thy steps awaits,
‘Accept: the seventh (but that you heard before)
‘Leads to a cave, where ravening monsters roar;
‘A sullen, dire, inhospitable cell,
‘Where deathful spirits and magicians dwell.
‘Farewel, dear youth!—how will our bosoms burn
‘For the sweet moment of our blest return!’

The king, who wept, yet knew his tears were vain,
Took the seven keys, and kiss'd the parting train.
A glittering car, which bounding coursers drew,
They mounted strait, and through the forest flew.

The youth, unknowing how to pass the day,
Review'd the bowers, and heard the fountains play;
By hands unseen whate'er he wish'd was brought;
And pleasures rose obedient to his thought.
Yet all the sweets, that ravish'd him before,
Were tedious, now, and charm'd his soul no more:
Less lovely still, and still less gay they grew;
He sigh'd, he wish'd, and long'd for something new:
Back to the hall he turn'd his weary feet,
And sat repining on his royal seat.
Now, on the seventh bright gate he casts his eyes;
And in his bosom rose a bold surmise;
‘The nymph,’ said he, ‘was sure dispos'd to jest,
‘Who talk'd of dungeons in a place so blest:
‘What harm to open, if it be a cell
‘Where deathful spirits and magicians dwell?
‘If dark or foul, I need not pass the door;
‘If new or strange,—my soul desires no more.’
He said, and rose; then took the golden keys,
And op'd the door: the hinges mov'd with ease.

Before his eyes, appear'd a sullen gloom,
Thick, hideous, wild; a cavern, or a tomb.
Yet, as he longer gaz'd, he saw afar

A light that sparkled like a shooting star.
He paus'd:—at last, by some kind angel led,
He enter'd; and advanc'd, with cautious tread.
Still, as he walk'd, the light appear'd more clear;
Hope sooth'd him, then, and scarcely left a fear.
At length an aged sire surprised he saw,
Who fill'd his bosom with a sacred awe ²⁷:
A book he held, which, as reclin'd he lay,
He read, assisted by a taper's ray;
His beard, more white than snow on winter's breast,
Hung to the zone that bound his sable vest;
A pleasing calmness on his brow was seen,
Mild was his look, majestic was his mien.
Soon as the youth approach'd the reverend sage,
He raised his head, and clos'd the serious page;
Then spoke: 'O son! what chance has turn'd thy feet
'To this dull solitude, and lone retreat?'
To whom the youth: 'First, holy father! tell,
'What force detains thee in this gloomy cell?
'This isle, this palace, and those balmy bowers,
'Where six sweet fountains fall on living flowers,
'Are mine; a train of damsels chose me king,
'And through my kingdom smiles perpetual spring.
'For some important cause, to me unknown,
'This day they left me joyless and alone;
'But, ere three morns with roses strow the skies,
'My lovely brides will charm my longing eyes.'

'Youth,' said the sire, 'on this auspicious day
'Some angel hither led thy erring way:
'Hear a strange tale, and tremble at the snare,
'Which for thy steps thy pleasing foes prepare.
'Know, in this isle prevails a bloody law;
'List, stripling, list! (the youth stood fix'd with awe:)
' ²⁸But seventy days the hapless monarchs reign,
'Then close their lives in exile and in pain;
'Doom'd in a deep and frightful cave to rove,
'Where darkness hovers o'er the iron grove.
'Yet know, thy prudence and thy timely care
'May save thee, son! from this destructive snare.
' ²⁹Not far from this, a lovelier island lies,
'Too rich, too splendid, for unhallow'd eyes:
'On that blest shore, a sweeter fountain flows
'Than this vain clime, or this gay palace knows,
'Which if thou taste, whate'er was sweet before
'Will bitter seem, and steal thy soul no more.
'But ere these happy waters thou canst reach,
'Thy weary steps must pass yon rugged beach,

‘ 30Where the dark sea with angry billows raves,
‘And, fraught with monsters, curls his howling waves,
‘If to my words, obedient, thou attend,
‘Behold in me thy pilot and thy friend:
‘A bark I keep, supplied with plenteous store,
‘That now lies anchor’d on the rocky shore;
‘And, when of all thy regal toys bereft,
‘In the rude cave an exile thou art left,
‘Myself will find thee on the gloomy lea,
‘And waft thee safely o’er the dangerous sea.’

