

Some sat and watched how the action veered—  
Waited, profited, trembled, cheered—  
We saw not clearly nor understood,  
But, yielding ourselves to the masterhand,  
Each in his part as best he could,  
We played it through as the author planned.

#### МАКТООБ

A shell surprised our post one day  
And killed a comrade at my side.  
My heart was sick to see the way  
He suffered as he died.

I dug about the place he fell,  
And found, no bigger than my thumb,  
A fragment of the splintered shell  
In warm aluminium.

I melted it, and made a mould,  
And poured it in the opening,  
And worked it, when the cast was cold,  
Into a shapely ring.

And when my ring was smooth and bright—  
Holding it on a rounded stick,  
For seal, I bade a Turco write  
*Maktoob* in Arabic.

*Maktoob!* "'Tis written!" . . . So they think,  
These children of the desert, who  
From its immense expanses drink  
Some of its grandeur too.

Within the book of Destiny,  
Whose leaves are time, whose cover, space,  
The day when you shall cease to be,  
The hour, the mode, the place,

Are marked, they say; and you shall not  
By taking thought or using wit  
Alter that certain fate one jot,  
Postpone or conjure it.

Learn to drive fear, then, from your heart,  
If you must perish, know, O man,  
'Tis an inevitable part  
Of the predestined plan.

And, seeing that through the ebon door  
Once only you may pass, and meet  
Of those that have gone through before  
The mighty, the élite—

Guard that not bowed nor blanched with fear  
You enter, but serene, erect,  
As you would wish most to appear  
To those you most respect.

So die as through your funeral  
Ushered you through the doors that led  
Into a stately banquet hall  
Where heroes banqueted;

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And it shall all depend therein  
Whether you come as slave or lord,  
If they acclaim you as their kin  
Or spurn you from their board.

So, when the order comes: "Attack!"  
And the assaulting wave deploys,  
And the heart trembles to look back  
On life and all its joys;

Or in a ditch that they seem near  
To find, and round your shallow trough  
Drop the big shells that you can hear  
Coming a half mile off;

When, not to hear, some try to talk,  
And some to clean their guns, or sing,  
And some dig deeper in the chalk—  
I look upon my ring;

And nerves relax that were most tense,  
And Death comes whistling down unheard,  
As I consider all the sense  
Held in that mystic word.

And it brings, quieting like balm  
My heart whose flutterings have ceased,  
The resignation and the calm  
And wisdom of the East.

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