



The Conference of the Birds
Farid Ud-Din Attar (1839 - 1937)

Read by:	Josh Mitteldorf	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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The Conference of the Birds, also known as *Bird Parliament* or *Speech of the Birds*, is a masterpiece of Persian literature by poet Farid ud-Din Attar, popularly known as Attar of Nishapur. The premise of the poem is a gathering of the various birds of the world called to select a sovereign leader, which they lack. The wisest of the birds, the hoopoe, suggest that they journey to find the legendary Simorgh, a benevolent female winged creature large enough to carry off an elephant and so old that it possesses the wisdom of the ages. In doing so, they must cross seven dangerous valleys to reach the distant China in which the Simorgh dwells. Each of the bird species at the gathering represents a human fault which stands in the way of enlightenment, and each

speaks to try to decline the daunting challenge. In spite of their apprehensions they are persuaded to make the eventful journey. Many perish along the way of thirst, heat, illness, predators, panic, violence, and so on. Thirty survive to reach a lake in which they see their own reflection and realize that they collectively are the Simorgh. This reading is of the translation by Edward FitzGerald, noted for his translation of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*.

Farid ud-Din Attar (c. 1145 – c. 1221), better known as Attar of Nishapur, was a Persian poet, hagiographer, and theoretician of Sufism who ranks with Rumi and Hafiz. Little is known of the details of his life. He was the son of a prosperous chemist, received an excellent education, and became a pharmacist who attended a large number of customers. He eventually left his profession to travel widely in the Orient and returned to promote Sufi ideas. His poetry was little known during his life, and only achieved recognition later in the 15th century. Nevertheless, he was revered by Rumi, who wrote that “Attar has traversed the seven cities of Love. We are still at the turn of one street.” His work is thought to represent the whole evolution of the Sufi movement and is valued as sources on the hagiography and phenomenology of Sufism. Attar died in a massacre by Mongols invading Nishapur in April 1221. He is memorialized by a mausoleum in Nishapur constructed in the 16th century.