The boy was fill’d with wonder as he spake,
And from a dream of folly seem’d to wake:
All day the sage his tainted thoughts refin’d;
His reason brighten’d and reform’d his mind:
Through the dim cavern hand in hand they walk’d,
And much of truth, and much of heaven, they talk’d.
At night the stripling to the hall return’d;
With other fires his alter’d bosom burn’d.
O! to his wiser soul how low, how mean,
Seem’d all he e’er had heard, had felt, had seen!
He view’d the stars; he view’d the crystal skies;
And bless’d the **Power** All-good, All-great, All-wise.
How lowly now appear’d the purple robe,
The rubied sceptre, and the ivory globe!
How dim the rays that gild the brittle earth!
How vile the brood of Folly, and of Mirth!
When the third morning, clad in mantle grey,
Brought in her rosy car her seventieth day,
A band of slaves, who rush’d with furious sound,
In chains of steel the willing captive bound;
From his young head the diadem they tore,
And cast his pearly bracelets on the floor;
They rent his robe that bore the rose’s hue,
And o’er his breast a hairy mantle threw;
Then dragg’d him to the damp and dreary cave,
Drench’d by the gloomy sea’s resounding wave.
Meanwhile, the voices of a numerous crowd
Pierc’d the dun air, as thunder breaks a cloud:
The nymphs another hapless youth had found,
And then were leading o’er the guilty ground:
They hail’d him king, (alas! how short his reign!)
And with fresh chaplets strow’d the fatal plain.

The happy exile, monarch now no more,
Was roving slowly o’er the lonely shore;
At last the sire’s expected voice he knew,
And tow’rd the sound with hasty rapture flew.

The promis'd pinnacle just afloat he found,
And the glad sage his fetter'd hands unbound;
But when he saw the foaming billows rave,
And dragons rolling o'er the fiery wave,
He stopp'd: his guardian caught his lingering hand,
And gently led him o'er the rocky strand;
Soon as he touch'd the bark, the ocean smil'd,
The dragons vanish'd, and the waves were mild.
For many an hour with vigorous arms they row'd,
While not a star one friendly sparkle show'd;
At length a glimmering brightness they behold,
Like a thin cloud which morning dyes with gold:
To that they steer: and now, rejoic'd, they view
A shore begirt with cliffs of radiant hue.
They land: a train, in shining mantles clad,
Hail their approach, and bid the youth be glad;
They led him o'er the lea with easy pace,
And floated, as they went, with heavenly grace.
A golden fountain soon appear'd in sight,
That o'er the border cast a sunny light.

The sage, impatient, scoop'd the lucid wave
In a rich vase, which to the youth he gave:
He drank; and straight a bright celestial beam
Before his eyes display'd a dazzling gleam;
Myriads of airy shapes around him gaz'd;
Some prais'd his wisdom, some his courage prais'd;
Then o'er his limbs a starry robe they spread,
And plac'd a crown of diamonds on his head.

His aged guide was gone, and in his place
Stood a fair cherub flush'd with rosy grace;
Who, smiling, spake: 'Here ever wilt thou rest,
'Admir'd, belov'd, our brother and our guest;
'So all shall end, whom vice can charm no more
'With the gay follies of that perilous shore.
'See yon immortal towers their gates unfold,
'With rubies flaming, and no earthly gold!
'There joys, before unknown, thy steps invite:
'Bliss without care, and morn without a night.
'But now farewell! my duty calls me hence;
'Some injur'd mortal asks my just defence.
'To yon pernicious island I repair,
'Swift as a star.' He speaks, and melts in air.

The youth o'er walks of jasper takes his flight;
And bounds and blazes in eternal light.

NOTES

1. The follies of youth.
2. The world.
3. The follies and vanities of the world.
4. The pleasures of the senses.
5. Sight.
6. Hearing.
7. Smell.
8. Taste.
9. Touch.
10. The sensual pleasures united.
11. Religion.
12. The life of man.
13. Heaven.
14. Death.

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